ATMABODHA

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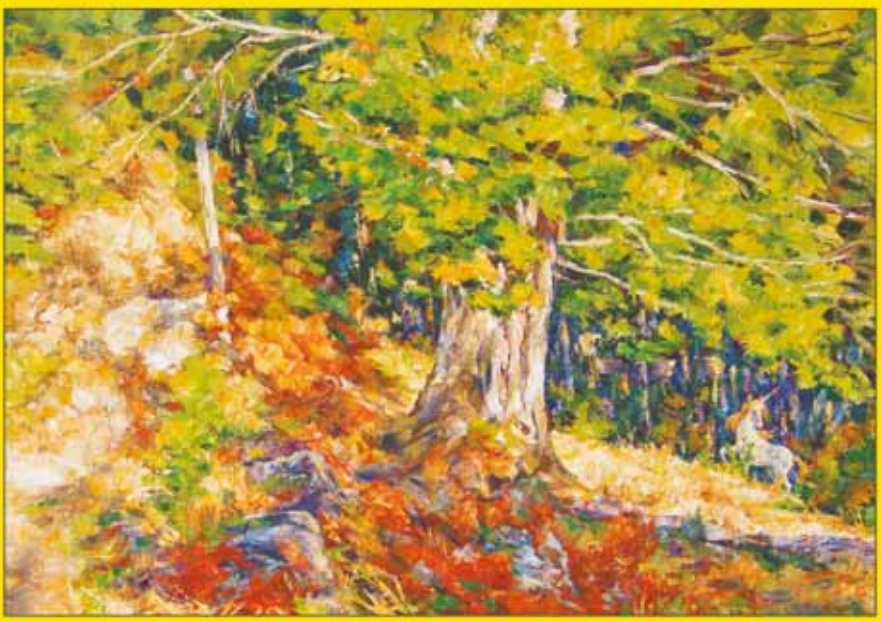
by Sri Sankaracharya



Knowledge of the Self

Sesha

In collaboration with Félix Arkarazo

ATMABODHA

by Sri Sankarachayra

Knowledge of the Self

Sesha

Translated from the Spanish edition by David Sutcliffe, in collaboration with Mar Garrido and David Morris

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What is the answer that prevents
appearance of any new question?
Sesha

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Atmabodha by Sri Sankaracharya

Author's prologue

I came across the *Atmabodha* just after my twentieth birthday. At first its reading seemed extremely complex, as its terminology and combination of ideas were quite unfamiliar to me. In those days, having just recently become interested in the *vedanta*, I was frankly unaware of the genius of *Sankarachayra*, author of the text we deal with here.

The years that followed became torrents of ideas that stimulated my interest in everything that had to do with meditation. I searched among the most prized exponents of Indian culture for texts that could point the way to the otherwise uncertain path of the inner search. However, the writings I found were so abstract, with such ethereal ideas that I was hard put to reduce them to a practical pattern to follow. The anonymous authors of the *Upanishad* and *Bhagavad Gita* along with the celebrated *sutras* by *Patanjali* became my central focus of reflection concerning a world which I understood less and less. But the years passed slowly by, and the seed sown by constant study began to germinate. At that time, I devoted practically every day to the task of teaching and learning oriental philosophy, combining all this with my engineering career. The jargon that described the world from the oriental viewpoint began to be more manageable and I strove assiduously to clarify ideas that would lead me to the practical aspect which reveals the mystery of Being.

Seven years of constant practice of the various possibilities of meditation turned into constant disappointment because of my unruly mental activity. I tried a thousand different ways to find a path which would lead to the stilling of the mind. I tried all kinds of meditation practice, from *mantrams*

to *kirtams* and going on to *biyams*[1], along with, of course, breath control and the "investigation of the *Self*" promoted by *Ramanamaharsi.* Yet despite all this I was unable to find the slightest relief.

There were also exceptional moments of mental peace occurring during this period, yet rapid loss of those instants owing to the constant upsets of life made me doubt the veracity of even these experiences. Nonetheless, I never brought my inner quest to a halt; it did not matter that on sitting down on the floor with the intention of practising meditation I would fall asleep or that the pain in my legs and back would become unbearable. In spite of my ignorance and the habitual pain when I sat down to meditate, I strove to achieve that silence which so many books and masters describe as the fruit of such inner practice.

Like a wanderer lost in the desert I desperately sought to sip the nectar of knowledge which was beyond me. I memorised entire books, I disciplined my mind and body to a frankly Spartan extent – all of this to prepare my mind for an encounter which never took place. And so I studied in depth many of the *prakaranagrantas* or books introductory to the *vedanta*, among them the *Atmabodha*, with the simple desire to discover the teaching that would provide me with an answer to my desperate yearning to know what the Self is.

In the evening of one May 12th, having turned twenty-six, what I had so deeply wished for finally happened, and I had never thought it would occur in such a clear-cut manner. For hours, and eventually for days on end, my mind sounded the most profound and unimaginable infinity. I became aware of thousands of secrets that had never been

1 *Mantras* are words of power that, when properly articulated, are capable of releasing the energy stored within them. *Biyams* are the central part of the *mantra,* the sound which synthesises its strength. *Kirtams* are different hymns that devotees offer as worship for their personal divinity.

secrets. Unimaginable galaxies and universes collided in a fraction of a second and unleashed Absolute Bliss. I had finally returned home; at last all the effort of searching had come to an end; now there were no questions, the answers emerged on their own.

As a consequence of profound *samadhi*[2], my mind took on a new nature. Now it became easy to delve into my innermost and become aware of how the mental machinery moved each of the parts and gears of which it was composed. I became aware of the most insignificant movements as they occurred within it and recognised the varied depths and levels that operate at the different degrees of inner and outer perception. From that moment on I navigated through the streams of mental silence and discerned the different ways in which it could arise, yet, above all, I learned something which though I had read about it so very many times, I had never really understood: non-duality as a exceptional factor that related the knower and the known in a simultaneous way.

Afterwards, the years of learning continued. I promised myself to find a system of inquiry into the mind sufficiently simple and practical to serve as a stepping stone for students who floundered about in the confusing world of the mind. My thousands of students made possible such an end. The drive to portray the mind and its contents for students in a clear way, was indispensable for these young people to clarify their own personal processes. With the passing of time, some of them have now even been able to drink from the unfathomable waters of non-duality.

The commentaries realised in this book are the fruit of the pedagogical experience that for so many years now I have

2 There are different kinds of *samadhi* which are explained in detail in "*Advaita Vedanta*", another of *Sesha's* books. In general, *samadhi* represents a form of cognition in which at possible different levels beholders know themselves to be non-different to what is known. The supreme level of non-dual experience is usually known as *nirvikalpa*, the level which is described in the experience mentioned here.

been conducting in many different places all over the world. Its fundamental objective is to bring the ancestral knowledge in the *vedanta* closer through straightforward ideas and examples related to daily life. The sum of commentaries were expressed live to a group of students a few years ago, near to the little village of Sant Martí de Sesgueioles, in Catalonia, Spain, and are here presented to the general readership as an offering to all sincere searchers after the Self.

Sesha

G.d.1.E.

Bogotá, September 2012

Collaborator's preface

When human beings' perception is sufficiently refined, they unfailingly conclude that all experience with the power to transform gathered during their lives can bring comprehension.

However, it becomes evident that, of all the levels of understanding, the most transforming ones are those that see into the essence of things and, as such, see into our inner selves. It is thus and only thus that it is possible to quench our thirst for plenitude, a desire which in greater or lesser definition, swells within all those with an inquiring spirit.

In this connection there are more and more of us fortunate enough to have access to teachings which are a light unto themselves, providing a body of theoretical-yet-practical teaching able to provide an empirical solution, a key, through experience, to the highest level of metaphysical questioning: the teachings of the *advaita vedanta* system.

Yet our privilege does not end there. For years now, we have had this access thanks to a great teacher, one who bases himself on his own personal, living experience of the lofty truths in his teachings, who imparts impeccable lessons brimming with content. These, thanks to their innovative nature, are fascinating in that they bring us a new vision of the compendium of concepts and metaphysical abstractions of Eastern learning in the *vedanta*. In my sincere opinion, this instruction reached supreme heights during a series of seminars in which *Sesha* provided commentaries on the 68 *slokas* of the *Atmabodha*, offering a joyous and complete journey through the exquisite thinking of the *vedanta*.

It only remains for me to assure readers that in carrying out the task I was assigned of giving shape to the transcriptions

of the seminars in written form I was spurred on by my desire to see to it that, throughout the book you are about to begin, you the reader will enjoy this inner journey – a journey which, while it involves no distance, means setting out to experience the most exalted, sweetest adventure conceivable to human kind: the adventure of understanding.

Félix Arkarazo

Bilbao, April 2012

Introduction

We are about to immerse ourselves in the study of the *Atmabodha*, a title which is translated as "knowledge of the *Atma* or Self". It is a *prakaranagranta;* an introduction to the *vedanta*, and is attributed to *Sankara*, called the *Acharya* (Master, Sage).

There is now unanimity in recognising *Sankaracharya* as the principal exponent of the *advaita vedanta* tradition, owing to the enormous task he undertook of ordering the general ideas explored in the ancient texts of the *Vedas*, along with most of the commentaries written on these texts. In this way, he succeeded in creating order and clarity at a time when Hinduism had proliferated into many different schools of thought, many of them exhibiting great discrepancy amongst themselves.

This order was mainly based on the organisation of the philosophy inherent in the precepts of the *Vedas*, using the many commentaries on fundamental texts such as the *Brahma sutras* and *Bhagavad Gita*. He also wrote books to the standard of the *Vivekachudamani* (The Supreme Jewel of Discernment), also considered a *prakaranagranta* (introduction to the *vedanta),* as well as many devotional hymns.

It was thus that he devised a means, a system for approaching metaphysical reality, the Ultimate reality of the Self, a system which the *Atmabodha* describes.

The *prakaranagrantas* set out to provide a relatively accessible approach to the basic ideas that give shape to *vedanta* philosophy, and they do this based on the four fundamental questions known as *anubandas*.

1st: The first *anubanda* sets out to define the qualities aspirants or disciples (*adikari*) need to have when wishing to accede to this knowledge: what capabilities, level of discernment, characteristics, and so on.

2nd: This second *anubanda* deals with the basis of the *adikari*'s study, the material upon which their investigation needs to be based, which is precisely the identity expressed by the *mahavakya* or great saying "*Jiva Brahman aika*", "the individual is identical to *Brahman*, the Non-dual Absolute".

3rd: *Sambanda*. This explains the practical mechanism by means of which the *adikari* attains this identity with Brahman. This work is essentially based on the practice of meditation, or *nididhyasana*.

4th: *Prayoyama*, or end result, which is the practical attaining, by means of training in the preceding *anubandas*, of the Reality of the Self.

These four main lines constitute the common denominator of the *prakaranagrantas*, although it has to be said that not all deal with each one of these points in the same depth; the *Laghu Vakya Vritti* deals almost exclusively with *sambanda*, the *Drg Drysa Viveka* similarly does not analyse all the *anubandas*, although the *vedanta Sara* (Essence of the *vedanta*) attributed to *Sadananda Yogindra* does do so. Others, such as the *Panchadasi*, reach a high degree of complexity, both because of the number of *slokas* or aphorisms and the level of analysis and profundity attained.

In this sense the *Atmabodha* is more elementary, simpler, although this does not spare us one of the basic problems that we come across when approaching texts of this kind, a problem which is twofold: on one hand, the translation and, on the other, the interpretation of the translation.

As with so many classical texts, the *Atmabodha* is a compilation of maxims or aphorisms, known as *slokas*. These *slokas* contain each within itself, succinctly summarised, a

series of metaphysical ideas that form part of a particular tradition, in this case the Hindu one. When one approaches the study of metaphysical precepts of one tradition from the perspective of another culturally distant one, there is a space to be bridged, a distance to overcome, since such precepts make reference to experiences that may be foreign to the analysis of the translator or scholar.

Often an effort to bridge this gap is typically made by resorting to the maximum linguistic rigour possible, yet here we run into another dilemma. The first word in the title of our book, *Atma*, for instance, refers to two different things, depending on the context: the *Brahman* concept, on one hand, and the "soul" or the individual psyche, on the other.

At a more prosaic, workaday level we could fall back on an example that well illustrates the nature of the problem: when we watch a film on television or at the cinema and have to read the subtitles, we can tell that the subtitles often fall short of conveying all the nuances in the speech of the characters, turning the work into a rather poorer version of the original. We might well conclude that the problem will be worse when dealing with language that makes reference to highly abstract realities, as in this instance.

Because of this, we have opted for a version that, rather than going for linguistic rigour, seeks to explain in more down-to-earth language the ideas that the tradition expresses in terms and expressions proper to that tradition.

To give an example, there is Annie Besant's translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Of all the many translations of this wonderful text, Besant's is one of those that complies least with linguistic rigour as such. Yet its poetic skill reaches heights that convince us that this is among the best avenues to approaching the true nature of the *Gita's* teachings in particular, and in general the surest way to approach all texts that expound metaphysical truths. [Compare the problems

posed when translating *Sesha's* text into English; firstly, *Sesha's* Spanish is considerably more formal than current English readers will expect; secondly there are lexical challenges: for example, an implicit contrast is often made in the text between the two Spanish words for "know": saber (French "savoir") and conocer (French "connaître") and this almost defies translation, other than punctually rendering conocer as "witness" or "perceive": *translator's note*]

In the same way, given that the *Atmabodha* has also been translated many times, we opt for a version that clearly indicates the ideas which are transmitted in the *slokas*, rather than the literal linguistic expression of these ideas, and, in that sense, seek to convey the essential idea, the thinking, that the *slokas* wish to transmit; thus it will be a free translation, consistent with the way we understand the *vedanta*.

One last point, to finish this introduction: as the reader will ascertain, throughout the text there is frequent repetition when tackling particular aspects of the teachings. Far from being negligence, this responds to the belief in the validity of insistence as a pedagogical tool to lay the foundations in the most efficient possible way of the understanding of concepts and ideas that, as we shall see, attain extreme levels of subtlety.

Part One

Atmabodha

and commentaries

Sloka 1

"I am composing the** Atmabodha **or Knowledge of the Self to serve the needs of those who having purified themselves through the practice of austerity and who are peaceful at heart, are free from cravings and desire Liberation".

It is taxing to speak of something words do not define. It is hard to convey the depth of knowledge of what escapes reason. There are so very few great masters who, having experienced the reality of the Self, can then set out with able pen to write about the abstract ideas their lofty comprehensions soared to. The *Atmabodha* is one of those priceless gifts that a wise mind was able to present to help us. The eternal truths expressed throughout the *slokas* are unmistakable proof of the spiritual strength and compassionate vocation of the author.

The terrain onto which we are venturing is highly abstract, which gives rise to one of the main obstacles we will encounter when considering the postulates of *vedanta* philosophy. Its metaphysical reasoning is deeply subtle, which can be properly developed only in an atmosphere free from mental turmoil, not a usual state for most people.

Imagine for instance that you have to do mental arithmetic, multiplying 26 x 32 in your head; usually to make such a task easier you would need to close your eyes to shut out distraction. Noises and other external disturbances would tend to prevent you multiplying correctly. Inner restlessness is an obstacle to any continuous process of analysis or minimally abstract reasoning; in fact it obstructs the carrying out of any kind of mental activity, however simple. So, we could readily conclude that the experiencing profound metaphysical realities would require absence of mental turmoil. This freedom from mental restlessness or doubt is the basis of the method proposed by the *vedanta* as a mechanism to access the most metaphysical realities, a method known as *nididhyasana* or meditation.

Through continuous meditation practice it becomes possible to develop the ability to settle into inner self-observation, permitting the comprehension of highly abstract realities. Is it possible to apprehend for example that perception of the present as a *continuum* catapults the observer into different states of consciousness that bring about higher levels of analysis and metaphysical comprehension. Notice that the analysis we refer to completely differs from that which we habitually understand by analysis. Analysis, reasoning and metaphysical investigation, operating within the parameters of self-observation free from mental turmoil, banishes the paths such as logic, reasoning and dialectics, to induce the highest comprehension through what could be known as "contemplative experience", "intuition" or "direct comprehension".

Nonetheless, as the *sloka* states, previous personal preparation and training is needed, something similar to what is needed by mathematicians or musicians. The most outstanding mathematicians are those who have converted the language of mathematical symbols into clear and

consistent representations of their own inner reflections. For instance, Newton had the abstract thought that the universe is the sum of countless infinitesimal events which could be brought together to form a momentaneous whole, thus establishing the basis of what today is known as "infinitesimal calculus".

Musicians, for their part, are able to shape clear and elevated conceptualisations that reach the sublime, using sound, but all these cases a previous attainment of inner stability and inner mastery is required, allowing them to listen within themselves to varying tempos which become interwoven to transform silence into an audible modality.

Hence, in a similar wise to what happens in mathematical and musical languages, to develop metaphysical language that can serve as a guide to the comprehension of metaphysical realities, there is need for lack of turmoil and doubt that would create mental unrest in a disorganised way. If a mind is chaotic, only with great difficulty can one create a healthy sequentiality that will allow valid understanding of the questions in hand.

For this reason, the ve*danta* is intended for all those people who "*...have purified themselves through the practice of austerities and who are peaceful at heart, are free from cravings and who desire Liberation"*.

The skill of a master of the innermost, like to that of erudite mathematicians or virtuous musicians is the acquisition of a kind of gift that operates without effort. In the case of a master of the inner life, this gift arises from paying attention to attention. When a calm mind is directed inwardly, encountering no resistance of thought, it witnesses the continuity of all existing things. Here, in this dwelling place of silence and restfulness, the uncontrollable forces of nature can be discerned, without the least sign of mental inquietude.

In this respect, it should be said that when studying western philosophy, it becomes plain that practically none of the exponents of the subject demonstrate any first-hand experience of the metaphysical realities about which they theorise. All their abstractions are found in a category of reality situated beyond their own personal experience. Perhaps Plotinus was the only one who wrote about the conscious experience of the Absolute. Plotinus spoke about "Pure Reason" as being the masterly experience of contact with the Eternal and the Infinite. Nevertheless, there have been countless controversies that have stirred up disagreement among translators and scholars who, as we said, do not have any living personal experience of what Plotinus sought to explain: the conscious experience of contact with the Absolute, and the personal understanding of the origin of *nirvana* or *samadhi,* as it is known in Eastern traditions.

Thus, the Pure Reason of Plotinus becomes confused with the Pure Reason of Aristotle, in which accentuated, aseptic logic is said to be such that there is no need of experience to validate what pure reason determines.

Hence, for instance, passages in which Plotinus talks about how the perception of Beauty arises through Pure Reason, are misinterpreted, as if this perception were possible as a consequence of a kind of elevated intellectual reasoning. The worlds of Plotinus' Pure Reason, and the Abstract Realities of the Platonic Intelligibles require a singular level of introspection, uncovering the nature of the truth that informs these worlds. Mental turmoil is a hindrance to any such enterprise.

Hence, perception only has to be free from the turmoil that impedes the continuity of inner analysis, for the resulting knowledge to emerge in a natural manner as the essential nature of what things truly Are. The truths which the *vedanta* seeks, profound and elevated truths which are not detectable

using a mere dialectic process, arise from worlds which emerge in self-observation free from mental turmoil. It is for these people, capable of venturing into these worlds with stability, for whom the *vedanta* in general and the *Atmabodha* in particular were realised.

Without the need for the moment of going into the superior states of consciousness, in which it is possible to experience *Brahman* as the non-dual Essence of reality, through the meditation practice or *nididhyasana* that the *vedanta* advocates, we are led to experiences that provide us with a highly efficient mechanism of inner investigation. The unusual stability in perception, the uncanny consistence of the void established therein, the evidence that we can simultaneously be the observer and the observed in cognition – these are just some of the realities waiting to dazzle those who persevere in this practice, even at initial levels that constitute Observation.[3]

Sloka 2

"As fire is the direct cause of cooking, so Knowledge, and no other form of practice, is the direct cause of Liberation; as Liberation cannot be attained without Knowledge of the Self".

Here, we encounter one of *Sankara's* recurring metaphors fire and cooking, in which comprehension, the conscious force, is equated with fire.

3 We are referring to the third of the state of consciousness discussed in various works by *Sesha* set out to establish possible relations between subject and object that operate in cognition. These are:

- *Dream state*, in which the subject becomes subject and object.
- *Thought state*, in which the subject sees itself as being differentiated and different from the object which is being known.
- *Observation state*, in which only the subject or the object of cognition prevails.
- *Concentration state*, in which subject and object are simultaneous, that is, there is non-dual experience associated to a closed field.
- *Meditation state*, in which subject and object are also simultaneous, that is, they are presented as a non-dual perception associated to an open field.

Defining consciousness is just as complicated as defining the a-dimensionality of a dot. Consciousness is one of those things which we all experience yet apparently no one can adequately define. The term and concept "consciousness" will recur throughout this book. From start to finish in so many different ways, an attempt will be made to give it meaning and provide a practical definition. Initially, consciousness has to do with the force which produces knowledge, with the act which induces comprehension and learning.

It is mistakenly assumed that learning is a product of our own effort. Nothing could be more mistaken. We come across knowing just as we are confronted with stars on opening our eyes on a starry night and looking at the sky. Stars are not born when our eyelids open; the celestial dome is forever present waiting to be discovered. In a similar fashion knowledge is always with us, as wetness is in water. Knowledge belonging to consciousness is not a quality of life, but rather, it is that which gives life to all quality.

Because of this the act of comprehension acquires relevance for the *vedanta*, since it becomes the practical expression of something as undefinable as consciousness. We might be unable to detect the flow of consciousness, but we can definitely be aware that we know, we are, we exist. There is also a term which brings us close to the nature of consciousness as it is its dynamic factor: attention.

Once this has been established, along with attention being defined as the dynamic expression of consciousness, we could say that both forces, consciousness and attention, have an extremely interesting thing in common, that is, they are "without cause", in the sense they are not brought about by any previous mental or physical cause. Both consciousness and attention become of themselves by themselves and in turn feed the continuum of knowledge which things really Are.

Attention lights up objects by virtue of its own nature, causing them to be known, just as a lamp allows us to distinguish colours that are obscured by darkness. Attention also brings the contents of the past to life in the same way as it does to any future projections constructed in one's mind. However, when attention is paid to the *present* in a *continuous* manner, then attention becomes the fire that produces the cooking flame that produces inner freedom. It is also important to point out that other schools of thought give importance to the act of love, worship becoming the focal point of the whole of its practice. Love feeds off itself and forever flows as a sense of integration between the *lover* and the *beloved*. Knowledge, along with Love, are the surest means by which one can eradicate the ignorance that cohabits in both the mind and heart.

Perhaps this last point may seem strange to a rational kind of person, who might come to presume that love is not a fundamental activity. Nevertheless, people endowed with an emotional nature may come closer to understanding that Love, without the mediation of any causality whatsoever, impregnates everything there is. From this final comprehension they can be led to a kind of loving understanding that allows a person to embrace actual daily life itself. Transforming every action into a loving offering to their divinity, such a divinity being understood as the essential object, as the reason for being of their self: the search for their beloved, so what they understand becomes indistinguishable from what they love. Thus, the devotee makes their beloved the object of their personal quest so as to blend into this love. As such the *gnana*[4] presents discernment

4 *Gnana yoga* represents the aspect of the *advaita vedanta* that searches, through sharpened discernment, for comprehension which endows the non-dual experience of Reality. Meanwhile, *bhakti yoga* achieves an comprehension of integration between God and devotee, between lover and beloved through living devotional experience.

as the mode in which what is known and the knower are revealed in the exaltation of non-duality.

We could say that it is fire, as the force of comprehension, which is the direct cause of the cooking, of Self knowledge, but with the condition that this fire entails the continuity of attention placed on the present.

Sloka 3

"Action cannot destroy ignorance because it is not in conflict with ignorance. Only the comprehension endowed by Knowledge is capable of destroying ignorance, as light dilutes dense darkness".

When *Sankara* alludes to the word ignorance, *agnana*, he does not intend it to mean the lack of knowledge, but rather, real yet erroneous knowledge. For instance, at the instant of seeing a shell on the beach on a starry, moonlit night, it is quite easy to mistake it for a silver coin. *Agnana* implies taking something nonexistent to be real. Another possible example would be to observe someone in a dream. Although they really do not exist, it seems as if they do when we are in the dream. There is nothing in dreams that warns us of this error, so we take the perception to be valid. Seeing illusion as being real is *agnana*, ignorance.

Life constantly draws us towards action. The fact of being alive brings with it the responsibility of interacting with our surroundings in accordance with our own personal characteristics. It is in this feedback of personal situations and their surroundings that one requires the maintenance of a process that *Sankara* metaphorically denominated "cooking", that is, one needs to pay attention to events that present themselves, from a focus of attention free from turmoil and cravings. The secret of the affair is that the body and mind *exclusively respond* to events which are happening in the *present,*

in the *here and now*. When perception and the response to this perception is exclusively placed in the *present*, and such a reaction is continuous, that is, it keeps "cooking sufficiently", a comprehension will be established that works through the highest states of consciousness: Concentration, Meditation and *Samadhi*. Such superior experience of comprehension leads to the destruction of ignorance, *agnana*. The West has sought over the ages to tackle the problem of approaching Truth (i.e. that which is Real) through the categorisation of action in terms of morality. Ethical guidelines have been shaped at different times in history, by splitting actions or understandings into "good" and "bad", with the idea of forging them into stable models of reference in the inner search. Regardless of their relative value as a factor in social cohesion, time has shown the futility of such an approach to paths of access to higher realities.

In the *vedanta* it is stipulated that Knowledge and Love are the ideal ways *par excellence* to travel the path towards freedom. Accordingly, from this perspective, moral activity alone cannot be instrumental in inducing personal freedom. It is not action as such which is important, but rather the comprehension associated with it, as without such comprehension action and ignorance can coexist indefinitely, however "virtuous" our actions may be. Beyond any kind of relative ethics there is the comprehension that comes in the form of freedom.

Action should not be the yardstick by which the answer is given to the problem of one's engagement with that which is Real. To be associated with one´s virtues does not allow us to find a consistent state in our inner search. The value in things is the comprehension we have of them.

Given the importance of the continuity of presential comprehension one realises the insistence of making attention the principle *sadhana*, and how this attention should occur

without any effort, that is, without any associated volitional sense. What is to be done is to effortlessly remain attentive to the world as it unfolds, to the reality which *presents itself to us*; in fact the only world which effortlessly appears is that which arises from the *here and now*, which is why we state that all our *sadhana*[5] entails is *to pay continuous attention to the present.*

Sloka 4

"It is only because of ignorance that the Self appears to be finite and brought down to 'name and form'. When ignorance is destroyed, the non-dual Self, which does not admit any multiplicity whatsoever, truly reveals Itself by Itself, Its true nature being non-dual, just as the sun when clouds are removed".

This *sloka* deals with the problem of fleeting comprehension, in which knowledge of such comprehension does not endure, for instance when we think we are our body or that an object is the "name and form" which defines it.

Our own beliefs hide knowledge that does not last. Its fleetingness makes such comprehension unable to be maintained within a temporal-spatial frame. Because of this *Sankara* states that this momentary knowledge stops us from seeing our Real non-dual nature by hiding it. Thus, *name and form* is synonymous for super-imposition in this technical sense, for duality and ignorance.

We can reduce everything we know to *names* and *forms*; nonetheless, these *names* and *forms* only represent the object and not its reality. With the passing of time or by placing the represented object in another space, its name and form are changed. We live in a sea of *names* and *forms* that keep time with an unknown beat; they change and are transformed. Our

5 Group of practices that we follow guided by tradition or through teachings of a qualified master.

minds capture the sea of *names* and *forms* and unceasingly move to the rhythm of this change. This is why awareness of Reality becomes impossible within our minds' shifting vision. Taking it that our mental representation of things – that is to say, their *names* and *forms* – constitute a valid representation, by labelling them as "that which is Real", is what *Sankara* gives the name "ignorance".

In the *vedanta*, this primal ignorance springs from one´s identification with the sense of being an individual, with the *I*. When the mind recognises itself and assumes that the sense of ego is valid, then identification is born and with it the validation of individuality. What mentally defines us as being people changes with the passing of time. We are dependent on time and place. We become transformed for better or worse due to our experiences. What we believe ourselves to be is only an opinion based on our momentary comprehension. None of all this can truly be Real as it is based on the conjectures and opinions of the self, on the *ahamkara*. Just picture a large saucepan in which there is milk. At first sight the milk is perfectly homogeneous; we then add the juice of two lemons and stir. Moments later we will see that the milk will have separated into two clearly different substances where previously there was just one: curds and whey. In a similar fashion, the appearance of the *I* introduces differentiation into cognition. The differentiation in cognition is usually known generically as *name* and *form*. Thanks to its differentiating power, the *I,* our mind constantly relates *names* and *forms* by means of its innate dialectic capacity. This power of reasoning which prevails in our mind leads us to distinguish its different qualities, memory, logic, intelligence, and so on.

We can go about understanding this issue of the veiling of the Self's true non-dual nature from a new perspective, by looking at the concept of "symmetry". To be able to do this we would need to provide a short introduction.

The second law of thermodynamics establishes that energy is conserved in all closed fields, it is constant. We should go on to add that according to physics there are four fundamental forces that operate in the universe, which are: 1 the force of gravity 2 electromagnetic force 3 strong force, and 4 weak force. Scientists have thought to establish a relationship between all four united by a "super force".

Where scientists agree is in adducing a compensatory or balancing function to these forces so that a closed field, remains invariable in accordance with the second law of thermodynamics - hence such forces at bottom would be no more than mechanisms where nature has to maintain its own conservation. These forces necessarily have to have a common denominator, a sense of identity of nature fused with apparent and constant change. This feature, *identity in apparent differentiation* is termed "symmetry"[6].

If we take it that the Earth itself as a planet can be seen as a closed field, as laid down in thermodynamics, then its total energy will always be conserved within that system. The varied seasonal cycles of climatology are nature's answer to the variables that present themselves, such as temperature, velocity of the Earth's rotation, luminosity, the moon's gravitational pull and so on. The cycle of the seasons and the variables that govern them differ among themselves yet, nonetheless, the sum of all that happens always leads to the maintenance of the thermodynamic balance of the whole system, which is the Earth. In essence, the forces of nature are expressions of the four fundamental forces, so that we can take it for granted that these forces are what promotes and maintains systematic compensation, so that such closed systems are conserved despite constant change operating.

6 We advise readers to read the chapter on beauty and symmetry in *Sesha's* book *Cuántica & Meditación* published by the Asociación Filosófica Vedanta Advaita Sesha, August 2012 (www. vedantaadvaita.com).

Symmetry is the sense of unity that exists in this apparent change. Thus, forces unceasingly change compensating for each other, yet the system in which they act is always in balance. This is the charm of symmetry: allowing for change without balance ever being lost.

Symmetry can also be expressed in a human being's psychological activity. The mind produces countless symmetries that, basically, are states of compensation within its constant movement, there to maintain the balance of our mental economy. From this perspective, the many psycho-affective patterns that present in an individual would be no more than the symmetries that a single basic identity establishes to manage behaviour. This symmetry is expressed through the diversification of psychological behaviours that offer a wealth of attributes to the personality. Hence, the psychological basis of every human being is sustained in *the yearning to exist as a self* [7]. These diverse symmetries arise from the many aspects of a primitive and basic impulse which leads an individual to remain as a psycho-cognitive unity.

These different symmetries are the varying expression of mental habits and their emergence as an answer to any day-to-day activity. Hence, it is easy for love to become hate and vice-versa, or fatigue to turn into being energetic or hope to disappointment, even pleasure to pain.

Thanks to the elegance of the symmetry concept we can cast aside our value judgements based on different antagonistic evaluations like "good" and "bad", and by doing so, generate a deep and efficient understanding of the mental processes that human behaviour is blessed with.

7 Buddhists usually name this basic and primary condition of the mind *"tahna"*, the desire *to exist as an I*

Symmetry, as a theoretical tool, leads us to affirm that ignorance, *agnana*, arises with the volitional act[8] in cognition. This volition imposes differentiation on the non-dual nature of Reality, creating an apparent delimitation of countless symmetries which the mind apprehends through the diversity of "*names*" and "*forms*". It is the "*names*" and "*forms*" which are related through reasoning, creating distinctions among and between different mental contents, including between perceiver and perceived. However, owing to the intrusion of these dual symmetries in an eminently non-dual system, compensation in the closed system's cognition itself is needed, making necessary the apparition of *karma* and *maya* as the balancing elements of the equation that produces duality. Given the newness of the ideas presented here, I ask for the reader's patience. These suggestions will be fully explained in the following paragraphs, clarifying any previous statements.

The *vedanta* coined the terms *karma* and *maya* to refer to the forces that reign in psychic nature, just as science uses the terms "strong force" and "weak force" underlying the atom. *Karma* concerns the force of causality, with the continuous dynamism which induces the impulse that creates the *self or I*. The essential purpose of *karma* is to inculcate a sense of permanence across change itself, and thus the sense of the *self*, through interchange and action. *Maya,* on the other hand, refers to the mental force that allows awareness of the nonexistent to be real and the Real to be inexistent.

In the same way, the *vedanta* coined the terms *nama* and *rupa*, "name" and "form", as generic expressions of the *self*'s presence. Each time the I takes part in a mental process,

8 An act of volition or emergence of the self present in the form of "I am", "I want", "I desire" and any mental activity that implies the feeling of being an individual, of belonging or possession.

names and forms become the unmistakable expressions of the dual activity in cognition.

Name and *form*, as the predominant aspects in duality, are related activities that spontaneously arise in the mind in the very instant the universe is thought of by an *I*; in the same way *karma* and *maya* as "causality" and "ignorance", are compensatory forces that balance out the dual system so that it subsists with attributes of individuality. Both *karma* and *maya* are mechanisms that are compensatory in all dual systems where knowing is by means of processes that evince a sense of volition in the cognition.

This is why, by removing the volitional bias from perception, *ahamkara, names* and *forms* vanish as differentiating attributes. It can be seen that when non-duality is present, the identity of objects is maintained, but not the *mental* barriers caused by their *name* and *form*, which differentiate them. Equally so, with the disappearance of the *self*, *karma* and *maya* retreat as the dual system's compensation forces, and also all the infinite amounts of symmetries that they gather into perception, thus allowing, as *Sankara* puts it, that the sun is witnessed without the clouds that otherwise cover it. Non-duality is "multi-symmetry", that which is simultaneous and infinite is conjugated within it. The *karma*, *maya*, ego and all other realities are just information that flows without differing whatsoever from those by whom they are experienced.

This is to say, in essence no duality, no symmetry can affect the non-dual nature of Reality at all, just as the fearful snake that we think we see coiled up by the side of the path in the darkness, and which frightens us, does not have any effect on the rope, the rope being its true substrate of being. Duality and non-duality are worlds that coexist yet can never intersect.

What we mentally detect from the standpoint of duality are the different and infinite possible symmetries

that encompass our personal experiences within specific karmic canons. Countless dual realities and innumerable symmetries coexist, all underpinned by the same non-dual identity. This makes evident the futility of any evolutionary approach which entertains the idea of a supposedly "primal origin" of all that exists. In the best of cases, both physicists and philosophers come up against singularities[9] and paradoxes that logic necessarily encounters in its search for the metaphysical.

Accordingly, given that the basic information of the universe is forever and always identical and non-differentiated, it will always be present in systems of duality. The many symmetries that our minds detect have non-duality as their basis.

Creation and evolution are a result of the compensatory forces of *karmas* that create a state of affairs known as *maya*, illusion. This leads to the appearance of different states of consciousness because of the differing symmetries that are operating, depending on which *agent* or *I* is in charge at the instant of cognition. That is to say, there are no different worlds, only different symmetries that generate different modes of perception. As the adage has it: "there are other worlds but they are in this one", and hence even *maya* can be understood as that manifestation of ignorance that leads us to consider the world as valid and real, a world that emerges within a particular cognitive symmetry.

The symmetry concept is a profoundly interesting tool that brings us face to face with a new perspective on complex metaphysical aspects and offers us a fresh approach to great concepts pertaining to the teachings in the *vedanta*,

9 Regions of space-time within which the laws of physics do not apply. For instance, the Big Bang which astrophysicists allude to as the origin of the universe, is a region within which the laws of physics do not apply or simply differ from conventional ones.

for example on *maya*, *karma*, ignorance, superimposition, as well as conjugating apparently contradictory aspects of the reality of things.

Sloka 5

"The practitioner, thanks to repeated understanding that daily enhances their experience, purifies the mind shrouded in ignorance, which disappears, as the powder of the kataka-nut disappears after the muddy water is cleansed".

We usually put ignorance down to someone's lack of knowledge or education, to someone who does not know, who is unable to define that which he or she is reasoning about. This definition is not precisely what *Sankara* is referring to. *Sankara* sees ignorance as taking as valid a non-existent reality (a reality which in fact does not exist). In other words, according to *Sankara* an ignorant person does not lack knowledge, for their knowledge is complete, yet they attribute reality to something that is essentially false. For this reason the *vedanta* establishes a one-to-one relationship between ignorance and illusion, *agnana* and *maya*.

Illusion, *maya*, and ignorance, *agnana*, are activities that operate in our mind, which lead us to take things to be real when they are truly nonexistent. A classic example of this is the snake and rope story we have already mentioned. Someone strolling through the country sees a coiled up rope lying alongside the path but in their mind they perceive it to be a snake. They seem to be aware of its movement, its colour and its intention as a snake ready to strike – so naturally they take fright and flee from the spot. *Sankara* suggests that ignorance is not the walker's lack of knowledge of the rope, but rather the illusion that the person's mind weaves, endowing reality to something nonexistent. Hence, the

walker turns something real into something illusory and something which is illusory into something real.

By extension, the *vedanta* establishes that all *names* and all *forms* are essentially of an illusory, mayan nature. There is no *name* or *form* that our mind independently experiences that is both independent and separate, *and* Real. In other words, all *names* and *forms* are illusory, like imaginary ghosts, like snakes devoid their own existence. Every name and form can be defined as a *closed system* or *field of information*, in which the boundaries of the field constrain its range and preclude the appearance of other fields. Thus, all closed fields of information, by the very fact of being closed, are illusory. Closed fields exist, and it is obviously that they do, just as the snake in the example does. Yet they do so thanks to a mental process that turns illusion into reality, that is, through *agnana*, or ignorance.

Closed fields flow through a spatial-temporal continuum, which differentiates and catalogues them. One closed field is an idea, which may be a stone. Such fi are distinguished as mental sequences that appear and disappear one after the other. They evolve and unfold in the temporal environment and are modified in the spatial one. Whatever can be defined through *name* and *form* is a closed field. We term them closed fields to differentiate them from *open fields*. Closed fields are illusory, *mayan*, generated by ignorance, *agnana*, and founded upon egoic thinking, while on the other hand open fields indicate a combination of information without barriers. That is, the infinite, unlimited and simultaneous summation of information that arises in a practical fashion in the context of Meditation.

All individual perception or all closed fields of information or dual systems of information inherently constitute *maya* and are illusory in nature, owing to the fact that the field is experienced through sequential, cognitive fractions in

time and space. In the instant of perceiving a closed system or field of information there is unknown information left beyond its confines; in the precise instant we become aware of a forest the sky is eradicated from our perception along with all that remains beyond auditory and visual barriers. On seeking to experience the forest we are led to itemise each one of the subtleties it presents sequentially. *Maya* endows attributes of reality to perception that is neither complete nor simultaneous, as the rest of the universe is unknown.

However, a closed field, regardless of the barriers it may be subjected to, since the latter change with every instant that passes depending on our perception, will remain as real to the viewer since the mind experiences infinite symmetries or unlimited chances to learn. All change operating in a closed system, as we saw with the previous *sloka*, is always compensated by the arising of *karma* and *maya*.

The non-duality experienced as cognitive activity that presents in Meditation is a 'multi-symmetry' since within it all potential symmetries or probabilities of knowing are experienced simultaneously. In non-duality the entire universe is known, along with all the infinite amount of details it is composed of, that is, Consciousness knows the universe and the universe is none other than the substantiality of Consciousness.

In summary, it becomes evident that the fact of perceiving information from a dual ambit entails non-perception of all the remaining information, that is, the entire complement of that closed field of information. From the epistemic viewpoint, perception of the Real would be that which encompasses the conjunction of information existing throughout the entire universe in a ubiquitous and simultaneous manner, as this conjunction is the only one that has the inherent, absolute stability of the Real. *Maya* is a mode of perception in which individual cognition is seen as being real, excluding

the complement of that perception and thus preventing knowledge of that which Is.

The term illusion does not refer to a supposed nonexistence of what is perceived but rather to the fact that all complementary information to what is being perceived, off camera so to speak, is veiled. Because of this, it is said that human beings are immersed in *avidya* – ignorance – as they habitually assume something to be valid when knowing it generates ignorance of the complements of this something.

Gnana is the comprehension of the force of "being-ness" that impregnates things when they are known. When this force of Being is associated with things known, then Comprehension is generated. This is the exaltation that comes about when we go from "knowing" something to truly "Comprehending" it. Many times we swiftly gloss over something and we know it (as an act) until we actually comprehend it. *Gnana* is the presence of Being in cognition, while *vignana* is the force of consciousness itself that recognises objects existing.

Hence it is said that, owing to *maya*, human beings are immersed in ignorance, in the form of *avidya* and *agnana*. It is not that they do not know or do not understand; they simply do not reach the experience of the totality of perception entailed in what they know, they do not recognise that whatever dual perception has non-dual "multi-symmetry" as its basis.

Thus all is derived, as previously mentioned, from the introduction of the volitional sense, of the *self*, into perception, which gives rise to differentiated *names* and *forms*. The way out of this conflict is simply to inhibit or eradicate this sense of volition through effortless perceptive continuity when faced with any event which happens in the *present*.

Continuous perception in the *here and now* eradicates any kind of individual symmetry, that is, it eradicates *maya*, *avidya* and *agnana*, so that the perception of "multi-symmetry" or

non-duality duly emerges. Such a ubiquitous, simultaneous and total experience of the universe knowing itself, is known as *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*.

The practical implications of the foregoing statements are overwhelming. The effort to attain freedom or uncover the supreme secret that can bring us peace ceases to make sense. The way out is *comprehension,* which stems from *continuous perception* established within whatever symmetry. Any epistemological, metaphysical or ethical problem is resolved in one blow: the answer is to live! The aim is to take advantage of the very condition of existence and the attention within it exclusively flowing in *the here and now*.

Sloka 6

"The world of samsara, which is full of attachments, aversions and duality, is like a dream. It appears to be real, as long as we stay asleep, but becomes unreal when we awake".

The term *karma* implies the presence of the future in actions being realised at any given moment. In general, human beings project themselves into the future when they carry out common day-to-day actions by seeking the outcome of that action. Actions realised generate *karma*, that is, a link is created with their *consequence*, when such a mental or physical action is realised out of *desire for its fruit* and with *a sense of ego*. When we say sense of ego, of self, we are referring to its cognitive and not its ethical meaning, in that there is a sense of *I-ness* or *self-ness* on carrying out the action.

What *karma* transfers from the action to its consequence is its egoic web. The fact of carrying out an action and projecting its goal projects us to this goal. Thus the *I* leaves a historical print of itself in the past; *karma* also generates the *I's* imprint in the future in the same way. The most interesting consequence

of *karma* is the sense of the *I*'s ongoing permanence. Hence, the *I* from the past links up with the one in the future creating the connection or concatenation of individuality. We see ourselves as continuous individuals because we are mentally the result of our own yearnings. The result of *karma* is the mental belief that the *self* or *I* is a continuity.

When the body dies and decomposes into its essential elements, the idea of *I* remains in the mind, it is a fraction that does not decompose, given its subtle nature. Death resembles dreaming, that is why in Greek mythology *Hypnos* and *Thanatos*, Sleep and Death, respectively, were seen as brothers. Existing unfinished tendencies in the mind cause the subtle mental entity to be impelled to find another physical body, with the aim of experiencing the consequence of yearnings or urges that have occurred in past lives.

In the end, something paradoxical happens; *karma* induces the forces of nature[10] to operate, constructing a physical vehicle adequate for housing previous yearnings; yet when these are fulfilled, in turn others are generated. Thus the experience of *karma* induces the appearance of further *karma*, something that becomes a vicious circle. Finally the *self* ends up being born and dying time after time, impelled by tendencies, cravings and desires unfulfilled life after life. This uninterrupted cyclical movement of being born and dying is known as *samsara*, and is pictured as a wheel that perpetually turns throughout time.

In previous *slokas* we set out to explain how the mind functions by producing countless symmetries based on the multiple pieces of information that make up each and every known event. The mind is conditioned to perceive *names and forms*, to compare them and make value judgements when they coincide with previous such *names and forms* stored in

10 A great variety of *devas* control the mechanism that brings physical bodies into being.

the memory. Nonetheless, it is worth asking oneself: if the possibilities within *maya* are infinite why do we humans perceive events as being similar? If reality is an unceasing and unlimited ocean of mental probabilities manifesting, how can we perceive such similarity in things whose qualities can differ so much?

The answer lies in the fact that human perception is conditioned by both individual and collective *karma*. The "collectivisation" of *karma* means that only permitted symmetries are associated with similar experiences: that is why we all see the world within specific common parameters.

Individual *karma* gives structure and form to the physical body, quality and condition to the senses and functioning organs, and specific mental and emotional reactions. Collective *karma* gives group reactions that determine physical and mental structure, along with all those behaviour patterns and collective situations such as families, ethnicities, cities, countries, and so forth.

Prarabdha karma, the totality of action-consequences that occur over the course of a life, from birth until death, can present as *individual or collective karma*, as explained in the previous paragraph. *Prarabdha karma* establishes a certain degree of common denominators in our physical system that stem from genetics or collective behaviour shaped by group customs. We are programmed to respond within similar symmetries of conduct and that is why we collectively see the world in a similar way, since the parameters within which our mental, energetic and physical bodies are shaped are highly similar, depending on the *prarabdha karma* established before the moment of birth.

Our physical and mental responses to common daily acts that we undertake are always subject to genetic and cultural conditioning that we believe to be valid based on our own innate tendencies. We see pain in one way and regard

happiness in another way, both personal. We are not free to react: our tendencies, our *samskaras*[11] lead us to interpret the world in a particular manner. Because of this, the *samsara*, being the wheel of deaths and rebirths, is the culmination of duality: a forever changing universe, in evolution, which tends towards an unknown perfection, within which it is only possible to move between the opposites of pleasure and pain

Being immersed in this constant change without being able to find an answer to such impermanence is like sleeping without being aware that this oneiric universe only exists in the mind of those who dream it. While the dream of duality endures thanks to the ignorance of the individual, the universe is seen to be real thanks to *maya*, just as the events which happen in a dream seem to be real for the dreamer. Nevertheless, *correct cognition* is enough to reveal the mystery of the illusion and the dream; you only have to wake up or, at another level, experience non-duality, to become aware that the universe is not made up of fractions but rather an infinite continuum of simultaneous and ubiquitous reality.

Sloka 7

"The universe appears to be true so long as the non-dual Brahman, the ultimate Reality, the substratum, the basis of all this creation, is not comprehended. It is like the illusion of seeing silver in mother-of pearl".

Relating that which Is with that which is not, that is to say, when one seeks to describe a Reality that underlies that which is apparently seen as real, calls for the most natural and simplest kind of language possible, which create a pedagogical difficulty that at first is nearly insurmountable.

11 A Sanskrit term which represents the firmly established set of tendencies that model our common daily response, our tastes and our necessities.

These days we rely on concepts such as 'symmetry', 'multi-symmetry', 'probability', 'hologram', 'information', etc., stemming from research in classical and quantum physics, which emerge as wonderful theoretical tools for the transmission of metaphysical concepts. Yet for millennia human beings have been seeking to advance in the search for the underlying substrate for all things and sought to develop metaphysics using proverbial language, which to be frank at times proves incomprehensible. Hence *Sankara's* mastery and that of other ancient exponents when it comes to resolving – through the use of natural metaphors, at times with a hint of the poetic – the pedagogic dilemma posed when seeking to transcend the common condition of cognition and bring the searcher closer to understanding the metaphysical aspect of reality.

This expertise can only be achieved after cognitive preparation and pedagogic exercise in which examples will arise naturally of their own accord – examples in the form of aphorisms such as the classic figures of the rope and the snake, the shell and the silver, the apparent mobility of the moon at night, and floating clouds parting to reveal the sun, among other examples designed to bring about comprehension.

Thus *Sankara* uses an abundance of masterly metaphors to introduce us to knowledge beyond common mental experience. He seeks to describe how Reality is so close yet shrouded in a tenuous veil, and thus hidden, as in our mistaken perception that we may have of an oyster shell being silver. That which is Real pervades yet no one can see it, it is undetectable. No logical mechanism can unmask Reality and yet, it would seem that it is there right around the corner. It is frustrating for aspiring students to find that the essence and aim is so near yet so far. Dozens of methods of purification are recommended to enable the desired encounter but seemingly none of them lead to the happy ending of blissful union with

the divine. And so, ethical behaviour is proposed as a bridge to the absolute; *yoga* exercises are stipulated requiring the utmost willpower to be able to achieve the goal. But no, there would seem to be no clear path to the experience of non-dual Reality, secreted away who knows where.

Sankara establishes that no performance of any action leads to Freedom. Nor does the field of ethics provide a key to the encounter with the Fundamental. Proper cognition is needed to unveil this mystery. Proper cognition entails seeing the world, as it unfolds, with the intensity of someone in love or about to die, the intensity of complete awe. Experiencing the *present*, the *here and now*, as if it were the only way to live, becomes the secret that nobody detects. One only has to observe any event in the light of attention firmly focused on the *present* for it to be revealed simultaneously as the perceived object and its cognitive complement [Cognitive complement here and elsewhere, crucially, refers to the remainder of creation, not the object being known - translator's note].

There is an example which most readers will probably be familiar with: the "magic eye", a series of sheets featuring two-dimensional coloured blobs which conceal three-dimensional figures at first sight impossible to detect. We are told that to be able to see the three-dimensional objects we should place the two-dimensional painting close to our eyes and then slowly move it away; then at a given moment the hidden figures will stand out from among the blotches. There are those who try again and again without being able to discern the three-dimensional forms that are merged in with the apparently unorganised coloured blobs. The three-dimensional figures are hidden there and one only has to adopt the right perception to be able to verify this. Something similar happens with the Real: it is always there, yet our vision, clouded or distorted by the *I,* by the *self,* impedes us from discovering that *all* is in *all*, that *all* is *everywhere*, that

there is no essential differentiation throughout the universe, that *all has been, is, and shall be*.

When in the end the Real is revealed, the astonishment of becoming aware that the universe is a prolongation of yourself is most apparent. Your vision ranges far and wide through space and the past without noticing any movement in distance or in time. Consciousness lights up everywhere, highlighting existence and underwriting comprehension in a continual and unlimited universe. That is *Brahman*, that which is Real, the summation of experience, the causeless cause of the Self.

Sloka 8

"Perception of the multiple and differentiated 'forms' exclusively exist in the mind of those who perceive them, their substrate being the eternal and all-pervading *Vishnu*, ***whose essential nature is Existence and Consciousness. 'Names' and 'forms' are like golden ornaments and bracelets,*** *Vishnu* ***being the gold".***

What *Sankara* seeks always to get across is that Reality is in essence unchanging and is expressed as consciousness, the urge to know. Our perception is a mode of information in constant change. This perception is manifested in the mind of the perceiver as *differentiated and changeable*, solely owing to the intrusion of the self in cognition.

Hence, the "multiple and differentiated forms" to which the *sloka* refers belong to a kind of dual cognition brought about by the sense of *ahamkara*, of *I-ness*. From the egoic perspective, the universe is an infinite collection of individual events with their own sense of reality. This collection of events is generically represented by the presence of the countless *names* and *forms* by means of which our mind is capable of remembering them.

Again the *sloka* reminds us of the evidence that the problem with common perception arises from the impossibility of simultaneously perceiving information which stems from both the field and its complement. When our mind detects any *name* and any *form* it is impossible for it to relate them simultaneously with others. The activity of information being ubiquitously and simultaneously related is only possible through non-dual experience; this experience necessarily requires the *dissolution of egoic activity*, yet *not* the dissolution of the mind.

There is no denying the perception of *names* and *forms* represented by such dual cognition. It is simply that any cognitive symmetry portrays a fraction of reality; however, the *vedanta* states that in essence, any fraction is intrinsically related with all remaining ones.

The impossibility of cognitively experiencing *all in all*, or *all in all things,* leads to the mind offering a sequential and dialectic representation similar to what human beings commonly experience and upon which is developed their particular form of cognition, which they will probably die with, without ever knowing the truth.

In dual activity, which is common to human beings, a so-called "dialectic mechanism" arises, because of which all perceived events need to be contrasted with another previously known one stored in the memory. The perceived event (thesis) is counterpoised to another stored in the memory (antithesis), and when any comparison and coincidence is made, the resultant cognitive judgement or synthesis produces knowledge. Given that this process always happens through the counterpoising of *names* and *forms* and vice-versa, a *sequential process* is required similar to what any computer uses to be able to read a file or locate a memory address on its hard drive.

The mind is composed and designed to carry out sequential and intellective judgement associated with *names* and *forms*, yet there are also other mental processes that offer other forms of cognition, among them being the non-dual states of consciousness known as Concentration and Meditation. When within the dialectic process there is no apparent relationship between a *form* and any *name* or a *name* and any *form*, there is no way of expressing synthesis. For instance, if readers can associate the *name* "clouds" with an idea of *form* stored in your memory and can match them, you can determine that the *form* corresponds to the *name* in question. Likewise, if you remembered the image of a brick and expressed its name, there would be a relationship between the two that would elicit the valid knowledge relating the *name* and its *form*. Yet if I were to ask you to remember an "intercalated reticule" you would probably not be able to find such a *form to associate* in your memory, because of there would be no thesis-anti-thesis counterposition and there would be no synthetic final judgement.

Given that our minds are used to making dialectic judgements, for cognitive symmetries within which only sequential relationships of *names* and *forms* operate, a major problems arises: our minds are highly inefficient for understanding any kind of reality in which cognitive processes associated with simultaneous activity are in operation.

For instance, when we are told of the metaphysical considerations relating to the non-dual *Brahman* as the Real substratum underpinning everything that exists, understanding it becomes complex because we very easily tend to assume that our universe and *Brahman's* are two different realities, when in fact they are simultaneous and non-differentiated, so that there is only one non-dual Reality. Here we find evidence of the deficiency and limitation of the mechanistic dialectical model upon which we base our

interpretation of reality. We see the world as being real and yet, at the same time, understand there are reasons for concluding that there is an additional "other" Real world – one which underpins that which is impermanent. We get lost in this dichotomy, as our mechanistic system does not allow for the simultaneous coexistence of both realities; one or the other: we either eliminate one of the worlds or we mistakenly presuppose that the key lies in how "the *self* can journey" from one to the other.

The *vedanta* suggests that there is no need to discard anything. One only has to concentrate one's perception upon any dual symmetry without any kind of voluntary effort, taking advantage of the fact that essentially, all symmetry is conditioned by the "multi-symmetry" which generates it. And so, given the "to Be and not to be" simultaneity that underlies all symmetry, we can grasp either of the two aspects depending on which mode of perception we foster.

This is why *Sankara* states in the text: "*Perception of the multiple and differentiated forms exclusively exist in the mind of those who perceive them*". The sense of the perceiver's *individuality* brings to life different symmetries and a universe associated to such perception in which differentiated entities emanate and change. What is it that never changes in any kind of symmetry associated with any perception whatsoever? *"… Existence and Consciousness as essential nature*", as described in the *sloka*.

In this way, the *vedanta* states: perceive any symmetry in a sustained manner without including your sense of "self" or associating *name* and *form* to the perception; then you will become aware that all sense of differentiation is undone, disappears, to end up resolving itself in the non-dual "multi-symmetry" which is its origin. You will be aware that in all universes, in all symmetries in which you have previously travelled you were always accompanied by That which Is Real expressed as the gift of Existence and the gift of Consciousness.

It's in fact *Vishnu* who represents this condition of That which Is Real. The divinity seated on his lotus-flower throne guarded by the giant snake *Ananta* represents the non-dual *Brahman*, as Absolute Being, Knowledge and Bliss.

Sloka 9

"The all-pervading** akasha**, Void or Emptiness appears to be limited on account of its association with various conditionings [**upadhis**] which differ from one another. Space becomes one upon the destruction of these limiting adjuncts. So too, the non-dual** Brahman**, the omnipresent Truth which appears to be diverse owing to Its association with the various** upadhis **also becomes one, non-dual Reality upon their destruction, through the act of sustained attention on these same differentiated** upadhis**".

Sankara starts off by making a reference to *akasha*, which is one of the five primordial or subtle *tatvas*[12] that are part of the early material in the process of the development of the universe. From the standpoint of the *vedanta*, in its cosmological unfolding, we have three kinds of existing matter that in turn generate three domains of life; these are the causal, subtle and physical worlds. The causal world is a domain whose constitutive matter is made up of the *gunas*[13] or qualities of matter which still have not mixed; this corresponds to the world of *Ishvara*, divine creator

12 *Tatva* is an expression which denotes the category of material. Thus, the *tatvas* are: *akasha*, *vayu*, *agni*, *apas*, *pritivi*, the five elements (ether, air, fire, water and earth respectively). It should be realised that dense and subtle elements are known by the same names, which causes confusion for some readers.

13 *Guna* is translated as "attribute". Perhaps the closest thing to this concept is what we call "information". *Guna* is a quality of matter which, when it intermingles with similar qualities, shapes potential life forms, just as when information mixes with energy, matter or any other kind of substance. To learn more about these concepts, we suggest reading the book "*Cuántica & Meditación*", by *Sesha*, published by the AFVAS. Spain, August 2012 (www.vedantaadvaita.com).

and intelligence that governs *karma* in the entire universe. When *gunas* are intermingled amongst themselves thanks to *Ishvara*'s active intelligence, another world is born, the subtle world[14]. This subtle world is composed of the mixture of the three *gunas* in the causal state which make up the five subtle elements. These subtle elements constitute the individual (*antakarana*) and collective (*mahat*) minds; in turn these make up the individual and collective energetic or pranic worlds. These five subtle elements, in turn, intermingle by means of a process known as *panchikaranam* or quintuplication, giving rise to the five dense elements. These dense elements will in turn be the constitutive substance of the dense objects of the human body and the universe[15].

Akasha is translated as "ether" and has two variants depending on whether it is presented in the dense or subtle state. If *akasha* is in the subtle state the reference is to an extremely subtle and permeable substance, which favours the possibility of other objects being born within it. Water leads to many kinds of organic life coming into existence; for instance its dampness favours the appearance of mould; it also produces rain, snow, oceans and a myriad of other things. *Akasha* is a material that, in contrast to water, favours the presence of subtle life wherever it is to be found. *Akasha* is the spatial sustenance of ideas, emotions; just as space is the substratum that supports all that has volume, *akasha* is the sustenance of ideal materials and forms. When *akasha* has to do with the dense worlds, it concerns sound, the vibration that is the activity present in all matter. Thus, when *Sankara* uses the simile *akasha*, he is expressing the fact that Absolute

14 Also known as *hiranyaagabha* or "cosmic egg". This is a subtle world, similar to the material of which ideas are made of or *prana*, the vitality which streams from the sun.

15 The dense body of the universe is generally known as *virat*; the physical human body is called *stula sharira* (physical body), *anna maya kosha* (illusory body of food), or *chaya* (shadow), among other terms.

Consciousness contains all things just as the immeasurable *akasha* spatially contains both subtle and dense creations.

On the other hand, all particular or individual systems are known as *upadhi*. *Upadhi* is a synonym for individuality, yet it is employed with a more structural connotation. For instance, *upadhi* is the physical body, a mountain, any object or any independent system that has any substance, including all individuals or any of their parts. All *upadhis* can be expressed through *name and form*. All *upadhis* are distributed throughout "*the all pervading akasha*" and are all perceived to be differentiated from each other only from the perspective of another *upadhi* known as the "*I*" or *self*.

The *upadhis* make up all cognitive symmetry; as such they are unstable and impermanent. The boundaries that delimit *upadhis* are never maintained. It is due to this impermanence, instability and fleetingness of the *upadhis* that sooner or later people accept the evidence of the illusion in perception.

Upadhis evolve depending on the changes undergone by the boundaries which contain them. Hence, there is no use inquiring into the origin of the universe. The sense of time and space only happens in the mind of a perceiver who detects *upadhis* being different from each other. The situation is similar to what happens in a dream whilst we are asleep. Are readers aware that dreamers are able to ask themselves about the origin of the universe they are living in, since they feel it to be real as long as they are asleep? Can the dreamer imagine the universe being born from the Big Bang, thirteen thousand million years ago? Undoubtedly. Nevertheless, there these things happen to the extent that the dream coordinates perception. On waking, any question about the origin of this dream universe, the oneiric universe realised in the dream, becomes completely meaningless, futile.

Nothing was ever born; moreover, nothing ever really evolved, nor did anything ever die, it is only the mind

experiencing a world within certain canons that led to the presence of a particular universe.

Upadhis are just as real as any event in a dream when one is asleep, or just as valid and real as seeing an non-existent snake, through lack of correct cognition, when suddenly confronted with a rope coiled up on the ground: both are real and illusory at the same time. There is no answer to the problem of what is Real if we seek to find a special kind of category of *upadhi*. The correct answer entails establishing a form of cognition in which every *upadhi* and everything else which may exist can be experienced simultaneously and ubiquitously. The cognitive activity which reveals this option is known as "non-duality". There the perceiver of the universe is Consciousness itself; it is no different from the universal substance it experiences. An *upadhi* is simultaneously itself and all the rest; experiencing such an assertion implies unfolding the temporal-spatial dimension and creating a continuum as the essential base of comprehension and knowing. The setting for the development of this new cognitive mode is known as "non-duality". The name which the *vedanta* tradition gives to Consciousness simultaneously and ubiquitously knowing itself in the entire universe is *Brahman*. *Brahman* is taken to be the Absolute non-dual Reality; it is Consciousness, Existence and Bliss.

Sloka 10

"Because of the unceasing mental activity of the perceiver, holder of individual consciousness, the diverse upadhis (differentiated forms) such as caste, colour, lifespan and position are super-imposed upon the Self (*Atman****), as flavour, colour, etc., are super-imposed on water".***

We have defined *upadhi* as every event which is perceived as *name and form*, whether it is individual or collective (for

instance, tree and forest). Synonyms of the word *upadhi* are "field", "system", "event", "variant", and even "thing".

If we look carefully at a part of a wood floor and we fix our awareness on the *name* and *form* of a lath or floorboard, by delving even more rigorously we become aware that this information tacitly includes the kind of tree it comes from, the sap that flowed through it, the water it absorbed while it grew, the sun that gave it energy and so on, leading to the conclusion that the lath or floorboard has an infinite amount of information which we do not see at first sight. This equally occurs with any field of information or system of perception that we turn our attention to. Hence, all information consists of infinite pieces of information; every field of reality that is experienced essentially contains infinite information.

However, all these infinite pieces of information generated by any system have an essentially probabilistic nature. The mind, when it remembers, chooses a *name* and a *form* associated with perception, leaving the rest undetected. Before we think about it, *all* is *all* yet, on introducing our will, on imposing our sense of appropriation on perception by means of the *I*, the universe reshuffles to become a sequential and dual universe.

From the psychological point of view, the mind's probabilistic tendency is accentuated forming responses in the shape of habits. That is to say, although we human beings are all different from each other, the fact is that such a choice is not random; indeed, we can observe that this choice is determined by a psychological process conditioned through elements derived from *prarabdha karma*, known as *samskaras* or conditioning habits.

Thus, *samskaras* are the predominant tendencies through which permitted cognitive symmetries will emerge. There are very few basic *samskaras*, and this leads to the fact that

most modes of perception occurring amongst people are extremely similar.

This, however, seems to contradict the fact of the enormous wealth in experience and behaviour patterns existing in human evolution. These basic psychological conditions are expressed by innumerable symmetries, sometimes very different amongst themselves, to the extent of seeming opposed. For instance, if children who have a strong natural impulse to be active, who are always on the move, are punished, or harshly repressed, they can develop the opposite tendency and become restrained, introverted lethargic, as the same base psychological condition drives both tendencies. In turn, these tendencies generate successive superimposed symmetries, which may be psychologically integrating or not, depending on the individual's own level of understanding and the individual's surroundings.

At all events, just as we have pointed out, these basic psychological conditions are determined by *prarabdha karma* and are those that determine some perception modes and not others. The way out of this for all human beings, whatever mental conditioning they may have, is to pay attention to what is happening in the present since, from there, every perception tends to lead to another, endowed with greater stability, until acceding to the supreme stability of non-dual perception. This is the way to peel away the successive layers that, as the *sloka* says, are superimposed over the *Atman*.

Sloka 11

"The dense body provided by** karma**, is the consequence of past actions and made up of the five great subtle elements. It becomes dense when half of one of the subtle elements joins with an eighth part of each of the other four. The dense body is known as the 'seat' of experience, the 'medium' through which pleasure and pain are experienced".

The *vedanta* adopts a great part of its cosmology from the *Samkhia School* and reproduces assuming its validity. The *vedanta*, in contrast to the *samkhia*, is an exclusively metaphysical system, and accordingly has little interest in the evolutionary processes of matter. *Sankara* established, in concordance with the categories of matter which constitute the universe, three differing regions that taken together make up everything existent; they are: 1. The causal universe. 2. The subtle universe. 3. The dense universe.

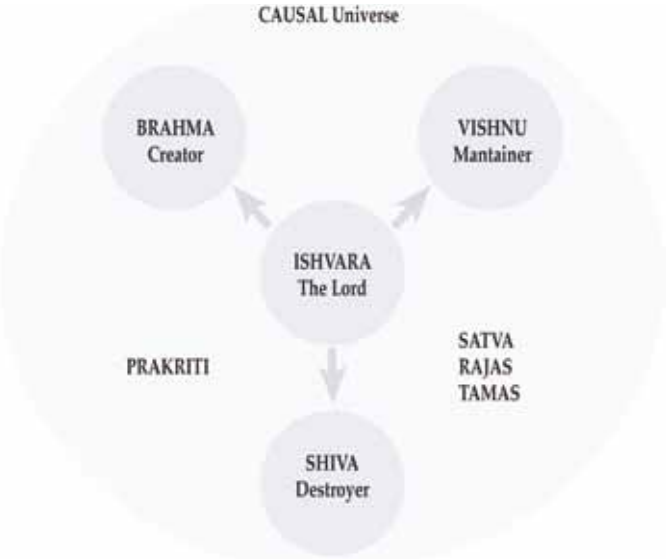
These three immense regions or immense *upadhis* are the first three cosmological symmetries to emerge in the world of non-differentiation. "Above" these symmetries the non-duality of *Brahman* is encountered. The categories of matter of these three universes differ in order of the complexity caused by the continual mixing among primal elements, named *gunas* or qualities of matter. In this manner, new substances are produced over and over again, which in turn serve as a basis for diverse material symmetries.

The birth, development and entire extension of this universe is known as *manvantara.* This expansion is followed by an inverse process of gathering in known as *pralaya*[16]. This "breath of *Brahman*", this constant and continual birth and death of universes, brings with it the birth of divinities or intelligences which will govern the conditions of all existence. These divinities could be identified with what is known as "the intelligence of the natural forces". Readers might imagine that the four fundamental forces: strong, weak, electromagnetic and gravity, had a symbol with which they could be represented and worshipped. Such primal inherent forces in the manifestation of all things, are from the scientific point of view, operative processes that confer

16 There could be a co-relationship associated with the process of *pralaya* or cosmic dream and with the Big Crunch or process that science takes as being the putative collapse of the universe, in the case of black holes absorbing and gathering all matter in a place with no spatial dimension..

order and meaning on creation. From the standpoint of the *vedanta*, the primary forces that bring nature into being have the gift of intelligence[17]; they operate equally throughout the entire universe and are represented by symbolic aspects that highlight their majestic and universal nature.

Figure 1. The Causal Universe



Hence, unresolved *karmas* from the other universe, after *pralaya*, the cosmic dream, pave the way for the material

17 The causal universe is governed by the intelligence known as *Ishvara*, the Lord. To this universal activity, the gift of activating unconsumed *karma* from previous universes is given, putting into movement the forces that will create life at all levels. *Ishvara*, in turn is represented by *trimurti Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*, representing creative forces, maintainer and destructor of the universe. The four previously mentioned forces, strong, weak, gravity and electromagnetic could be expressed as potential aspects of these three divine intelligences, since they govern the destiny and nature of everything existent.

impulse and movement[18] providing the substantial basis for *manvantara,* the new universe being born. In the universe's causal state the *gunas* are quiet, that is to say, there is no activity of intermingling among themselves; in *vedanta* cosmology this is known as *prakriti,* or *gunas* in a state of rest. *Ishvara* is the intelligence associated with substances in the causal field, which triggers the emergence of the universe, as if it were a *big bang* that initiates a reality which awakens after a millennial sleep.

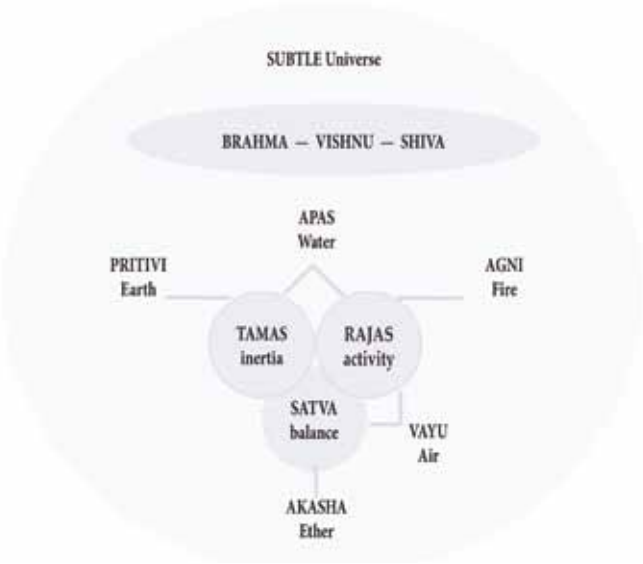
When *gunas* mix together, they give birth to the subtle universe. That is, when they intermingle and *satva* is dominant *akasha* is born, ether; when *rajas* dominates *agni* arises, fire is born; when *tamas* dominates earth emerges, *pritivi*; when *satva* and *rajas* dominate together, *vayu* emerges, air; when *rajas* and *tamas* dominate *apas* is born, water.

The subtle universe is composed of material other than that of the measurable universe with which science engages by means of its scientific method. The substances that form ideas, feelings, emotions, passions and the life force or *prana*, in all of their different degrees, take part in this field. Ideas, similar to the platonic archetypal universe and the universal order that underpins all, form part of this sphere of reality. Oriental tradition has a divinity representing each and every one of the active parts of nature. In fact, though, the only difference between the East and West is that Orientals worship, they are in awe of the wonderful order that reigns all around them and they feel to be an integral part of

18 The causal matter that will serve as substantial basis for actual intermingling itself is known as *guna,* which is translated as "primal quality" or "base attribute of matter". It should be understood that the *guna* substance still has no dense quality such as a stone, a quark or a physical atom. *guna* matter is alike to that that substantially constitutes a dream when it has no images or memories, it is totally causal matter. the *gunas* are called *satva*, balancing quality, *rajas*, active quality and *tamas*, composing quality.

everything, whereas westerners assume they are the centre of creation and are its only vestige of intelligence.

FIGURE 2. THE SUBTLE UNIVERSE



While the West suggests that there are forces described and determined by mathematics and physics which describe the natural order, the East has assigned a set of divinities to the order in question, which operate in material, subtle and causal realms.

The three *gunas* that make up the causal universe intermingle and interact amongst themselves to compose the subtle universe. The matter of the subtle universe is based on the now new five elements namely ether, air, fire, earth and water, *akasha*, *vayu*, *agni*, *apas* and *pritivi*, respectively. These five substances are not those that we commonly have to do with in our daily lives when we drink a glass of water, look into space or feel the airy touch of the breeze on our skin.

The mind is composed of the five subtle elements within the material substancehood in which *satva* is predominant. The mind's different characteristics or *antakarana* arise from the immense gradations of blending that there are amongst their components, just as the three primal colours can offer an infinite range of shades and tones. No *upadhi* of the universe can have a pure material constitution; all the *upadhis* are, from the very moment creation comes into play, an infinite mixture of gradations of basic information originating from the causal world. Likewise, the gradations of divinities that operate in the causal world are more universal than those that belong to and control the subtle world with their intelligence. Whereas great *devas* such as *Brahma* and *Vishnu* are an integral part of a realm of special existence, *devas* such as *Surya*, *Ganesha* and *Kartikeya* are representatives of the subtle universe. The cosmological processes explained through myths that great cultures have composed are part of the symbolic process within which the universe is maturing.

Akasha provides the subtle universe with the possibility of creation securing a spatial and temporal dimensionality. *Akasha* is translated as "the capacity of containing"; the universe cannot exist without a spatial-temporal environment within which creation can emerge. The subtle matter that makes possible the appearance of a universe is *akasha* or subtle ether. Imagine the environment where an idea is born in the very instant we think of colours, forms and thousands of sensations that *occupy* our inner selves. The place in which creation springs forth is a vital primary, absolutely permeable space that allows for the existence of all kinds of substance.

Vayu provides the subtle universe with the possibility of expansion of the substance that makes up this subtle universe in the *akasha*. Just as a thought opens up to associate with another in our mind, or in the same way as sound expands through space, equally so does the *vaya* quality,

air, impregnate subtle matter with ampleness allowing expansion here, there and everywhere, making it possible for an infinity of boundaries in creation. *Vayu* possesses the same qualities as *akasha,* adding its own quality of expansion.

Agni provides the subtle universe with the possibility of movement in creation that expands in *vayu* and is contained within *akasha*. Subtle *agni* possesses all the qualities of *vayu* and subtle *akasha* plus its own. Readers should take notice of how a mental image *occupies*[19] an inner space from where it expands[20] into a given place generating boundaries and, moreover, within which it enjoys movement proper to *agni*.

Apas promotes a principle of adaptability to creation which is already in movement in the subtle universe. If matter were unable to adapt to its surroundings, as water does to a mould, contours and boundaries would not be able to be defined between subtle objects themselves. Thus, thanks to adaptability of *apas*, movement gains speed that offers a fleeting unity, just as a wave momentarily differs from the one that follows it.

Pritivi is principle that brings about the definition and consolidation of subtle matter in the subtle universe. As an example, readers should take note that memory is a subtle matter with a lavish helping of *pritivi*; it allows for a degree of definition to subtle matter capable of clearly differentiating one thought, feeling or passion from another.

Later on in the cosmological process there occurs the so-called process of *panchikaranam* or quintuplication that composes gross elements and, as the *sloka* indicates, involves the combination of a part of each subtle element with an eighth part of the four remaining subtle elements. Each element is in concordance with each of *the five senses*, with *the*

19 Quality deriving from subtle *akasha*.

20 Quality deriving from subtle *vayu.*

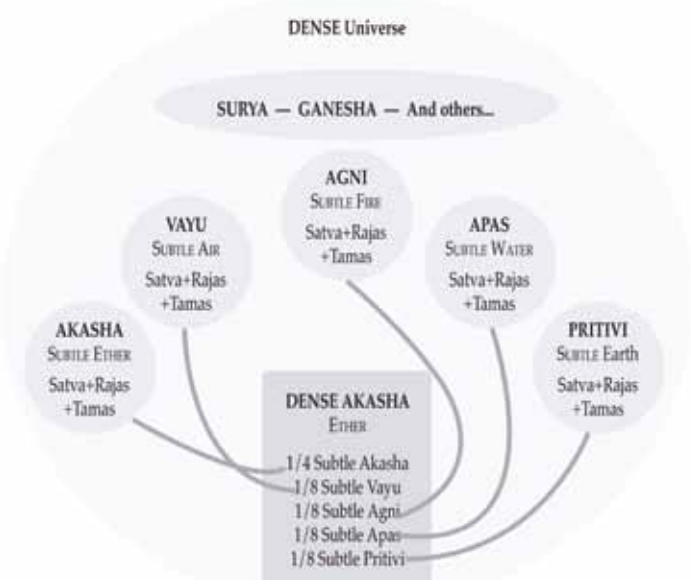
five organs of action and the five *pranas*. Given that there are also degrees of "subtlety" in subtle matter, it is usually said that hearing, given that it is the faculty with a prevalence of *akasha*, is the most perfect of all senses. Moreover hearing is associated with sound and therefore with *akasha*. When we say subtle hearing we are not referring to the physical organ of hearing, but rather to the subtle organ through which we listen, for instance, to vibrations that happen whilst we dream or remember something. There are some people who can perceive vibrations with their subtle hearing and can experience intensities and situations from a physical distance that physical hearing would never be able to detect. The same goes for the rest: the other subtle elements are also analogically speaking associated with other perception organs: *vayu* with touch, *agni* with sight, *apas* with taste and *pritivi* the least developed one, with smell.

The difference between subtle and dense matter is the level of stability possessed by the former. The mind and any of the subtle constituents have an immensely long average lifespan that enable them to range from the beginning to the end of the universe, whereas the dense matter that forms a gross body deteriorates with the passing of a few decades. The most stable constiuents of dense matter are electrons; their rate of degradation is measured in billions of years, yet even they statistically tend to deteriorate in tiny amounts from moment to moment. Nevertheless, subtle matter is far more stable, allowing the mind to maintain itself as a functional unit throughout a whole *manvantara* or duration of a universe. In this way, dense elements, on deteriorating are absorbed by subtle matter that, in turn, on deteriorating is absorbed by causal matter.

The causal relationship between the causal, subtle and dense universes favour multiple relationships between the three worlds, owing to the fact that they have *gunas* or primal

materials in common; because of this it is easy to interrelate different symmetries amongst themselves. For instance, from this viewpoint, it is easy to develop an efficient way to deal with illnesses on the subtle plane, by determining what kind of co-relationship there is established among dense elements. There could be, for instance, trees that are overly *satvic, rajasi*c or *tamasic*; the same could be said for minerals and all other forms of nature. In point of fact, when the constituent nature of all things is known, specific treatments can be prepared according to the typology of each illness, as done in the *Ayurveda* school of medicine.

FIGURE 3. THE DENSE UNIVERSE



Sankara, so far, has coherently and rightly considered that all *upadhis*, whatever their condition, are *maya*: they are

ignorance, in the sense that the common perception eliminates the possibility of all the infinite complementary information that essentially makes up any *upadhi* being perceived.

In line with this *Sankara* establishes a protocol that engages with the living experience of Liberation, understood as non-dual perception. This modality of cognition that leads to non-dual experience involves total, constant attention without there being the slightest hint of the presence of the *upadhi* "I". This is the path which leads to the awareness of the essential nature of all things, that which all things truly Are. Nonetheless, at any given time the approach may differ and the perception of more and more subtle objects is recommended as a way of access to non-dual perception – and this is a conceptual error. To suppose that Liberation comes about through absorbing previous fields of perception at successive levels would be to say that Liberation is conditioned by the level of subtlety in perceived events, and this is not true. Even the most subtle degree of *akasha* is still *maya*.

It does not matter how gross the physical body may be, nor what substance it is made of, nor what its previous *karma* was before it was constituted; the way out of *maya* lies in the awareness of any event being Existent and Cognoscible because it is non-different from the Consciousness that is Knowing it.

Sloka 12

"The subtle body is formed from the five vital energies [*pranas****], the ten organs, the* manas *(mind) and* budhi *(intellect), formed from the primary pure elements before their "five-fold division and mutual combination with one another. The subtle body is known as the "intermediary" in the experience of pleasure and pain".***

For *Sankara* the elements can be divided into three main categories: causal, subtle and dense. When explaining cosmology in greater detail, however, he turns to and draws on the teachings of the *samkhia* school, founded by *Muni Kapila*.

The word *samkhia* is generally translated as "enumeration" and refers to the different categories of manifestation of substances or *tatvas,* of which the universe is made and according to which it operates. In this way *Sankara,* by accepting the *samkhia'*mode of analysis, integrates its cosmological vision within the *vedanta's* more specifically metaphysical standpoint.

Thus, as indicated in the *sloka*, the substance of the subtle body falls into seventeen categories or *tatvas*.

Out of these seventeen categories, there are five which make up the pranic body. The pranic body is the physical body's exact double; that is to say, a system that contains an image of all its physical organs. Because of this it is also known as "ethereal double". Its structure emits light, which for those who have eyes to see ranges in colour from white to blue; moreover, it usually extends ten to fifteen centimetres out from the physical body. When the physical body dies the pranic body becomes detached, undoing the cohesion of the dense matter, leaving the body of the deceased to decompose. While there is still life in the physical body, the pranic body enables cellular selection, permitting each cell to evolve towards a level of specialisation that the *prana* has programmed. Usually, the pranic body is studied in terms of five functions, depending on the predominance of any one of the five subtle elements, namely:

Prana. This is the name given to the first function that absorbs the *prana* coming from sunlight and moonlight and distributes it throughout the whole body in the same fashion as the heart pumps blood. While *prana* circulates through subtle nerves or *nadis*, blood circulates through arteries. *Prana* is the

transporting energy of *rajas*, activity, whose fundamental physiological vehicle is the bloodstream, being the material oxygen-carrying channel. *Prana* is usually absorbed through food, through breathing and solar radiation; any of these are life-sources, that is why advanced *yogis* are capable of living on just a little water and may even maintain their physical body by means of breathing alone.

Apana. This function of the pranic body is involved in the organism's processes of excretion and detoxification: peristaltic intestinal movements, the foecal bolus formation, the activity of the kidney, bladder and sweat gland, along with urinal movement, among others.

Vyana. This third function is multi-directional, as it is linked to the movement of bodily fluids; it is responsible for ensuring that the bloodstream runs through the network of arteries, veins and capillaries and ensures lymph and bile movement. All active physical body fluid movement other than the two previously mentioned *pranas* pertain to *vyana*.

Udana. This *prana* is associated with the processes of birth and death. It is responsible for setting a new-born baby's heartbeat in motion, through a primal electric impulse. This *prana* also unleashes the process of the pranic body's separation from the physical body at the moment of death. Usually, at the instant of death the remaining subtle body issues through the throat and makes contact with the subtle regions with their association with the mind. Because of this it is often said that the moment of death is one's "last gasp" ("last breath"). *Udana* also governs any electromagnetic activity that operates in the physical body.

Samana. This pranic function concerns the process of absorption of food and the consequent mechanisms of metabolisation, growth, structuring and proteinisation, along with others that may operate in a physical body. In turn, *prana* possesses subtle counterparts which act upon the mind,

by inducing its activity, or not. It is because of this that one mechanism to still the mind is correct control of breathing.

Of these seventeen categories of *tatvas* of which the subtle body is composed, there are five which make up the organs of Knowing or *gnana indriyas*. The *gnana indriyas* are the five subtle senses; they are not to be confused with the five physical organs. Subtle senses specify the function, whereas physical senses are concerned with the material expression of such a function. That is, someone skilled in these functions might be able to read what is written in a letter without opening the envelope. In a similar fashion someone with developed subtle hearing will be able to hear the sounds that subtle matter makes or hear things at a great distances. Likewise, one may be able to observe sounds or the order of subtle life forms, and all of this thanks to the fact that subtle senses may possess a sufficiently sensitive physical counterpart to serve as an intermediary or link to other non-physical realities.

In addition, of the seventeen *tatva* categories from which the subtle body is constituted, there are five which make up the *karma indriyas* or active organs. These are the hands, feet, tongue, anus and genitals. As with the *gnana indriyas* or knowledge organs; the term *karma indriyas* or active organs refers to the activity on a subtle level and not to the actual physical organs.

To complete this analysis of the subtle body there are two categories left to examine, *manas* and *budhi*. *manas* and *budhi* together are the subtle fractions that make up the *antakarana* or mind. The *vedanta* presents us with a thorough analysis of the mind, dividing it up into four functions that will be fully explained in *sloka* 16.

Hence, a human being's subtle body is made up of seventeen parts, namely: five *pranas*, five *gnana indriyas* or sense organs, five *karma indriyas* or active organs; *manas* and *budhi* or mind.

From the standpoint of the *vedanta* it is possible to study the categories of matter which make up the human being, along with analysing the categories of matter that compose the entire universe at a collective level. That is to say, we can analyse the cosmic mind, cosmic *prana* plus the cosmic sensory and active organs.

We can also study the regions shaped by each one of the collective *tatvas* and encounter the fourteen worlds that are shared among the causal, subtle and dense universes. These worlds or domains of matter, which contain differing elements, are known as *lokas*, and they in turn are made up of seven *talas*[21] and seven *patalas*[22], heavens and hells, depending on the kind of matter they are made up of.

Because of the differing ranges of constitutive matter in the subtle worlds, different regions are generated, shaped by various entities or intelligences associated with the specific conditions of such worlds. Thus, the cosmos is made up of fourteen different domains or *lokas* that allow for the expression of different kinds of life; and within these different kinds, we would like to focus on that of the *devas*, rather than humankind.

Devas are guiding intelligences essentially composed of subtle *satva* and/or *prana*, whose function is to maintain order and serve as a rectifying intelligence for the countless forms of life across the universe, from the highest *satvic* levels to the lowest *tamasic* ones. These are the entities whose aim is the creation and promotion of life, establishing functions and organs that adjust to the needs which, depending on one´s

21 The *talas* or superior worlds, in ascending order, are*: bhur, buha, svaha, maha, yanaha, tapaha,* and *satyam*. Some scholars add two more, *vaikunta* and *goloka*, the abode of the great *devas*.

22 The *patalas* or subhuman worlds, in declining order are: *atala, vitala, sutala, rasatala, talatala* and *patala*. The perceptive reader may detect a great resemblance here between these age-old teachings and the different circles of life described by Dante Alighieri in his *Divine Comedy*.

prarabdha karma, may be required in the existent human and non-human worlds.

To conclude this section with something to reflect upon: there is a surprising resemblance between what is presented here and the discoveries and principles of particle physics. For a long time, the atom was considered to be the basic constituent in matter; later on it was discovered that matter was made up of neutrons, protons and electrons. It transpires that these sub-atomic particles along with many others emerging through scientific research, are in reality no more than ways of integrating so-called *quarks*, and the latter, like *tatvas*, are to all intents and purposes subtle elements considered to be the basic units which interact to bring about material structures.

Sloka 13

"Ignorance or** avidya**, which is indescribable and without beginning, is the basis of the causal state. It is an** upadhi **superimposed upon the** Atman**. Be sure that the** Atman **is different from the three** upadhis**".

The *vedanta* states that the essential cause of dual manifestation is *avidya* or fundamental ignorance. Perhaps readers could imagine walking along the beach in the night and coming across an upturned shell lying on the sand. The reflection of the moonlight on the shell produces an effect, so that it resembles a piece of silver, which might immediately make you think that someone had dropped a coin. You have jumped to the conclusion that you see a shiny coin before you. You ask yourself whether the coin is real and the response being that it is, you stoop down to pick it up, urged on by the value of the silver coin. However, seen up close up, from its colour, shape, weight and so on, you realise that it is a sell covered in mother of pearl.

As a result of our own ignorance we transform one thing into another. This process of change is known as "superimposition". Superimposition makes us *take something illusory to be real* which in turn, changes what *is real into something nonexistent*. In the case of the shell and the coin, as it happens, while we perceive the coin to be real we are not aware of the shell's reality, and vice-versa. On the beach something nonexistent and something that exists momentarily coincide, yet both are real depending on the moment our cognition occurs. Obviously, both situations operate in the mind of the perceiver; there is an intersection of a nonexistent shell and a real coin with an existent shell and an unreal coin.

From the standpoint of the *vedanta*, there is an essential power, that is, a causal power, which confers an unreal twist to perception which in turn makes something nonexistent appear true. There is a causality which is known as ignorance, whose fundamental quality is *to favour the emergence* of something that is not only essentially *unreal*, but also *nonexistent*. This causal power, which promotes the appearance of something being valid even when it does not exist, is known as *avidya* in the *vedanta*.

The only difference in our example of the mother-of-pearl shell and the coin, in comparison with the universe we live in, is that the dual universe is a projection occurring in the mind of *Ishvara,* whereas the coin is a projection occurring in the mind of the perceiver. It is owing to *avidya*, individual or collective ignorance, that we transit throughout the universe along with all creation taking with us the assumption that the world has a valid cause and that its manifestation corresponds to a specific order.

Brahman and *Atman* are the entities that represent Reality at collective and individual levels, respectively. Neither *Brahman* nor *Atman* are *upadhis*; *upadhis* are closed systems

that possess infinite information. An *upadhi* is a tree, a human body, an eye, a galaxy, or any other system composed of information without end. *Brahman* and *Atman* are open systems which, on being perceived, simultaneously engulf an event and its complements, that is, the rest of the universe[23]. The simultaneous perception of a closed system plus its complements, opens up the field (removes the boundaries between contents and ultimate boundaries) and allows for the experience of the non-dual *Brahman*.

This *sloka* refers to the first field of existence, the causal field, made up of the *prakriti*, that is, the *gunas* or the qualities of matter in a balanced state without mixture. According to tradition, the causal plane is a region of the universe consisting of three sub-regions: *yanaha*, *tapaha* and *satyam*. Within these reside the great *Adidevas*, that is, the primal divinities of creation known as: *Ishvara*, *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*. It is said in *vedanta* tradition that when *Brahman* is associated with *avidya's* veiling aspect *Ishvara* is born. In turn, when *Ishvara* is associated with the *avidya's* power of projection[24] the universe is born in its three gradations, causal, subtle and dense.

23 If the universe as a whole is universe U, and C is any given closed field (with ultimate limits or boundaries), and kC is the complement of the closed field, that is, the rest of the universe, then:

C = S + O in which S stands for subject and O the whole set of the field's constitutive objects.

U = C + kC in which C is any given closed field, kC is the complement to this field and U is the infinite set of informations.

U = *Brahman* = *Atman* $\Leftrightarrow \alpha = ß \Leftrightarrow \forall t,e\ \mathbf{C} + \forall t,e$ kC for all C and kC in all time $\forall t$ and space $\forall e$, that is to say, for all C and kC in any time and in all space.

$\alpha = ß = \mathbf{C} + \mathbf{kC}$, $\forall t,e$ *Atman* is identical to *Brahman* and equal to the sum of the field perceived plus its complement for all time and space.

24 It is usually said that *maya*, or illusionary power, has two powers, *avarana shakti* and *vikshepa shakti*, the power of veiling reality and that of projecting illusion; in our example, it would entail veiling the mother of pearl in the shell and projecting a silver coin.

Ishvara, as the intelligent aspect that endows the causal universe with order, has the status of creator of the universe[25], governing all karmic processes arising from the unfinished tendencies of a previous universe. Hence, it is metaphorically stated that *Ishvara* is a divinity with an infinite number of heads, "facing all directions at once", since *Ishvara* constantly perceives everything that happens in creation. *Ishvara* may also be symbolically represented by a peacock, owing to the multiple eyes near the tips of their feathers and visible when spread, suggesting that these eyes symbolically see all. *Ishvara* is also represented as a spider, since the latter spin their webs with matter from their own bodies; in other words *Ishvara*, like the spider, spins the universe into existence with his own intelligence and self-provided material; *Ishvara* is the efficient and material cause of the universe.

The *samkhia* school presents a cosmological model that documents, step by step, the unfolding of the universe in successive planes of existence, through the arrival of diverse categories of matter. The *vedanta* takes advantage of such a theory to give an explanation for the universe from the illusory point of view but presents the non-duality theory as the practical and theoretical mechanism which provides an answer to the metaphysical problem of that which is beyond duality, its birth and its death.

The appearance of *maya*, illusion, as the source of the universe is only a theoretical need, based on the belief that the universe exists only in the light of the individual perceiver. This particular existence is not denied, yet it is observed that what is Real is no fraction, no *name* or *form* that the dialectic mind can count on while there are perceivers differentiated from what they perceive. The solution for

25 The concept closest to the Christian divinity or God is *Ishvara*, the Lord Creator, nevertheless, the non-dual expression of *Brahman* as the sum of Reality has no equivalent in Christian thought.

such a metaphysical dilemma inheres in preventing the differentiating fraction of the mind from coming into action, that is, by eradicating the sense of *I* from perception, without eliminating the remaining functions that serve as a support for the mind's reflection of consciousness.

It is paradoxical that the branch of knowledge that sets out to describe the nature of the universe is physics; one of its fascinating ideas is the interrelationship of forces through the appreciation of symmetries. This concept of symmetry, which we have defined as "the sense of identity within differentiation", allows us to understand that the fields of existence at both individual and collective levels, and dense, subtle or causal descriptions, are different ways of expressing a common basic substratum that is developed in various manners through the option of multiple combinations. The common and essential element from which all symmetry arises is the power of Consciousness, not just as an ideal expression but also as vector of the necessary force which holds the universed together and endows it with life.

From this point of view, the emergence of different states of consciousness is no more than the result of different symmetries, which arise from the different modes of subject-object interrelationship that can be established in the world of perception; all different states of consciousness have the non-dual condition of Consciousness as their primal basis of reality in common.

In contrast to philosophy and psychology, physics has pursued its investigations into parameters which challenge rational ways of thinking; with its concepts of "symmetry", "simultaneity", "uncertainty principle" among others, which for some time now have formed part of its postulates. It would be very worthwhile if this audacity of innovation in physics - in investigating and shaping models that entail a total change of paradigm, were transmitted to other branches of academic

knowledge, so that, for instance, the concept of simultaneity of cognition through non-dual experience could begin to be grasped in these other disciplines without misgiving.

Sloka 14

"Because non-dual Consciousness is the basis of the five sheaths (*koshas****), the non-dual Atman appears with differentiated attributes, the same happens to glass on being endowed with colours such as red and blue, when it is superimposed upon red and blue cloth".***

Here, we have another simple example from *Sankara,* which sets out to explain how the *Atman*, an entity with no specified attributes, seems to assume them due to the intervention of the perceiver's mind. The author shows how a colourless element such as glass seemingly acquires the colour of the thing it is placed ("superimposed") on.

The highly efficient simplicity with which *Sankara* adduces the wealth of examples in the *Atmabodha* is extremely revealing. All later Indian philosophers fall back on them to explain their teachings, in one way or another. This *sloka* refers to the way in which clear glass can *apparently* take on a colour, red or blue for example, depending on what is behind it, without losing its nature and essential condition. Thus, in the same way, that which is Real will seem to be not the *Atman* but the mind, *prana* or the dense body.

Again the cause of something such as clear glass apparently taking on specific tints is superimposition. Superimposition here implies taking as real something which is not. It is very often said that the superimposition that covers the entire universe and entails the mind in believing that all that exists is the summation of *names* and *forms*, the sum of countless *upadhis*, is what is known as *maya*. This belief leads by extension to accepting that the mind, along with all other

attributes that constitute the human being, are real. We should stress that we are not saying individual attributes are non-existent or unreal, but rather, that the mind on experiencing them with egoic presence, blots out the awareness of their *complements*, that is, the rest of the entire universe. When the universe as a whole becomes the subject of perception of itself, then a special state of consciousness arises in which the observer is no different than what is observed; this state of consciousness in which non-dual perception emerges is known as Meditation.

Sankara proposes a series of *upadhis* (sheaths) depending on the *tatva* or kind of causal, subtle or dense matter from which they are made. These *uphadis* or sheaths are given the particular name of *koshas* when they form part of human beings, endowing them with their identity. There are five of these *koshas:*

1. ***Annomayakosha***. The illusory sheath of food, also known as "physical body". The matter with which the dense body is composed is similar to the structure of the known dense universe. The universe's dense body here is known as *virat*. The dense universe consists of subtle matter which has gone through the process of quintuplication, just as we have studied in previous *slokas*. This now dense matter is what we know as the periodic table of elements; through evolution, the conjunction of complex molecular structures leads to the emergence of organic systems with nervous systems capable of being conscious of themselves and the world around them. Dense bodies have the particularity of rapidly decaying, a situation that brings about the appearance of constant change in their nature, and in the end, the coming of death. There is no dense system spared from change; from the most elemental particle to the most giant of suns and black holes, they are all prone to birth, growth and death.

2. Pranomayakosha. The illusory sheath of vitality, also known as the "pranic body". The matter the pranic body is composed of is more like the substance plotted in a magnetic field. When looking at the sky or the horizon, readers may well have seen tiny glints of light dancing and circulating in our surrounding space. This sparkling effect is often known as "*prana* atoms". Such brightness is a charge or input of vitality that impregnates our main vital sources, oxygen and food, and is said by tradition to come from the sun.

Vitality in the form of *prana* sent by the sun directly or reflected by the moon is absorbed along with its dense counterpart when the physical body breathes or takes in food. The pranic body is a double of the physical body; it includes all the physical organs and functions just as they operate in the dense body; because of this it serves as a model for physical organs and is what guides cellular specialisation. The pranic body subsists even when part of the physical body is severed; this is why people who have had a limb amputated feel pain in their "phantom limb". When death occurs, a large part of the pranic body starts its degradation where the body has been buried until, finally, its primal constituents return to being their corresponding subtle elements; another part of the pranic body, the most subtle part, accompanies the mind in its functions and allows for its activity in subtle fields. The pranic body of the universe is also often known as *prana*.

3. ***Manomayakosha***. The illusory sheath of the mind, also known as "mental body". *Manas* may be translated as "that which fluctuates" and it refers to the mental faculty that prevails when there is doubt. Readers take note that when gathering information through an internet search it takes just tenths of a second for the question to receive hundreds of thousands of answers. The search engine sifts through certain specific algorithms and gets information at very high speed. The programming of the algorithms classifies the information

that occupies this virtual world, deciding on whether to discard or accept. This process of searching for information is similar to the one that takes place in the mind when an object that is being known is compared with another existing one, with the aim of creating a co-relationship between them. As long as this co-relationship or link is not established there is a mental activity, which we know as *manas*, sometimes mistakenly thought to be "reasoning". *Manas* is a constant state of fluctuation of mental material, in which *names* and *forms* continue to emerge until the following mental activity, known as *vignana* or consciousness, generates the acceptance of the searched for match, this happening at the precise moment of cognition.

Manas is a special material category of the subtle body and the substance it is composed of is similar to the structure of the *devas* that dwell in *svaha loka*. The *devas* or gods of such regions have different gradations of this matter depending on their nature. The ruling divinities of hate, jealousy, doubt or desperation are entities that inhabit fields in which the primordial substance is alike to that of *manas*. The difference between human beings and *devas* is that the latter do not have either the quality or quantity of tamasic substance in their minds that human beings have; because of this, their level of egoism does not lead them to identify themselves with the tasks they naturally carry out. The universe's manasic body is also known as *manas or,* in some cases, *mahat*.

4. ***Vignanomayakosha***. Illusory sheath of knowledge, also known as "intellect" or "body of knowledge". *Vignano* translates as "conscious capacity". While *manas* is the function with characteristics that in most cases correspond to what is studied as the mind in the West, *vignano* is an activity of the subtle body that serves as ground and reflection of consciousness. The subtle matter that *vignano* is composed of is qualitatively similar to a mirror, that is, it serves to reflect

sunlight. *Vignano* is the mental faculty which allows us to house (or rather receive) consciousness and retain it in the form of intellect or personal understanding. Bodies become warmer if exposed to the sun by absorbing light energy, and will radiate a fraction of it; likewise, *vignano* captures consciousness or the capacity of knowing, which is continually permeating space and the existence of all things, and emits personal comprehension at the level of the individual.

It is the presence of the *ahamkara* process or the *I* that forms part of the *manomayakosha* or mental body, which causes the *continuity* of consciousness to be fragmented by inducing the onset of individual consciousness. *Vignano* activity resembles that of the internet browser where the algorithms on which programming is based, accept and select a particular kind of information.

Any instant of comprehension, any act of learning, any state of awe and wonder belong to the *vignano* activity operating in the mind. Non-dual Consciousness is present in *vignano,* yet owing to the limitation originating from the contamination of the substances of which it is composed [26], the correct form of perceiving reality is stalled. Thus, the mind contaminated by ego, sees the world as being a dual complexity and that everything is separate from everything else.

Pranomayakosha and *manomayakosha,* along with *vignano-mayakosha,* form human beings' subtle body, which is made up of seventeen parts, as mentioned above in previous *slokas*.

26 Contamination refers to the percentage of *tamas* and *rajas* in subtle matter that make up the *antakarana* or mind. The more primary a mind is more, evident becomes the presence of *tamas*, which leads it to a state of identification with any physical or mental action one realises. In turn, the more *rajas* dominates in the mind, the more the impulse to action urges the mind to go out in search of knowledge which, without being aware of the fact, is already there within. Eventually, the stronger presence of *satva* in the mind provokes comprehension and clearly develops intellect. The *sadhana,* every human being's inner quest that searches for personal development, is achieved by transforming tamasic and rajasic mental habits into satvic ones.

5. ***Anandamayakosha***. The illusory sheath of bliss. This is the individual human sheath which in fact forms a part of the causal body of the universe. As has been mentioned earlier, the causal body is a region of existence composed of *gunas* in a state of balance, or *prakriti*. The consciousness associated with this body is similar to that in dreams at moments when there is no mental activity. There is no subject experience at this level. It also resembles the moment when we faint, when it seems that the universe resumes its own potentiality of action. Usually, on coming back from this state, the feeling of peace is so intense that the state is known as bliss. You feel as if centuries had gone by while resting in an imageless dream. The causal body of the whole universe is known as *Ishvara*.

Sloka 15

"Through** budhi**, the discriminative self-analysis and logical thinking function of the mind, it is possible to distinguish the non-dual** Brahman **from the superimposed sheaths that enclose it, in the same way as one separates rice from the husk, bran, etc., with a mill stone".

The structural compendium which in the West is known as mind, in *vedanta* tradition is known as *antakarana*. The mind or *antakarana* is studied in the *vedanta* in a different way to the approach adopted in the West. Indian philosophers break down the mind into four activities, comparable to the way the colours of the spectrum can be reduced to three basic primary ones. Hence, in this way, all the various different feelings, emotions and thoughts come about through the intervention and combination of the four basic mental activities known as: *budhi,* intellect; *manas*, reasoning; *ahamkara*, I-ness, and *chitta*, mental matter or memory.

The range of mental activities is infinite, depending on the prevalence of the *gunas* in each one of the four basic

functions of the *antakarana* or mind. Thus, the human mind or *antakarana* possesses characteristics in common with the human race as well as particular traits representing the uniqueness of every person. Similarly, the five states of consciousness analysed in the *vedanta* arise thanks to the individuality that is present in them. In other words, the *I* or *self*, in contrast to the way it is viewed in the West, contains qualities that tinge each state of consciousness depending on the state of transformation the latter has attained. There is perception with the *I*, without the *I*, with simultaneous *I* – up to five possible variants establishing the differences between the five states of consciousness. It is important to note that, from the standpoint of the *vedanta*, the mind is an organ having the *function* of detecting, processing, fixing and synthesising any information which is to be known.

Like the eyes or ears, the mind is an *organ*. Just as sight and hearing can detect shape, colour and vibration, the mind has the function of processing and recognising information thanks to the fact that its constitutive matter mirrors the light of consciousness. The most subtle fractions of the mind, the ones in which *satva* or balance is predominant, are those which perceive the splendour of consciousness. This *satvic* fraction of the mind, with the subtlest material composition, is known as *budhi*, and has the capacity of creating the intellectual spotlight of knowing. However, the remaining components of the mind's constituent matter are more rajasic (active) or tamasic (gross) so that the mind of the individual barely reflects the merest shadow of consciousness, as a steamed-up mirror is unable to reflect one's face clearly due to the mist which covers it.

The mind[27] is the organ that forms the support for the cognitive function. Each aspect of the mental organ houses different facets of cognitive activity. The mixtures of subtle matter that make up the *antakarana* bring about the generation of different ranges of possible feelings, emotions, thoughts and passions, as well as the intellectual functions, memory, logic, reason, self-hood and other activities that require cognition.

The activity of the *budh*i, translated as intellect, is the function of the mind that vehicularises consciousness. In turn, the *budhi* gives off a reflection, a conscious splendour or gleam that accompanies the cognitive process, which determines the capacity of understanding that operates in cognition. *Budhi* resembles the moon in this sense. The moon, thanks to its material make-up, reflects some of the light of the sun which reaches its surface – it absorbs some of it and reflects the rest. Were it to reflect all of the light that lights up its surface it would be as bright as the sun. In a similar fashion, the *budhi* is impregnated with non-dual Consciousness[28] but only reflects part of its brightness in the form of personal consciousness[29]. The satvic aspects of which *budhi* is materially composed act as the abode for the power of knowing that operates in consciousness itself. *Budhi* is not intelligent in itself, it is the seat of intelligence, just as the brain is actually not intelligent in itself but contains and retains the brightness of knowing that filters through its physiological processes.

27 When we talk about the mind we are specifically referring to the subtle aspect and its physical cerebral counterpart. All subtle mental activity has a physical counterpart that acts as an intermediary connecting to the experience of the dense world. Without cerebral intervention cognitive activity is impossible.

28 *Kutasta Chaitania.*

29 *Chidabaasa*. Thus, *budhi* is the organ which houses individual or reflected consciousness. *Budhi* is the organ which is in contact with non-dual Consciousness.

In the field of philosophy, and more particularly in epistemology or the theory of knowledge, the *budhi* would be the equivalent of the process known as *synthesis*. This latter process occurs when the event being perceived coincides with a previously existent image in one´s memory. Any coincidence between what is perceived and the inner reference, produces what is termed synthesis, in which knowing occurs. Hence, the *budhi* activity is what enables us to recognise objects as and when dialectical synthesis arises. This process of comparing and contrasting, 'thesis-antithesis' in order to generate synthesis, is known in the *vedanta* as "determining the pros and cons of things" or the defining faculty.

Thus, *budhi* is the most suited faculty to discerning reality, since individual consciousness is stationed within it and, as such, knowing. All comprehension is a budhic act, as in any moment when there is learning. *Budhi* is the very instant of awe or wonder in cognition. *Budhi* is like the tranquil reflection on the mirror-like surface of a lake. Budhic activity does not imply in any way that all known events are real. It only validates the coincidence between the perceived object and existing counterparts in the memory. To say you have seen a dog with green spots may be real to you as the perceiver, just as somebody on drugs may believe the hallucinations they experience to be valid.

The level of reality in perception is determined depending on whether or not the object is perceived simultaneously with the entire complement. That is to say, perception is Real when all remaining objects in the universe are experienced simultaneously with the object being known. Within such appreciation the knower is non-different to what is known. When the perceiver becomes non-different to what is known, cognition takes on a non-dual quality; this is the experience brought about in Meditation.

The clearest expression in the function of the intellect, *budhi*, is the act of understanding; "knowing" is the result of the budhic act. It is because of this that *Sankara* relates the function of the intellect with that which induces recognition of the non-dual *Brahman*, which is no more than non-dual Consciousness. When the *budhi* achieves a level of "purification" such that non-dual Consciousness totally agrees with the reflected image in the *antakarana*, or mind, then the resultant comprehension allows the knower to perceive Reality, the knower is Reality.

It is worth pointing out that Consciousness is a non-differentiated ocean of knowing, it is a "multi-symmetry" within which all objects are everywhere in a non-differentiated form. The diverse symmetries that are *apparently* established in different modes of perception in which the *ahamkara*, I-ness or self-hood, subsists, become the objects that the mind commonly detects sequentially. Thus, the symmetry of cognition that we commonly experience and which is known as the "state of Thought", leads us to experience isolated systems, closed events or fields, independent from each other. In this case, *budhi* is the determining faculty that decides which closed field matches another previously registered in one´s memory; the *budhi* endows the perceived element with the light of consciousness, thanks to which, it is seen as being real.

Lastly, beyond the determining faculty we have explained, there is a higher faculty in the *antakarana* which is capable of establishing the "pros and cons" of those things which Are, with respect to those things which are not. In other words, it is capable of discerning with absolute precision that which is Real from that which is not. Such discerning capacity is often known as *viveka*. Thus, *viveka* is the culmination of *budhi*, the capacity that endows the knowledge of what *Brahman* is and the ability to distinguish what is experienced from *maya*, illusion.

Sloka 16

"Although the individual perceiver is not aware of the Omnipotent non-dual** Atman **as the substantial basis of all differentiated things, It is manifested in the mind associated with** budhi**, like a reflection in limpid water or an unmisted mirror".

Closest to the divine are the activities of Knowing and Loving. Both Loving and Knowing have no cause in anything other than themselves and, nevertheless, they take part in all existing things. There is no corner of the universe in which Consciousness does not express Knowing when something is known, or show Love through *integration* with what is known. Knowing unifies the knower and what is known; Love integrates the lover with that which is loved. Nothing feeds Consciousness, nothing feeds Knowing; both are self-illuminated, they depend upon themselves and nourish all that exists with Reality. The most sacred thing is Knowing; the most sacred thing is Loving.

Atman is an ocean of Consciousness and Bliss. It is a reality with no boundaries that contains all *names* and *forms* in existence, those which have been and shall be. In the end, every material and ideal event is the substantiality of non-dual Consciousness. The experience of *Atman* is to integrate all existing things simultaneously and ubiquitously; it is the experience of ineffable joy in knowing that everything Is and all Is in *everything*.

If *Atman* is so sublime, where is it? Why does it not reveal itself to our gaze or whisper in our ear? *Atman* is not a category of material or ideal object, yet it endows quality and quantity to all entities. What *Atman* resembles most, the closest thing to its nature, is the very act of consciousness and the power of love. *Sankara* tells us that consciousness abides in the mind and the act of comprehension derives from the

mind's intellectual faculty or *budhi*. *Atman* is encountered in all things, in the glare of fire, in the intensity of a thunderclap, it can be seen as the purity of water and it encourages the arrival of death; nothing is far from, near to or contrary to *Atman*. *Atman* flows here there and everywhere, in a child's crying, in an earthquake's devastating force. However, our mind associates it more easily with pleasant surprise upon encountering beauty and the fine feeling of something being fair and just, or a tender loving caress or surrender to fellowship. But really and truly *Atman* dwells closest in the *power of knowing* and the very integration that love procures.

If we look through a transparent pane of glass it seems to take on the colours and shapes of the objects beyond. It seems as if the glass adopts colouring, in the same way as minds will assume intelligence in the vicinity of consciousness. The closest "place", the most similar "matter" to the continuum of non-dual Consciousness is the satvic aspect of subtle elements that, blended together, compose the *antakarana* or mind. Just imagine a hospital; you will notice that there are places in its installations where there are patients who cough and sneeze and fill the atmosphere with germs and viruses; there are also completely sterile places, for instance, the operating theatres. In the same way, there is an area of the human being's mind that owing to its material constitution will allow conscious functioning; there the blinding light of Consciousness can rest in the mind and air its aroma of Knowing, Understanding, Loving and Existing. This place is the *budhi*, intellect, the fraction of the *antakarana* ready to reflect the stunning and infinite intensity of Absolute Knowledge.

Sloka 17

"Thanks to the activity of** viveka **it is possible to become aware that the non-dual** Atman **is non-different to the dense body, sense organs, mind,** budhi **and** prakriti**, and it is the witness of these functions, after the manner of a king."

The mind or *antakarana* is a subtle organ, a blend of aspects of the five subtle elements whose main function is to promote knowledge. The *antakarana* has a dense counterpart in the nervous system as a whole, and the countless functions of the brain. Hence, the *antakarana* and its dense cerebral counterpart interact with ideal and dense objects enabling our consciousness of them.

In addition, the *antakarana* can be studied in terms of its function, rather than its composition, as the sum of four activities that predominate, blend or simply do not occur and thus give rise to the five different states of consciousness and to the infinity of attributes which reside within them. From this functional perspective, the *antakarana* or mind can be divided into four primary activities.

Budhi

This function determines the "pros and cons" of known objects. *Budhi* is the determining faculty; it is the seat of activity of individual consciousness. As has been said previously, when we perceive an object and we are consciousness of it, we know it. We can be conscious of ideal or material objects, when this happens it implies that we know them. Because of this *budhi* is the intellectual faculty, that is to say, it is the intelligent aspect of the mind. The act of knowing (learning) and indeed the attitude of wonder, are representations of *budhi*. Thus the instant of learning something is a budhic moment. To give an example, if readers would just think

that I asked them to recall what they were doing last Sunday between eleven and twelve in the morning. To be able to answer you would have to set into motion various activities of your mind that will be fully explained later on. First you would delve into your memory looking for representative situations occurring on that day, and work your way closer to the requested time through association. At the very instant you find a match between the question and the image in your memory, knowledge emerges. The mind at this moment stops searching for more information and lets the knowing shine through. This moment, when the pros and cons of an event have been considered and the search completed, is known as *budhi* in the *vedanta*; in the West it could be called "synthesis" or "conscious instant". All earlier and later moments are associated with other activities of the mind. That which establishes knowledge is known as *budhi*.

It is important to underline that the match you found with the time in question on Sunday could be erroneous. But *budhi* does not categorise something as real or otherwise, it simply searches for matches with the perceived object. Thus, we can assert that at that time we were having breakfast, only to recall later on that that was on Saturday and not Sunday. Similarly, anyone can assume their own fantasies are valid and recognise the coincidence of their thought process with what is in their memory, with no doubt entering in. In such a case, there is consciousness, as there is knowledge, yet this knowing does not necessarily mean that this is valid. Just as the sun shines for the rich and the poor, consciousness illuminates the wise and the ignorant.

Manas

This function concerns the fluctuation of memory. It is an activity that makes possible continual access to one's

memory and is experienced as mental movement. Essentially, *Manas* is the moment of doubt before knowing anything. In our example of trying to recall what were doing on Sunday between eleven and twelve, it would be all the memories that rapidly appear and disappear, before finally arriving by means of correlation, at the moment in question.

Manas resembles more a moment of fear, within which the mind operates with no support whatsoever. Fear prevents any kind of certainty (*budhi*) and drowns those who feel it in a whirlwind of sensations that superimpose themselves one upon the other without any clarity of consciousness. Another kind of manas mental activity is emotion where such shock has no direction or meaning. One of the clearest examples of *manas* are the constant, restless waves in the sea, a symbolic representation of the mind's constant motion.

Try the following for a few moments: close your eyes and observe your inner world. Avoid the arrival of thoughts and feelings in your conscious sphere, that is, stop being conscious of any kind of memory. On wishing for this to happen you will become aware of the way your mind whirls and swirls, preventing any moment of restfulness. After a couple of minutes your mind will evoke memories in an uncontrolled way; you will find yourself being led to worlds and memories from which there is no escape and which you just cannot curb. The activity which triggers the arrival of memories one after the other, with or without any kind of co-relationship, is known as *manas*. When there is some kind of correlation between memories and a degree of order appears, this is known as "reasoning"; if such correlation is adept and puts things in order we may call it "logic". When, on the other hand, there is disorder in its inception this is known as "doubt" or "desperation", owing to the lack of mental control over the stream of memory.

Manas could also be termed "mental fluctuation", since it generates the unceasing movement of memory. Usually, in the mind there are more moments of fluctuation than those of quietude and inner peace (*budhi*). It is often said that *budhi* emerges when *manas* is stilled. That is why it is stated that *there is knowledge when there is no doubt*, and when *there is doubt there is no knowledge*. Manasic activity does not help to reflect conscious force, in the same way that a lake does not clearly reflect the sky when there are waves on its surface. One needs to still the ripples of the mind in order for there to be any comprehension. If you can, visualise a train with many carriages or wagons passing by rapidly before your eyes. The spaces between the carriages or wagons are practically unnoticeable, momentary, fleeting, like the activity of *budhi* at the moment of cognition. It is easier to be aware of the carriages passing by; in the same way it is easier to live within the complexity of mental movement without being conscious of what is really happening there.

An unruly mind tends to desperation, turmoil and doubt; a calmer mind is inquisitive, industrious and stable. Depending on its habits, there will be subtle matter inclined in the same direction. When there is an excess of *tamas*, inertia, in *manas*, the mind becomes lazy, selfish and ignorant; on the other hand, when there is an excess of *rajas*, activity, the mind becomes impetuous, proud and restless. Depending on mental habits, subtle matter is constituted that accordingly converges upon appropriate mental activity.

Both *budhi* and *manas* have infinite gradations, in the same way that colours have an infinite number of shades, depending on the mixture of primary colours they are composed of. Stark contrasts in the constitution of mental matter are not required to create variations in the order of thoughts, emotions, passions and feelings. There only need to be the slightest adjustment of the material constituents

of the *antakarana* to produce an extremely wide range of mental contents. This theory of the mind's constituents is surprisingly similar to the quantum physics analysis of the organisation of matter: the different characteristics of matter emerge depending on the mixture of *quarks,* each one of whose energy is a third, working together with other *quarks* to generate three thirds energy – or alternatively a white colour if teamed with an *anti-quark.* Depending on the fractioning of the five subtle elements and the mixture among their *satvic* aspects, an *upadhi* is created, an organ known as mind or *antakarana,* which has the primordial aim of recognising, processing and synthesising information and the ability, in turn, to reflect individual consciousness.

Chitta

Mental activity which prevents experienced objects from being forgotten. The closest to western thought would be to define *Chitta* as "memory". *Chitta* has a variety of functions that constitute a major innovation to dealing with cognition. If we imagined the mind to be a sea, we could define *manas* as being the movement of the waves and the origin of all the submerged currents which push the waters into movement; *budhi* would correspond to the moment in which the waves achieved an instant of rest, either when they reached their highest point and began to subside or when they subsided and the shore was expecting the next wave to be created. In this example *chitta* would be the waters of the ocean. *Chitta* is what is contained in the mind, mental matter.

As mentioned previously, the *antakarana* is composed of the mixture of the satvic aspects of the five subtle elements. This mental matter has a bright metallic aspect resembling silver. It is extremely mouldable like mercury and its brightness akin

to when we see the solar disc through the branches of a tree and observe an almost blinding gleam of light.

Owing to its plasticity, this mental matter, *chitta*, can adapt to any form, just as water takes on the shape of its container. *Chitta* can only assume the previously established representations, generically denominated *names* and *forms*. Hence, *chitta* can become an odour, a tactile sensation, a colour or a visual form. All contents established in the mind tend to remain in the form of memory and act as a reference pattern for future perceptions. When these future perceptions happen, they are compared to previously existing ones stored in the memory and cognitive judgements, known in philosophy as "synthetic" and in the *vedanta* as "budhic" or "conscious perceptions", operate.

Through its plastic nature, *chitta* assumes previous forms just as the sea constantly adapts to the shoreline by which it is harnessed. Mental matter is in unceasing movement, and as a force it moves at immensely high speed. *Chitta's* constant movement is known as *manas* and its stillness is termed *budhi*. While *manas* is active there is doubt and mental unrest, and there is *budhi* – cognition, learning and knowledge– when this same mental matter adopts a previous *name* or *form* and momentarily comes to a halt.

Chitta has another aspect, which is that of mental matter that flows and to which there is usually no conscious access. In our example of the sea this mental matter resembles the enormous quantity of water that fills the depths of the ocean. There, in the deep, *chitta* takes on the role of long-term or unconscious memory, that is, the gathering of memory which is not voluntarily accessible.

Chitta has the capacity of remembering countless *names and forms*. Just imagine that *chitta* is a transparent pane of glass; no matter which way it faces, it would seem to take on all the colours and forms that are seen through it. *Chitta* is the

unfathomable sea of information that flows to the conscious surface adopting the limits of previously known information. *Chitta's* essential role is remembering, preventing the conformation it assumes from being forgotten; because of this *chitta* is similar to memory, yet, in the end, it is nothing but mental matter willing to be moulded by previously established *names* and *forms*. *Chitta* basically takes on the *names* and *forms* that it does, owing to habits, something which favours, through reinforcement, the appearance of specific and common information in the consciousness.

Ahamkara

This is the mental activity that links perception with a sense of identification. In Western terms it would be the "sense of self" or "ego". Note how actions may be expressed in our language in the "infinitive mood". The infinitive of verbs in Spanish [or -ing words, gerunds, in English, translator's note] denote a specific action or activity. Walking, eating, going, coming, climbing, and a thousand more are examples of gerunds denoting actions. To indicate who performs the action there is the verbal inflection and the personal pronouns: I, you, he, she, it, we, you and they. On conjugating the verbs – using the verbs in the different persons – an association between the action and the doer is expressed; thus, for instance, we generally say, "we walk", "we are walking", meaning the action of the verb is done by a group of people in which I am included. *Ahamkara* is something similar, in that it labels actions by providing them with a sense of singular or plural authorship, for instance, "I want" or "we want". In both cases *ahamkara* has it that mental matter not only assumes a *name* and *form*, but also that such *name* and *form* should have an owner, they should become associated with an active agent.

Just imagine that you are going to pick up your son or daughter from school. Out of all the little ones that come running out to meet their parents you look carefully for the one who matches the details such as size, build, hair colour and so on, of your own. The other children running by may look like yours but do not awaken your sense of belongingness, which suddenly stirs when you see your own child. Then you think "that one is mine". In all other cases, you think, "that one isn't mine", "that one isn't mine either". Always, when there is the agitation of the mind, *vritti*[30] or thought, there is an association with the sense of *ahamkara*, which inserts the sense of personal authorship into the action. Just think how in all countries the land belongs to someone, to a private owner or to the government. Mental matter is like the surface of a country: it always has an owner, or various owners, depending on the kind of thought that occurs at the moment of perception.

Apart from this, *ahamkara* is the activity of the *antakarana* which has the function of differentiating or separating the *knower* from the *known*. *Ahamkara* is the mental activity that produces the sense of differentiation and, furthermore, duality in cognition. Thanks to the presence of *ahamkara* in perception the universe is experienced as a continuum of differentiated objects, which taken together make up creation.

All serious traditions that forge inner discipline are searching to undo *ahamkara,* the activity of the *antakarana* or mind. There is one very interesting feature of perception which makes it the central hub of all spiritual paths. The fact is that *budhic activity prevents the appearance of ahamkara*; that is, while there is *budhi* there is no *I*. Similarly, while there is manasic activity there is no budhic presence, and there is *I*, *ahamkara*. Thus, one should seek to perpetuate a

30 *Vritti* is least possible agitation par excellence, the tiniest ration of agitated mental matter. *Vritti* is translated as "thought" or "agitation of mental matter", *manas*.

mode of perception that is stable enough for the sense of belongingness, *ahamkara*, not to arise. This is achieved when the cognitive reaction is to the *present*, the *here and now*. When attention is paid exclusively and continually to the present, the sense of *ahamkara* disappears, and cognition rises to a new state of consciousness.

The practice of constant awareness and constant attention to the present leads us to experience layers of mind not even recognisable in most human beings. One of the most common consequences for those who achieve continuous perception in the present is the onset of *viveka*, or the metaphysical quality of discernment. *Viveka* is the metaphysical aspect of *budhi*, the understanding of the nature of what is Real directly or intuitively.

The *budhi* is able to determine the pros and cons of profoundly changeable events; that is to say, it makes us aware of objects conditioned by the unceasing activity of *manas*. When this manasic activity is slowed down and the option of quietening the mind emerges, the determinative quality of *budhi* gives way to the birth of its "discerning" counterpart. This discerning function, *viveka*, gives rise to the comprehension of metaphysical realities, which inhere in the understanding of what is Real *versus* what is illusion

Sankara establishes that *viveka,* the quality of discernment, provides the means to understanding the true nature of *Atman* and succeed in clearly differentiating it from remaining *upadhis* or apparently limited structures.

Sloka 18

"Just as the moon gives the sensation of movement when a cloud passes before it, so also to minds lacking in** viveka**, discernment, the** Atman **seems to be active, when in truth the perception of the world is only a mental superimposition which involves the senses".

When we watch clouds going by we can see that they take on various forms: a face, an animal or any object you can think of; we can also take note of details in the composition that together clearly define the imagined figure. The next moment, the wind scatters the clouds and fresh new shreds of cloud may join to form other clouds with new images. While the cloud is forming and failing to resemble anything, we are left to wait until the fragments form a shape that tallies with one stored in our memory. We may need to wait seconds or minutes for this to happen. Let us suppose that the process we are describing with clouds was not gradual but completed at the lightening speed of *chitta* in composing a recognisable object. Notice that here we have three activities or processes: the emergence of plastic matter, the process of adapting to a form and the final image that matches with an established recollection in one´s memory; these functions are known as *chitta*, *manas* and *budhi*, respectively.

Each image formed in the sky possesses distinctive features and corresponds to some memorised information. It is owing to such correspondence that we associate the image in the cloud with a certain memory.

Every one of us is capable of seeing a different shape, depending on the ordering of the details that make up the image's composition. This composition is a superimposition of details, of essential features which the mind unifies through a *name* and a *form*. The mind converts the composition into a total sum of details that make a shape and, depending on their concordance with existing ones in memorised images, we may find similarities between them; that is, we reach a cognitive judgement, we affirm that such an image resembles a dog, a flower or whatever else.

Each *name* and each *form* is made up of details that, added together, become a composition whose identity is taken as different from any other. Since the memory establishes a

database, the mind, *antakarana*, superposes details with which it constructs images. These perceived images, whatever they may be, are the superposition (successive overlay) of information, which added together give a sense of unity to cognition. This means that every object we perceive is the superposition of details stored in our memories. These cognitive details are made up of other previous ones and so on, leading us to understand that in the end, any known closed system is composed of countless pieces of information.

For instance, if the clouds remind us of a landscape, we may see that our mental image recalls details of how a wood forming part of the composition actually looks. However, this wood can also be divided into separate trees and those into branches and so forth. All perception is detected and registered as a unit, yet it is essentially a sum of infinite pieces of information. All perception consists of layers of superposed (overlaid) information integrated as a conscious unit.

When physical senses intervene in perception they are simply intermediaries that add still more codified details; this additional information is seen as colour, shape, fragrance or odour and all other attributes in innumerable gradations.

Atman is the conscious power that confers a sense of reality on every closed system by virtue of knowing itself or of knowing it. *Atman* is the light of conscious knowing that gives life to mental superpositions (overlays). *Atman* is the continuous consciousness within which all cognition occurs, and it remains unaltered and unmodified just as a wall remains unaltered by shadows falling upon it.

The set of objects being born, growing and dying in conjunction with the evolution they are subject to, are the sums of details which they themselves produce. It is Consciousness as an unalterable ambit which gives life and meaning to creation, just as in dreams the dreamer's consciousness gives life to the dream figures, and to all other creations which

momentarily develop there. The *Atman* might seem to be active creating the universe, yet the dynamism that brings about the game of *maya* is produced by the simple activity of *karma*, and induces the mind to prefer, through the force of habit, a type of association of information that composes specific cognitive units.

Sloka 19

"The dense body, senses and** budhi **occupy themselves with their respective activities, with** Atman's **inherent Consciousness as support just as men work with the support of the light inherent in the sun".

In nature every system fulfils its commitment, carries out its work. Seasons follow each other as always, and a gravitational field functions within precise rules. Rain, wind and sun dutifully comply with their daily task, moment by moment, with ample generosity. Their activity can be predicted, and the laws which regulate such activity are universal. Everything walks the path of universality, with the exception of human beings. Human beings as psychological structures are endowed with the ability to identify themselves[31] with what they think, and as they are not clearly aware whether they react to the present or not, their appreciation of what is right and that which is real becomes truly relative.

The egoic faculty which in the *vedanta* is known as *ahamkara* is extremely tamasic in nature. In the combination of the subtle elements that make up the *antakarana*, the tamasic fractions impregnate everything that is thought with a sheen or patina of identification or authorship. Human beings, in general, find themselves in this situation at this time; their minds tend towards the deep-rooted egoism which generates

31 Due to the *ahamkara* faculty that stems from the mind, *antakarana.*

the tamasic ingredients of which their mind is composed. The material constitution of the *antakarana* establishes functions and characteristics that endow each individual with his or her peculiarities; each mind is like a unique and personal fingerprint.

The dense body has the facility to interact with systems constructed with a similar material make-up. It acts in a natural manner, healthily or unhealthily, depending on the variety of food, exercise, and so on, plus the balance of the system of whoever is in psychological control of it. Physical bodies self-regulate most of the time, if given the chance; otherwise, they resort to medicines, massages and dozens of other therapies that allow them to maintain their balance.

The same thing goes for the senses: their activity and responses are developed according to their material structure. Senses do not get tired of doing their job, or deny their own nature. They are always ready to be of service as intermediates for the information that circulates through them. Any kind of deficiency is usually genetic or brought about by excess or defects in their management, never as a result of their own will. Human beings' minds are full of confusion depending on their level of egoism. This makes them see things as subverted and contrary, leading their body and senses to develop excesses or defects that do not form part of their nature.

Human beings, on the other hand, have a wonderful tool with which to be able to know themselves: the capacity of *understanding* established in the *budhi* aspect of their mind.

We naturally possess the gift of attention. Attention is the faculty which directs consciousness and allows for establishing knowledge. That to which attention is paid is known, that to which attention is not paid is not known. Thanks to attention, which is the dynamic aspect of consciousness, we can make judgements and be aware of

our surroundings; owing to attention we know and learn. This capacity of attention is natural, it flows from the mind and traps ideal or material objects giving them a sense of existence and reality. Thanks to attention we are conscious of ourselves and the world around us. Reality is revealed in its true magnificence thanks to Knowledge and Love. Whoever is trained in the unselfish activity of Knowing and Loving achieves the awareness that all things form part of a web that interacts beyond time and space. The great problem with perception is egoism, in the sense that we experience things as numerous, and diverse, differing among themselves. Egoism superimposes our personal reality over natural reality, making us see things from a relative and erroneous point of view.

Consciousness is not a fractional or differentiable activity, since it is a continuum, similar to space in having no parts to its nature. One only has to place one's sustained attention upon any given event which happens in the continuing present for it to spontaneously reveal the many differing symmetries in its nature; that is, it is experienced as itself and as its complements simultaneously. This is the most loving and intelligent form of perception. It allows us to see everything within everything else; it is awareness that the knower of all is non-different from all that is known.

Let us take an analogy: a doll made of salt, when thrown into the sea, dissolves and is uniformly distributed throughout the water; similarly, the different modes of individual consciousness that emerge in different fields of perception finally end up in non-dual Consciousness, which is their essential substratum, and this happens simply by sustaining total attention on *any* given event that is there in the *present*.

This is the function we have termed *budhi* in which, as the support, recipient or reflection of Consciousness, induces the emergence of individual consciousness. The

latter is the activity that confers momentary and sequential comprehension associated with the instants in which the fluctuation of mental matter comes to a halt – which in turn happens when there is a coincidence between what is being perceived and what is stored in one´s memory. While *manas* persists, one is in what we call a "state of doubt", and within this state no understanding can be generated.

The presence of conscious activity, *budhi*, that occurs at the moment in which *manas* is stilled, inhibiting *ahamkara*, is explained by the high concentration of *rajas* operating in *manas*. It is precisely these rajasic and tamasic elements that have the power to prevent our seeing even briefly the full reflection of Consciousness when they form an integral part of *antakarana*. Only the *budhi*, through being able to introduce the satvic quality into the system, is fit to contain and reflect the inherent power of Consciousness, in the form of comprehension.

Sloka 20

***"Some, because they lack** viveka **in their powers of discrimination, superimpose on the pure** Atman**, the Absolute Existence and Knowledge, all the varied functions of the dense body and the senses, just as common people attribute the characteristics of blueness and concavity to the sky"**.*

The budhic function may help people to be intelligent, rational, sensible; it may even enable them to elaborate a highly constructive body of ideas, yet it may lack the metaphysical comprehension that is required to determine that which is Real and what is illusory. *Viveka*, as metaphysical discernment, is *budhi's* superior aspect and is exclusively aimed at determining what is Real.

An individual can have *viveka* without necessarily having an especially intense budhic capacity. It is also possible to be

aware of the world and yourself, along with being capable of profound intellectual comprehension, yet still be unaware of higher realities. Most people who use their intellectual capability and obtain comprehension in the fields of mathematics or physics believe they are reaching a superior level of life and thought; however, their minds are still prey to sadness, dispair and error from not knowing or understanding what the underlying Reality beyond the mind, truly is. The pathology of egoism hovers over the mind of human beings so naturally that the world has become a reflection of them and their state. God surely has better characteristics than their own poor personal condition, given that they think the universe is a reflection of the type of personal nature that the mind adopts when the divine is thought of.

Viveka can arise in any individual. It is a representative bias which allows one to see the divine as something natural. It entails experiencing the world and recognising it as a marvellous dream. There are those who know that things are something that their mind can't quite grasp; very often, desperate to know the essence of that which is Real, they suffer isolation because they think differently from others. Trapped in a search which probably has no dialectic logic, very few manage to awaken the mental ability to withdraw and become metaphysically aware in a direct manner. When this does happen, when the road to divinity becomes clear thanks to the superior comprehension that the seeker now has, the seeker becomes an immense unfolding that only silence can contain. Discernment, in the form of *viveka,* confirms that Consciousness is not just a rhetorical theory: its murmur spreads through and through, giving a meaning to life and death.

When one seeks to express the order of metaphysical reality with the budhic faculty rather than the mind's *viveka* aspect, the descriptions of what is real are empty and

mistaken. The theories that *budhi* can conjure up can be as absurd as it would be to find meaningful questions such as how many angels can fit on the point of a needle. In this way, Reality is covered by a pall of stupidity and becomes false, and that which is essential becomes something fleeting, ephemeral; leading the heart of the ignorant to believe that their faith is the path to establishing truths that will satisfy their thirst for the divine.

The lack of metaphysical discernment, *viveka*, superimposes human qualities over Reality, causing the divine to be viewed with characteristics and attitudes which it does not possess. One of the major inconveniences of mistaken metaphysical discernment is taking God to be an isolated entity. Religion might preach God's omnipresence, but does not teach the faithful that they themselves possess the divine within them. They might be told they are sinners, yet their essential nature always remains free, with no need of any intermediary between them and their freedom.

Sloka 21

"Thus, as in trembling waters the moon's reflection seems to move, in the same way, owing to the lack of discernment, *viveka*, ***the agency of action, enjoyment and other limitations that only belong to the mind are delusively superimposed over*** *Atman*".

The fact is, it is very difficult to overcome the illusion of duality, just as it is hard to realise, when asleep, the very non-existence of the dream and assert that trees, people, the sky, thoughts and lives, not to mention every individual that make up this dream-state moment, are illusion.

Human minds find it practically impossible to perceive an object within their sensory range, and *simultaneously* detect the complement – that is, any other event that maybe

happening in any other part. All objects seem to be truly individual, and the subject certainly seems to be an entity independent from everything else. Our cognition is so basic we do not come close to being aware of the web that simultaneously embraces and integrates all things that exist. We know how to see ourselves like raindrops falling one by one, but we do not know how to see ourselves as the sea that contains all of them, the drop maintaining its identity, yet not its boundaries. Our mind encompasses us within conceptual boundaries, turning thoughts of *names* and *forms* into bricks that build the prison of dual perception.

Sometimes, however, the *intuitive* feature of perception offers a new and direct comprehension of reality. This intuitive faculty connects us with knowledge that involves a different way of comprehension. We do not know how intuition works, as our sequential mind prefers the presence of exclusively dialectic and sequential mechanisms. Yet once aware of intuition no one can deny its powerful knowledge. How does this knowing work, when in a split second it can gather unto itself total valid comprehension? There are different forms of understanding that the mind still has not succeeded in developing; intuition is one of them, and only recently has its nature been investigated. In a similar fashion, non-dual perception is another facet of cognition unfortunately little known to human beings.

Non-dual perception arises when the mind's *ahamkara* activity in cognition is extinguished. When the *antakarana* is capable of reflecting the conscious influx, like a mirror when it has had all dust removed reflects the full image there before it, we witness the true magnitude of the nature of the object being known. Objects acquire a relationship with all others, just as an object acquires an association with its past and the past of all other objects. Likewise, in non-dual perception there is the experience of the *present containing* the past and

the future, and the experience of the continuous perception in the present relates all things, just as the gravitational field relates distant masses.

The limitation of perception that the *sloka* speaks of refers to the witnessing of objects as different one from another. "Different" does not mean diversification in space and time. "Limitation", and as such difference, refers to a cognitive condition in which those who are doing the knowing are experienced to be different from what is known. Non-duality does not stop a cow from being one or mean that the grass it eats would vanish. Non-duality entails the mind being capable of embracing perception without limiting it to a person who knows. Thus, from this new perception of knowing, Consciousness assumes continuity, and thus it is Consciousness which knows and, simultaneously, is what is known.

The absence of *ahamkara,* the sense of I-ness, *transfers to Consciousness itself* the active nature of cognition. It is not the *I* that knows, it has always been Consciousness which knows. When the *I* is taken on as the active agent of knowing, it mentally casts a superimposition over Consciousness, just as when a coil of rope is taken for a snake. Thus, personal consciousness mistakenly is induced to believe what it is knowing; just as in a dream, the characters in the dream believe they are conscious of their own individuality.

The presence of *ahamkara* in the mind imbues perception with the sense of identification of the actor with the action, just as salt confers saltiness on the water it dissolves in. Readers should note that they could at certain moments be reading this book and not detect what they are doing. There are moments when the sense of authorship of the mental or physical action being carried out disappears, and yet the action for all that does not fail to be carried out nor the activity to be understood. And in the same manner, the consciousness naturally placed in the present, is capable of being the active

agent without there being the intervention of the *I*-presence. When this happens, when the presence of the *I* disappears from cognition, there emerge new forms of interrelation between the knower and the known, that is to say one of three new possible types of cognition: Observation, Concentration and Meditation.

Sloka 22

"Attachment, desire, pleasure, pain, etc., are perceived to exist so long as the budhic function of the mind endures. They are not perceived in deep sleep when the mind ceases to exist. Therefore these differentiated functions belong to the mind alone and not to the *Atman"***.**

The varying kinds of behaviour of each person can be seen to depend on the quality and quantity of each of the constituents of the *antakarana.* The mind is a kaleidoscope of information which, depending on how this patterns, determines reactions and tendencies.

An excess of quality and quantity of *budhi*, intellect, leads to a kind of thoughtful, yet deep person, with an overall sense of unity and respect for others. A person of stable intellect shows skill in taking decisions; such a person can face up to any setback and work out a proper response. There is obviously an infinite gradation of qualities in a mind with a predominance of *budhi*, but it is clear that whoever possesses such is enabled to take decisions. Also *budhi* can develop a specific aspect, as a reaction to whatever befalls that person during their life. Such a person would be conceptually skilled in the area of knowledge in question and it would be clear to them how pros and cons should be weighed up for progress to be made. On the other hand, a *budhi* can also consider their own belief to be the only one that is valid and to seek a manipulated response from everyone else. An active *budhi*

means an intelligent mind, with a capacity for logic and lineal reasoning. However, none of this is valid in itself without a background of awareness of what is Real, wherein *viveka* shows itself to be the ground and foundation of personality.

An excess of the mind's manasic element in quality and quantity, on the other hand, favours restlessness and doubt. It makes people highly emotional and suspicious when a psychological reaction of feeling or passion is called for. It takes people from feeling the height of well-being to the depths of sorrow. Manasic activity induces a profound bias toward changeability in one's inner world, favouring differing reactions to similar circumstances. *Manas* leads to excessive feeling, revelling in affective circumstances whether they are constructive or not, depending on other components in the *antakarana*. *Manas* manifests as constant thought, being flooded by memories, thinking uncontrollably in directions that make little sense. *Manas* is also thinking and talking purely for the sake of it, suffering without a visible cause. It is loving with a warm impulse to protect what one loves out of attachment.

An excess of *ahamkara* in the mind produces a deep sense of egoism or selfishness. It makes one think one is the centre of creation and that all reality is subject to one´s own exclusive opinion. *Ahamkara* changes what is right into what is wrong and makes any activity justified for the sake of one´s own ends. It makes personal gain more attractive than the collective good and transforms action into manipulation. A stable *ahamkara* may also lead to self-sacrifice and subordination, or may alter personal behaviour, making it take a more natural not to say innocent turn. The range in possibilities of *ahamkara's* faculties varies depending on the nature of *tamas* and the other *gunas* in its constitution, producing an immense range of gradations of all types, invariably associated with control and with being the agent of the action.

Chitta is the mind's essential constituent, it is mental matter, memory. Accompanied by *ahamkara,* its presence creates the unconscious as well as the long-term memory. In association with *budhi* it allows one to determine the pros and cons of perception, inducing a sense of synthesis to knowledge. Associated with *manas* it leads to the nightmare of uncontrolled thought and feeling for no reason. *Chitta* is the primordial matter that, depending on the other functions, favours specific answers and habitual behaviour. *Chitta* creates the sense of habit and elicits answers in the form of social and genetic conditioning. *Chitta* creates automatic reactions and foreseeable responses in day-to-day behaviour. *Chitta* creates habits, dependencies, social and personal convictions and all kinds of psychological conditioning.

None of these reactions affect Consciousness. Consciousness is an activity that supports the mind as space supports volume. The extreme subtlety of consciousness prevents it being modified by the objects that are being known (perceived, etc.). Consciousness resembles the sun whose rays warm both rich and poor, good and bad, the halt and the healthy. Consciousness does not possess the ethical spin that *ahamkara* confers on one´s mental processes, nor does it resemble any object known in *budhi*. Consciousness is the power of Knowing, of Being and of Loving, which gives sustenance without end to all that exists.

Atman is non-dual Consciousness and is not affected by anything that happens in the mind. *Atman* is in all that exists yet nothing that exists contains *Atman*. Notice how glass is unaffected by colours streaming through it, or how a dream-figure dying in one´s dream does not change the dreamer. *Atman* is tenuous like space, and like space, it is not modified by the volumes it contains.

Sloka 23

"Just as luminosity is the nature of the sun, coolness is that of water and heat that of fire, so too the nature of the* Atman *is Eternity, Purity, Reality, Consciousness and Bliss".

There is a rare difficulty in seeking to define the *Atman's* nature, since our minds try to focus its image on some previously known event. We usually use words that indicate an unusual characteristic beyond all limits, and may attempt to define this as absolute, eternal and infinite. However, such qualifications simply express a kind of immeasurable abstraction, something which we neither understand nor have had any direct experience of.

In itself, the experience of *Atman* is unfathomable. Neither language nor reason are capable of fabricating a means to explain its essential nature. It is like trying to understand something that is said to us in an impenetrable foreign language. We are used to remembering things, not experiencing the living condition of continuous contemplation of events. The mind is nowadays prepared for registering information, assuming momentary comprehension and again processing information. Thus, taking no rest, the *antakarana* resembles a vast stormy ocean in which the waves, like thoughts, come and go, driven by the violence of necessity, egoism and wilfulness.

When seeking to show a child a star tucked away in a far away corner of the celestial dome, we may firstly locate a more brilliant star to get visually situated; in the same way, all attributes with the intention of defining *Atman* are just simple intellectual descriptions that shed no light on its true nature; they are like photographs of food that have no aroma or the texture to really feed the body. The experience of *Atman* is unique, its total experience can remain registered in the mind, yet it is impossible to the right language that comes even close to explaining its essential nature.

I invite readers to imagine seeing a landscape in which all the details of its composition are simultaneously observed. I mean detect every last one of its constituents all together at the same time and not one by one sequentially. Imagine that the countless features of this landscape could all be seen in the same instant. Being able to describe the shades of green of the luxuriant foliage while at the same instant experiencing the flowers swaying in the wind. Along with all this, take in the scents in the air and the murmur of water while it trickles through the rocks and stones on its course. Imagine seeing all the countless details of the composition simultaneously, and wander through a universe within which space and time no longer possess the same importance as before. You would become aware that you are now not in any particular location but rather spread all about and into every single detail of perception. Such an experience is known as Concentration.

Now imagine something even more intense and more profoundly strange. Observe the landscape with the awareness of each and every detail and, at the same time, become aware of what is behind, in front, at the side, above, below, in all directions. Imagine your vision being able to take in three hundred and sixty degrees all around, and with no limit to your perception. All the other senses in turn are expanding in the same way and simultaneously merge with every detail that could be touched, heard, tasted or smelled. Just imagine the madness that being conscious of everything everywhere would entail. But let us go even further; as well as observing the ubiquity of each place, imagine you are able to be aware of everything that has happened and will happen. A universe in which time and space become a continuum and within which the perceiver merges with every existing instant and place. Readers should know that when this happens, and it will happen to you in this life or another one, you will feel entrapped by Bliss, made of limitless Love, feeling this to be all that exists. You will become aware that

the universe is boundless and has always existed with no change, although change is everywhere. You will be witness to life in everything, no matter what region of the universe it stems from; there, Consciousness is recognised as existing in harmony with all other things; then one will know what it is to experience Meditation.

Hence, this is the only way one can recognise that what is Real is an unfathomable ocean of Bliss, Consciousness and Existence without limits that contains all attributes and that, nevertheless, is neutral, motionless and yet in movement.

Sloka 24

"The notion of "I know" is produced by the *antakarana's* ***indiscriminate blending of two aspects of the*** *Atman:* ***Existence and Consciousness".***

The essential nature of Consciousness is Self-knowledge. Knowing something is establishing the existence of what is known. When we are knowing, we endow what is perceived with existence. Imagine you are walking in the countryside at night; a short distance away you see a person standing there; when you get closer, to discover what kind of person this is, you suddenly realise that it is just a wooden post, so you were previously wrong, mistakenly supposing the existence of such a person.

Initially, false perception leads us to imagine there was a person there, and then it is confirmed that it was a wooden post which looked like an individual. So was the initial perception real? Obviously, at first sight it seemed to be, yet later we saw it was not. Are there milieux in which perception is absolute? That is, are there events that every human being knows and which ultimately are identical for everyone? Physics sets out to determine, for instance, whether space is absolute; that is, whether space can be seen to be identical regardless of the

observer's point of reference. The answer is no, space is not absolute; depending on the observer's system of reference, it can be measured to have one result or another. Once aware of the relativity of space, physicists questioned whether time was absolute, that is, whether clocks will tell the same time without taking into account the system of reference in which the passing of time is measured. The final answer was no, time is also relative; depending on the inertial system of reference that is chosen a clock can indicate one or another time. So we ask the same regarding cognition. Is there a perceptual system in which perception would be the same for each and every perceiver? The answer is no. All perception involves a sense of the existence of what is known, that is, we know what we know, yet the final understanding that we have of the object may vary.

To give an example, let us say there is a group of people whom we ask to observe the traffic in a busy street. After a few minutes we might ask one of them about the size of the building across the street, and find surprisingly that they hadn't even noticed it was there! We could ask someone else if they had seen the white limousine go past, and again be surprised to find that they had not, for they had been paying attention to something else. In this way, attention (the dynamic aspect of consciousness) determines a field of action, and when attention is placed there it triggers comprehension, knowledge. Attention is like the lamp on a miner's helmet whose beam of light shines wherever the miner's head turns. The beam of light determines zones of cognition while leaving others in darkness. Attention, when placed upon an area, determines the existence of the objects perceived there.

The question now is: is the perception of all those who were watching the street real? To answer this we could state that each of them breathed reality into the events they

had paid attention to, yet we could also confirm that not all of them had given their attention to the same things. Consciousness endows a sense of existence to the things that we know (observe) but seeking to get a glimpse of Absolute Reality by means of a cognitive mechanism that selects details when knowing is, clearly, impossible. That is why philosophy can neither verify nor determine the nature of the Real, since there is no way of knowing whether it is Real for all observers. While what the mind uses is the dialectic mechanism of comparison leading to synthesis, it remains impossible to find the sense of what is Real; the Real is reduced to a mere intellectual abstraction.

In contrast, we can state that there is a personal ambit in which what is known takes on a personal form of reality. Yet seeking to determine the presence of Reality through dialectic judgement is pure fancy. Hence, is that which is Real elusive, impossible to grasp? From the dialectic point of view, the way in which cognition is currently looked upon – yes, it *is* frankly impossible to attain a perception of Reality. We would necessarily have to reconsider the definitions of what knowledge and Reality are.

The *vedanta* solves these fundamental questions in a different way, and establishes that what is Real is a form of cognition in which the perceiver establishes a group of simultaneous perceptions with regard to a system that is known, and its complement. However, perception of this calibre is only achieved where there is no trace of the individual sense in the mind; that is, while there is no sense of *ahamkara*, I-ness. Owing to the fact that the *I* spontaneously selects parts of the field to be known and establishes which events are detected through volitional criteria and which not, the *I* then becomes a fragmenting and relativising activity of cognition.

In view of the above, there is a personal reality insofar as the mind feels the sense of *I-ness*, and another Reality

that is reinforced to the extent that the perceiver *is not* different from the objects that are known. This latter mode of cognition is known as "non-duality". The dissolving of the *I* does not lead to the non-existence of objects but rather to their non-differentiated integration. Objects maintain their identity yet they lose the boundaries marking them as distinct from the knower. This resembles a previous example in which raindrops while falling are seen to be different from each other. On falling into a lake, each and every one of them maintains their identity yet all lose their boundaries that differentiate them from each other; thus, in this manner, non-dual cognition establishes a level of reality in which, no matter what system of reference is employed, the object always remains *the same along with its cognitive complement*, since everything is everywhere and in all things.

Because of this *Sankara* states that in any judgement where the presence of *I* is established, as in "I know" or "I exist", there is a level of relativity in which the *Atman* is present in the form of consciousness, yet none of these contents, objects, whatever they may be, will show forth the essence of their nature.

Sloka 25

"The non-dual** Atman **never experiences any change, neither is** budhi **endowed with Consciousness. However, the ignorant man thinks the** Atman **is identical to** budhi**, and as such falls prey to the illusion of considering himself the one who sees and the one who knows".

Every perceived object is a superimposition of characteristics previously established in the memory. Observing a big cat entails mentally supposing concepts of speed, ferocity, big, sharp teeth, roaring, claws, yellow skin, whiskers, agility and danger among others. The mind puts together an identity by taking previously established details

and merging them through a generic *name* and *form*, which encompasses all their characteristics. Hence, every *name* and *form* is a superimposition of countless characteristics. Obviously, this superimposition cannot be infinite, since if it were, we would be able to contemplate objects along with all their complements. The *ahamkara's* presence in the mind restricts the amount of *names* and *forms* which make up a unit that, in turn, would have its own *name* and *form*.

People go through their lives building cognitive units based on previous fractions. Nevertheless each prior fraction, in turn, is also a cognitive unit with its own respective *name* and *form*. From childhood onwards, the level of complexity of perception rises, going from simple mental constructions that involve concepts such as below, behind, hand, eye, to other more complex ones, which lead to the understanding of love, energy, death and a myriad of others. In the end, our mind has a database filled with cognitive events in the form of memories, rich in details, which we resume under their own particular *name* and *form*. As years go by we take it for granted that the image of a lion we have constructed in our memory possesses all the attributes which define it clearly. Later on, when one day we watch a film about the jungle, we easily recognise that the image of a lion in the film coincides with the one we have in our memory; then we understand that what we are looking at is a lion and we rightly know that this feline is the king of the jungle. The same happens with everything that is heard, felt, smelled and tasted.

We get used to taking for granted that the image observed, in this case a lion, has a conceptual unit which is accompanied by its own identity. We attribute this superposition (overlay) of events with a seal of reality, just as the sum of paints, colours, frame and canvas we call a "painting"

We turn the superposition into content with its own seal of reality for the simple reason of our being conscious of it.

We "know" the painting, and endow this perception with existence. But we also erroneously attribute reality to this existence. Thus, the final superposition of the painting or lion is seen as being a real event.

Hearing a lion roar or seeing a painting, involves or implies giving reality to what we consciously pay attention to. Taking it that the perception is *real* for the simple reason of being conscious of it, of hearing it, touching it or seeing it, is a mistake. In the end, the understanding of the event springs from the comparison of the object with the familiar image stored in one's memory; this image is a superposition of characteristics, the same as a saint on a stamp is the sum of ink, paper and worship.

Any mental creation is a *unified sum* of attributes. Being conscious of this sum of attributes leads to according a level of *existence* to what is perceived. *Becoming aware* of the existence of an event implies taking for granted the known object's level of *reality*. Yet one should understand that this reality is only the recreation of a jigsaw puzzle whose parts are seen as pieced together and existing. *Atman* is the Consciousness that sustains the absorption of the information being known, in which the presence of the *I* operates, just as space holds volumes and their colours without being altered by them. *Atman* is Consciousness, as it endows reality and existence to perception.

What *Sankara* proposes in this *sloka* is that in the process of conscious interrelationship, in which *Atman* is the basis, a superposition of information is produced, which generates a sense of identification of what is known with who knows it. This is the most primal, everyday, embedded and determining superposition in the human being's perceptive operativeness, and also the most difficult to remove; in fact, it only vanishes in the final leap to the state of Meditation.

Sloka 26

"When one confuses the** Atman **with the individual, it is like taking a rope for a snake, and one experiences fear; when "It" realises it is not the individual but rather the** Supreme Atman **then fear is not experienced".

The most intractable problem that habitually occurs in the mind is that of *identification*, which is understood as the fact of seeing oneself existing independently from others, that is, "being" and "knowing oneself to be" an individual. In dreams, the characters we dream of are subject to the same problem: they identify themselves with themselves and they believe they exist independently from all the other oneiric creation. Once a dream is in progress, the objects that make up that reality seem to exist on their own, along with the dreamer who perceives them. How can you convince characters in a dream that they do not exist, that they are just an extension of the dreamer, one who happens to be their creator? How would you convince them that the universe that unfolds right before their senses is just in the mind of the dreamer who is fast asleep in a bed somewhere?

Something similar to this happens when we are awake. We take it for granted that we exist independently from the rest of humanity; we imagine that we are created in the likeness and image of God, and that God lives in a place known as "heaven". We take our individuality for granted and we even deny the possibility of there being any other world different from ours and the sum of all its constituent parts. It is really difficult to be aware that our own individuality occurs when we remember ourselves, never when we comprehend. The present, as a temporal event in which comprehension manifests, lacks personal appropriation – identifying the perceptions and memories as

ours. We remember that we know; yet there is not one who knows, there is only knowledge.

Readers will recall *The Matrix,* a well-known science-fiction picture which came out a few years ago. The plot was set in two worlds. One was virtual, a product of programmes that induced people asleep in hives to think that the virtual world they believed they lived, grew up and died, was real. The other world was one where the people had finally woken up and were desperately seeking to prevent the Matrix (the programme that projected the virtual world and had all minds in its thrall) from operating. Readers will probably remember the story and the general atmosphere of the film. Think back to the difficulty the leading role had in believing the world he had always known was just a projection happening in his mind. Something similar is described in the outline of mental identification proposed by *Sankara*.

The *vedanta* assumes that perception, whatever that may be, is a superposition of information stored in the memory through the generic mechanism of *name* and *form*. These superpositions of information can be interpreted as electromagnetic processes and biochemical messages that begin in the brain and flow through the nervous system. In fact, all this can be summed up information that runs from the senses to the brain and is catalogued in accordance with its canons and cognitive priorities. The brain manages and processes information. In point of fact, there is not much difference between the Matrix and our own daily lives. Remembering and recognising are the same for the brain; the areas of the brain that house both activities are identical. Taking for granted that what is observed or remembered has its own identity comes very naturally. Our identification with our acts, with our memories, with our mind and body is so natural that we assume there is no other way.

Waking up and becoming aware that everything is in everything else, that objects seem to be real but are just mental constructions made up of information, is possible but somewhat improbable. Just as waking up from Matrix, and seeing that everything is in all other things and each thing is everything else, entails a level of discernment, *viveka*, seldom found in human beings. *Viveka* springs into being from constantly placing our attention on the present, from reacting over and over again on a daily basis exclusively to events that *are happening now*. When the mind is fixed in the *present*, and reacts exclusively to the reality happening there, we gradually awaken to a kind of metaphysical comprehension that allows us to discern that which is Real and that which is illusion.

Sloka 27

"*Atman* ***illumines the reality of the mind and the sense organs, etc. just as a lamp illumines a jar or a pot, but these material-objects,*** *upadhis*, ***by themselves cannot illumine their own Self".***

Consciousness is self-illuminating, that is, it has no prior condition needed to produce knowledge. Knowledge that produces comprehension has no cause in anything different from itself. Any event which is known through consciousness is born, grows and dies, that is, it is impregnated with change – all that is, except consciousness itself, since it does not decrease or vary to any degree, nor does it multiply or divide. Consciousness is a continuum that flows without any causality whatsoever. No one teaches us how to know, or how to understand. We are comprehension and knowing, we know without there being an initial reason that generates it.

Vedanta scholars use a pedagogical example, mentioned often throughout this book, which is aimed at helping us understand the actual nature of consciousness: space or

ether. Space flows here, there and everywhere without having higher density in one place or another; it does not fragment or split, regardless of the volume it bears, nor does it alter with any movement of any object, nor transform into anything else. Space, enabled by its utterly subtle nature, penetrates through any content and serves as a basis for its volume to be manifested. Space is a strange phenomenon without any apparent cause in any element other than in itself. This is why it is taken as a metaphor for consciousness, whose essential nature is without cause, without change, the producer of knowledge and in association with the mental organ or *antakarana*, the producer of comprehension.

Consciousness, as intelligent force, as an element that flows continuously, with no parts, and which in its most essential manner of knowing does not differentiate the knower from that which is known, is called the *Atman*. *Atman* entails the conscious force nested in human beings whose essence produces the act of comprehension. This force does not operate as normal forces do; the Consciousness of *Atman* is an impulse contained in all things in the form of Being and Existence. The force of Being, of Knowing and the Interrelationship between each event, is produced by *Atman*, an activity with neither parts nor causality, of which the material and ideal universes are but its substance.

The Consciousness of *Atman* interpenetrates everything, just as space interpenetrates air, wind, shapes and volumes. Regarding the human being's mind, *budhi*, the intellect, succeeds in capturing part of its essentiality through the satvic combination of the *tanmatras* of which it is composed, and emits a faint gleam of knowledge in the form of *individual consciousness*. It resembles the fuzzy reflection we see of ourselves when we look into a partly steamed-up mirror. As mental constituents succeed in adopting a more adequate state, individual consciousness takes on a higher level of clarity until, eventually, the mirror reflects the totality of

original colours and forms. If we were to ask ourselves where God could be found within us, we could respond by saying, in the essential nature of comprehension generated by the conscious act, in the expression of love and in the force of the very act of existing.

Yet one should not confuse *Atman* with the mental activity of understanding *something*; this personal understanding is akin to that of one who sees a snake on spying a coiled rope. *Atman's* real activity, in the form of consciousness, happens when, on observing any object, we comprehend that its nature is linked to the very characteristics it is composed of and simultaneously to its complementary field, that is, the remaining universe. Such comprehension is Real indeed since it takes on the essential nature of cognition in its true magnificence. Because of this, nothing that the mind, involved with an *I*, might know as part of perception, can offer the immense gift of attaining the comprehension of that which is Real. No *upadhi*, system, field or event has in itself the force of that which is Real, since such a force abides in the realisation that *everything is in all things*, and that there is no independent fraction apart from the "whole without parts", as proclaimed by non-dual cognition.

Sloka 28

"Just as a lighted lamp does not need another lamp to illumine its light, so too, Atman which is Knowledge in Itself needs no other Knowledge to know its Self".

The analysis of consciousness continues. For human beings, it is easier to assume a human God than to recognise a continuum of consciousness with no form as the essence of creation. It is easier for humanity to endow its divinities with human characteristics, as the Greeks did with their gods, or to attribute particular virtues to their saints as Christians

do, than to suppose the act of knowing as a continuum without beginning. It is easier for beings to witness divinity as a benevolent entity gifted with goodness; they can pray to him, and believe he abides in heaven; he even has a human son who serves as an object of worship and faith. However, a divinity beyond all attributes, yet whose nature is capable of having them all, is brushed aside, as being illogical.

Our mind is still so juvenile, its disquisition and logic is so poor that it does not dare to think for itself and inquire into its own nature; it prefers to take the beliefs of others for granted and justify an ethical mode of life founded on the opinions of third parties. Human beings could investigate the mind's wonderful laboratory and come across laws that decipher cognition itself. Are teenagers shown that their thoughts are mere objects whose nature only seems to be real for the simple fact they identify themselves with them? Imagine if your sons and daughters had been taught at an early age that their thoughts did not have any intelligence of their own; that those thoughts seem real only because they, the sons and daughters, were identifying themselves with them – and moreover that it is possible to observe them until they can be seen to disappear. Just imagine the invaluable tool that adolescents would acquire if they were able to enter their mind and distance themselves from their mental contents until they finally vanished. Imagine what would become of fear and sadness when attention is anchored in the present and from there observes the mental events. Imagine a young person's astonishment upon realizing that the fear suffered in the form of thoughts and feelings had evaporated, and that that desperate feeling of oppression had been extinguished. Perhaps it might be easier to pray to a god to obtain such desired peace of mind; yet it would be more advantageous, surely, to delve into one´s mental world, with all its disorder, to clarify its processes. Things such as

reflection, awe, learning, novelty and amazement are the perfect tools to shape an awakening mind.

Thus, consciousness endows the gift of existence to all those things to which the dynamic activity of attention is paid. Although consciousness has no parts, no boundaries, and inborn knowledge, human beings, thanks to the *budhi* aspect of the *antakarana*, absorb part of the reflection of its infinite magic. Hence, gifted with individual consciousness, it endows knowledge to that which is thought, yet wrongly believes this to be real. In truth, what is experienced is real, but this form changes in the spatial-temporal framework in which it co-exists. In the end, what is perceived is transformed, moved and evolved without shedding any light on what its true nature really is. There is a form of cognition known as "non-duality", which on detecting objects, prevents the knower-known, subject-object, I-that disassociation. When this happens, if the atmosphere of perception is placed in the *present continuous*, information re-gathers, such that there is simultaneous identity between the part and the whole, in all parts and in the sum of all parts. This comprehension is *Atman* and its essence is the total knowledge of the Self.

Sloka 29

"By a process of negation of the** upadhis **through discernment,** viveka **and the help of the scriptural statement that says of** Brahman**: "It is not this, It is not this", the oneness of the individual soul,** jiva**, and the Supreme Self,** Atman **(as indicated by the great vedic aphorisms) is able to be realised".

The rational method *par excellence* that the *vedanta* employs in seeking to decipher the nature of *Atman* is known as *neti neti*, "It is not this", "It is not this". When *neti neti* is

applied to dual perception it prevents known objects gaining the sense of reality which they usually acquire.

It is important to point out that two levels of reality are established in perception; to give an example, remember the real version of the false snake and the true, real version of the rope that is not recognised. Both versions have their reality; nonetheless, both the snake and the rope can be experienced by the mind of the perceiver.

The *vedanta* establishes that the true Reality is the rope and the illusory one is the snake; nevertheless, the mind is capable of detecting one or the other and assert the existence of either. When the snake is experienced, the rope vanishes; when the rope is detected, one is aware that the snake does not exist.

Shifting the example of the rope and snake to a context closer to home, the snake can be said to stand for any known object that is experienced as different from the one who knows it and to the remaining material and ideal objects [Here and elsewhere in this volume, the verb know (conocer in the original) frequently refers to knowing as an act of perceiving, of forming a direct mental impression – translator's note]. The rope, in turn, represents that which is Real, that is to say, any object, which on knowing it, is experienced as such, while at the same time, there is awareness of the cognitive complement in the field, that is, the object *and all* other existing material and ideal objects. Experiencing that which is Real means the modification of the common canons of perception in which the subject is seen as different from the object; within this new kind of cognition Knowledge is acquired, owing to the Continuous, non-dual, Self-illuminating nature of Consciousness. Thus Consciousness itself takes on the role of knower and, in doing so, does not restrict its nature to one place, zone or fraction of the field, but rather extends it to the whole field itself, that is, what is known becomes

not different from the knower. *Neti neti* entails detecting and relating to any dual object as if it were the snake in our example, and intrinsically recognising that its nature is fleeting, changeable, momentary and illusory. No known object can establish the same conditions of perception as the moment it was known at a later instant.

It is not sufficient to deny a perceived object by applying *neti neti* (it is not this, it is not this), for the illusion of its dual cognitive nature to disappear; plainly something more is needed: discernment. *Viveka* is a superior mental faculty that makes intelligible that which is Real leading to the comprehension of Self Knowledge. Only a handful in an entire generation of inhabitants on this Earth attain this. Indeed, a whole generation might pass with no one attaining a glimpse of the Real, which only discernment, *viveka*, is able to provide.

The *vedanta* customarily sets down three necessary steps as needed to achieve such desired metaphysical discernment, *viveka.* These are: *srada*, *manana* and *nididhyasana*, that is, listening carefully to the teachings of a master with experience of that which is Real, later reflecting in detail upon the teachings, for however long it takes, whether it takes months or years, and finally inwardly comprehending the knowledge gathered from the teachings to be able to open the doors to its inherent truth.

Srada

This first step concerns access to the teachings of a qualified master, who has the inner experience of non-dual Reality. Only a master who truly knows the Self is capable of teaching the world his own comprehensions. The majority of would-be gurus confuse the orgasmic experience of divinity with the living and unlimited experience of *samadhi*.

The effective power of the masters' teachings resides not only in the ideas that they transmit, but also the discernitive awareness they, the masters, have acquired from their personal experience. The wholeness of knowledge is delivered in the teachings and succeeds in filling students assiduous for knowledge with awe.

Not only *gurus* and masters have achieved the experience of what is Real. Tradition also offers the deft hand of the *rishis*, sages knowledgeable in non-duality who lead a family life, accepting their students as an integral part of their family. There are also the *nagas*, masters in the art of knowing, of right knowledge, whose essential function is transmitting teachings without forming a living commitment to their students (as do *gurus* and *rishis)*.

Manana

Once heard, teachings should afterwards be reflected upon. The mind should work at giving the ideas order, sequence and priority to create a clear intellectual unity. Obviously, the lack of first-hand experience of non-duality will be a source of doubt for students. Nonetheless, the constant rationalisation of teachings slowly leads to a maturity in which mental order falls naturally into place.

The most common statements laid down in the *vedanta* to educate students' minds are the *mahavakyas* or great vedic aphorisms:

Tat vam asi, You are That.

Aham Brahâsmi, I am *Brahman*.

Aiam Âtmâ Brahman, This *Atman* is *Brahman*.

Pragnânam Brahman, *Brahman* is pure Consciousness.

These *mahavakyas* possess knowledge which goes far beyond the words used to express their ideas. Success in grasping and understanding the *mahavakyas* entails achievement of well-honed intuition that only comes about after analysis over a lenghty period. The occasional reading of aphorisms is not enough for them to reveal what they conceal. However, the presence of masters, their inner experience of discernment along with the relationship established between student and master, slowly cleanse the mind, leading it to exceptional comprehension at a metaphysical level.

Nididhyasana

When finally awakening to comprehension is brought about by *viveka*, one is reborn to this world. When at last what was taught by the masters of old has been understood, and all the books written by those personages who lived and taught the Reality of the Self have been understood, there will be a reclaiming of one´s inner Freedom. This is when *neti neti* comes into play by becoming the mechanism unmasking illusory reality.

When one´s mind is prepared to see the world in its true magnitude, then *neti neti* becomes a blatant truth immense as a mountain. Hence, students who have persevered in deep reflection upon their master's teachings reap the fruit of *viveka*. Years of such deep reflection upon fundamental teachings end up awakening the heart of those who live in search of Knowledge of the Self. Their minds can now easily be stilled to be able to experience inner worlds which they have never before been aware of. The direction to follow becomes clear, since vivid experience of non-duality leads one to the safe harbours of cognition of what is Real.

Disciples, with ordered minds, with the capacity to respond exclusively to the present, can witness the unfolding

of the complexity and simplicity in all things. Their individual identity, which in Sanskrit is known as *jiva*, or individual unit, that is to say, their mind, their *prana* and their physical body, are the living reflection of the final comprehension that their *antakarana* has acquired. Repeated access to *Samadhi*, to tens or hundreds of final experiences, allow them to recognise their oneness with the entire universe, in an ever clearer manner.

Sloka 30

"The physical body along with differentiated subtle elements recreated by** avidya**, primal ignorance, and** prakriti**, whose illusory nature is identical to differentiated objects, are as perishable as bubbles. You have to realise, through constant discernment,** viveka**, that you are the Immaculate** Brahman**, completely distinct from your differentiated wrappings".

The *vedanta* states that any dual event is in essence an illusory reality, unlike what is experienced from a non-dual standpoint. Non-duality is a form of interrelationship between object and subject that happens when the mind focuses firmly and fixedly on the *present*. Thus, perception associated with *what is happening* reorganises the mind by restraining its sense of *ahamkara*, *I*-ness, thus recreating a new relationship of information with the object being known.

Accordingly, the Vedanta states that none of the dense, subtle or causal constituents, seen from the dual standpoint, i.e. with the sense of differentiation of knower and known, are really *Brahman*. *Brahman* is identical to *Atman*, they are synonymous. *Brahman* is employed when we talk about the Real at a collective or cosmic level, whereas we say *Atman* when we are referring to the Real in an individual field.

The *vedanta* is a system that takes a meticulous approach to classifying and selecting its ideas. Words such as "ignorance", "illusion" or "identity" are used, depending on the context, mode and occasion. If the context and the opportunity it offers is not right, such words are better not spoken and will be misinterpreted, proving to be a great stumbling block for the student's understanding. Hence the translation of the books used for study should highlight the metaphysical ideas rather than rendering the literal meaning of the translation.

The basic error that we detect when we perceive the world inheres in realising the way everything changes, shifts, transforms; as the *Buddha* would say, what one knows is impermanent and, therefore, this becomes the human being's essential suffering. Dense elements tend to decay rapidly into their basic subtle material constituents. In the same way the subtle elements break down into the initial *prakriti* that constitutes the causal basis. Thus, *prakriti*, which is primal ignorance, is born and dies at the beginning and end of the universe. The whole universe is subject to change, except when it is experienced as non-dual; then change is assumed as information appended to what is being known, and forms a non-differentiated part of it.

It is only possible to turn dual perception into non-dual perception through *continuous experience of the present*. When mind and body are accustomed to reacting while fixed in the present a new form of comprehension is born beyond intuition, enabling one to *become aware* of that which is Real and that which is illusory, what *maya* is and what *Brahman* is. This cognitive faculty that considers the pros and cons of metaphysical Reality is known as *viveka*. It is because of this that the first quality students should have is discernment. Without the *viveka* quality the search for knowledge and control of the mind becomes arduous and desperate, leaving

students fatigued, seeing themselves as inept and unsuited to continuing with their seemingly impossible inner quest.

Dear reader just consider how you would be quite certain that the book which you have in your hands is made of paper, and that you are comfortably seated and that you turn the pages one by one; when *viveka* awakens, with the same facility you will be able to verify that the universe of *names* and *forms* is essentially illusory in nature. The awakening of *viveka* does not mean a qualitative leap to the development of some special power; it is simply the consequence of allowing the continuum of consciousness to take control of perception again and again in the *present*, without there being the least sign of *I*-ness or self-hood, *ahamkara*, in the mind.

When *viveka* is active, perception dislodges the sense of *I,* banishing it to a non-place. You will feel that this kind of cognition is odd, as we are invariably used to its realisation when having some kind of time or spatial reference in perception. Yet now, with *viveka* being established, to give you an idea, it is like losing your ego because you drank too much – or like when the *I* is suppressed during a heroic act, to avoid harm coming to a loved one, a situation in which we would risk our lives without thinking.

The mark of *viveka* is not stamped on your brow for all to see, nor does it mean relinquishing the things of everyday life nor does it mean finding arcane knowledge in a book. *Viveka* enables us to envisage a landscape and transport us to all the colours, forms and other information which make it up. With *viveka* installed in the mind, we are able to observe our own thoughts, to be conscious of their birth and death; we are able to experience the special joy in simply existing.

Viveka induces a serene mode of perception, with no reference to knower or known. *Viveka* instils the calm sensation of simply being and existing; it represents a state of well-being that induces a sense of vivid yet calm elation. Just imagine

how you might gaze at the starry night sky and how, when this is in process, become absorbed by it. Your gaze is not fixed upon any place in particular, yet you are aware of every visual detail there before you. Moreover, imagine that it is possible to be visually transported to each detail, within an order in which this happens spontaneously. This is being free, this is perceiving freely. Apart from this, *viveka* contains attributes even more complex than that of our example, allowing us to witness worlds and information beyond any boundaries our mind or senses had ever experienced hitherto.

Sloka 31

"That which I Really Am is free of mutations such as birth, senility and death, as what I Really Am is different from this body; what I Really Am is unattached from all the objects of my senses, such as sound and taste, as in My essence I lack sensory organs".

When discernment, metaphysical certainty, *viveka*, becomes established in students, the way in which they see the world changes. This new learning produces an understanding similar to those who in dreams become conscious that they are dreaming; then they see the world that unfolds to their senses as being a marvellous illusory game. While in the dream the dreamer observes many different realities, yet understands that none of them is really and truly stable, as once awake all of them will fade and die like soap bubbles.

It is impossible to witness the world as *Sankara* describes it in this *sloka* if *viveka* has not been developed beforehand. Intellectual inquiry is not enough to be able to comprehend the immensity of the universe as an illusion and the objects within it as unreal in themselves. The comprehension that springs up in the presence of *viveka* is living knowledge,

knowing beyond all doubt. Neither pain nor fear, desperation nor death are able to alter these interwoven metaphysical certainties. No matter what we do, think, or know, the reality of seeing the world as an immense web in which everything forms part of everything else, never changes. No matter in which direction sight, smell and all other senses are directed, perception is teeming with the integration of all objects in a non-differentiated network.

"That which I really Am", as *Sankara* puts it, is not the result of intellectual inquiry. Nor is it the logical conclusion one may come to after listening to the words of a master or reading a book in which the truth is allegedly written. It is a living certainty, whole, full of knowledge with no doubt. It is more than an intuition. It is like the sureness of a virtuoso playing a musical instrument, or that of an artist who sets to work with deft ability on their canvas. It resembles the mathematician's elation on finally writing, after years of research, a mathematical equation that appears to be universal. It is like the love of a mystic who surrenders to the beloved without the slightest fear of rejection.

More than anything discussed above, *viveka* expresses a similar comprehension of the Real, no matter what activity is undertaken or realised, no matter whether there is pain, loss or death of a loved one, no matter what time passes or distance separates. *Viveka* is a condition or state that brings with it a knowledge that never changes, no matter what happens. Such is the certainty of "knowing who I Am", that no kind of upset in life is any reason to lose the knowledge of the Self.

While experiencing *viveka,* when we observe our body, there is stored there a knowledge that is aware of its existence, yet the sensation of dependence upon it disappears. The body and senses lose their dominance in our living for them; instead they become like helpers used along the way, they

are respected for being our tools of action and of knowing, yet the importance the body and senses were accorded until now vanishes. They are like borrowed objects that one day will be returned and which should be taken care of while we use them. The changes that occur in the body and mind, its ageing and decrepitude are symptoms of inefficiency and illusion. Death is not to be seen as an enemy, but an old friend, whose task is to free us from the burden of our body's duality. When death arrives one looks it in the eye, one´s inner sight observes it intently as it draws near, and before it requests our life we surrender to it without the least fear. Travelling to the subtle worlds after death becomes a gentle journey in which the mind flows eagerly to make its final leap at the end of life's path while, with no worries, it observes a new and brilliant scene in the mind. Only those who have vanquished fear are capable of directing their discernment along such stable and firm lines of comprehension. They are those who live freely in the body and mind, and equally so without the body and mind.

Sloka 32

"That which I Really Am is free from attachment, sorrow, malice and fear, for what I Really Am is other than the mind. What Is lacks** prana **and mind, it is pure, it is higher than the high and is imperishable".

This *sloka* by *Sankara* is a far cry from the common Western notion of what a human being is. Our western religion treats us right from the start as sinners; the divine envoy cleanses us of our sins with the sacrifice of his own life. The only way we can become one with divinity is to blindly obey the commandments laid down as valid. My dear reader, try telling any ordinary person that you have beheld the divine presence, that your eyes have seen God in the torrent of infinity, that you have finally comprehended

that the essence of all existing things is Love and Knowledge. Just try telling anyone that your mind has had contact with God and been transported where that which is Absolute and Infinite pervades every instant. They will think you have a screw loose. It seems that human beings suffer such natural imperfection that they could never dream of aspiring to such an experience.

Even our saints here in the West were scorned and looked down upon because of their mystic raptures and outbursts; they were even tortured for claiming to having experiences which were politically unacceptable to the church of the time. However, how can one describe that which is Real at the moment when the rapture of perception goes far beyond any object and, at the same time, be able to recognise creation itself as a single surge, whose rise and fall are in every one of its constituents? When the *I* dissolves and the mind consciously diversifies throughout limitless space, then there emerges the profound integration of everything in everything else; hence, the explosion of love is indescribable and bliss becomes the stuff of life itself in every corner of the universe.

When the mind becomes accustomed to travelling the pathways of non-duality and forges a clear and solid path in the continuous perception of that which is Real, then psychological categories are modified, giving way to another way of seeing the world. Fear and doubt cease, as do all the states dominated by the agent's identification with action. Simplistic emotionality, a very frequent reaction in humankind, fades away like a dream upon awakening. The dozens of thoughts which continually and rudely interrupt consciousness come to a halt, leaving a calm inner nature. New forms of feeling and knowing arise; elation, happiness and bliss come onto the scene. The simple fact of being alive leaves a friendly seal upon life, predicated on grateful and spirited comprehension. Contemplation of the world carries

the mark of constant wonder. Loneliness becomes silent company and fear of suffering and death vanish from one´s psychological portfolio.

Our western upbringing leads many of us to see ourselves as sinners in search of redemption. This world seems to be an ordeal in which suffering is the most frequent ingredient. How sad it is to assume we are so insignificant, bent on seeking happiness which seems only to be secured by complying with heartless dogmas and rituals. The *vedanta*, like most Eastern metaphysical schools, not only claims that humanity is divine but offers each person the option of achieving their own freedom through inner work. No one is impeded from discovering themselves, just as no one requires the intervention of a third party to wake up from a dream.

Our essence is the unlimited force of knowledge that consciousness provides; our essence is the power of love which is integrated in all; our essence is the force of being which nourishes the entire universe. Nevertheless, these three characteristics are not just simple superimposed ideas that sound good and seem to open up a pleasant path to follow. The experience of undoing the sense of *I*, *ahamkara*, while mind and body react to the *continuous present*, catapults perceivers to a new expression of reality. Readers only have to realise such cognition persistently for the universe to be revealed in a manner which very few have seen and which will help one to understand and comprehend the highest sense of reality that can possibly exist.

We are obviously not only our memories nor are we just the life force which quickens our physical bodies. We are this along with everything else. We are the force which inspires universes to be born and die, we are eternity and death, being and not being. We are the compendium of all that exists and the sum of everything that will exist. We are the simplicity of the wind and the transparency of water. We are a little child's

laughter and the sleep which the night brings. We are the vigour of Consciousness which knows all as it knows Itself. The objects in the universe are like links in a chain, the chain being Consciousness which unites them all.

Sloka 33

"*Prana***, *the mind and all the sense organs, ether, air, fire, water and earth, were born of That which I Am, because That is the substance and sustenance of all differentiated things***".**

Many of *Sankara's* statements are impossible to prove within the common perception with which human beings go about their lives on a daily basis. Owing to the presence of *ahamkara*, *I*-ness, dual cognition impedes the integration of objects and their cognitive complements. Because of this, most of the time the *vedanta* would seem to playing with words that exalt human beings yet whose final goals might seem almost out of reach because of their level of abstraction. The *vedanta* has always been the redoubt of a type of cognitive elite that, having attained discernment, *viveka*, finally succeed in leaving the ocean of duality and resting in the peace of non-differentiated comprehension.

The difficulty in understanding metaphysical development, due to lack of discernment, *viveka*, has led many human collectives to seek refuge along moral lines as a way of approaching the experience of the divine. All sorts of dogmas and rituals become guidelines marking the path towards God. Action becomes the defining element of the inner search, rather than the act of *understanding without anyone doing the understanding*, as the fundamental tool to one´s own personal quest. Thus human beings, confused by moral turmoil, by the result of action and its apparent validity, become active practitioners of virtues for reasons they do not and never will understand. These virtues are

enthroned by the fallacious interpretations of those whose hearts are plagued with thirst for power and control over their fellows. In the end the blind lead the blind; each falls into the ditch thinking that their interpretation of truth is the right one, when it is only beneficial to those who developed it to control others.

When a free thinker is born and seeks to change the *status quo* of thinking that underpins morality and action that is practised for no real, apparent reason, they are hounded, mistreated or at least isolated to avoid any kind of knowledge, innovation, universality and brotherhood spreading out and becoming general.

Hence, for the past two thousand years in the West they have been playing at educating the hearts and minds of devotees, and have only managed to create a political and economic system with no religious depth. Only a few giants of devotion and surrender to God have succeeded, through mystic force, in envisioning divinity within themselves. These are the beams of light which guide us through the darkness, these are the only ones who have the right to be followed and whose teachings should be expounded. The experience of being witness to the divine is always similar. Let us be clear that the language of Knowledge and Love is universal. No matter which masters speak out of their experience, it will always be compatible with that of any other vision of God, anywhere and at any time.

In the end, we are what endures, what does not change, what reunites and integrates all things, the forces that arise of their own accord self-illuminating, which are: *Sat*, Absolute Existence, *Chit*, Absolute Consciousness and Love, and *Ananda*, Absolute Bliss. Thus, *Brahman* is *Satchitananda*, the triple enunciation of that which exists and always will exist for itself and by itself. This is the comprehension that comes to us when our minds are in the state of Meditation.

The state of Meditation is the only conscious experience which allows an understanding of the essential nature of Reality. It resembles the peak of a mountain, from which we can see in all directions. While we are still climbing and have not yet reached the top, the mountain creates its own shadow preventing us from seeing in all directions. In the state of Meditation consciousness initiates its process of integration of all events located beyond the mind and senses. One by one, the constitutive events of the cognitive complement in perception itself arise like a continuum of parts, which are experienced simultaneously. This conscious force, which has knowing as its essence, takes over the role of knowing agent for every instant of time. The force of comprehension penetrates where consciousness flows and integrates everything through its essential quality of knowing, generating a panorama of objects with no boundaries. This comprehension expands to the limits of creation, leading to all things being known. Only from the state of Meditation does it become possible to confirm that the entire universe is but the substance of Consciousness, and that Consciousness is that which simultaneously knows everything there is.

Sloka 34

"That Which I Really Am lacks attributes and action, it is eternal and ever pure, it is immaculate and free from desire, there is no change; because of this it truly has no form and causes Me to be free always".

All human beings at one time or another have asked themselves: who am I? Depending on the point when this is asked, the answer could be: an unattached student who studies, a young person in love, a hard worker who day after day struggles to earn a living for his family, an infirm person who only thinks of the past, and many more.

Most fundamental questions on existence do not have an answer. Thousands of thinkers and religious have delved into their minds and surrendered their lives with the aim of answering them, yet there exists no definitive legacy in this respect. Nevertheless, these questions never completely absent themselves; sometimes a painful experience will trigger them anew, or just the passing of time will make us realise that death is closing in and we are again impelled to think about what we are and what there is beyond our present lives.

When we seek to sort out these fundamental questions within ourselves we come up against our memory. We only know what we have previously experienced; in fact, many of our experiences have been lost over the years, our memories becoming a limited circle of the relatively recent. Time goes by, and what we know becomes as limited as the few certainties we soldier on with. Life comes to its end without leaving any sign of stable comprehension that could stand firm before pain or loss of life. Certainties that we absorb during our daily experience are usually as fragile as the pictures traced by our fingers on a sandy beach, which the sea will wash away. In the end, we know very few things for certain; we have lived through so many experiences, yet have no perennial certainty which enables us to take that last stride toward death with no fear of doubt.

We think we have loved but we are not sure; we think we have known yet we have our doubts in that regard. There are few consistent things that can provide an anchorage point after so many years and experiences. And the question remains: who am I? And the answer remains beyond our reach. Am I perhaps my memories, my few certainties that remain, or the legacy of my children? Faced with the immense void of the unknown, restlessness again creeps in;

perhaps it is best not to think about it, as we are not prepared to investigate complex worlds for which have no answers.

The truth is that nobody has shown us how to look at such fundamental questions. The education system insisted that all our effort should be directed at the future. We were always taught to struggle against time, to regard competition as a reason for obtaining our own goals. Now, with time running out, with no goals left, we ask ourselves what we are and there is no answer. Like greyhounds we chase the bait all our lives, we go round and round on the assumption that we are getting closer to our prey, thanks to our redoubled efforts to capture it. But when at last we run out of steam or we run out of reasons for competing, we may ask ourselves, what meaning is there to life?

We have always been illuminated by consciousness. We have been permitted the awareness to take in the countless sums of colours worn by nature all around us. Thanks to consciousness we listen to sounds, which moment by moment comfort our heart and to others that shroud it with anxiety. Thanks to consciousness we are aware of the sun, the rain, caresses and spaciousness. Consciousness has accompanied us through good and ill and, thanks to its nature, we are aware of life, pain and love.

Throughout the years we perceive many thousands of illuminated objects, lit by consciousness, yet we never probe into the reason for this splendour, this illumination that has allowed us to know them. We listen to a myriad of modulated sounds yet we never make the effort to search inside ourselves to discover how the miracle of hearing is produced. We seldom if ever seek to turn our attention on consciousness itself, we are always aware of its complex light surrounding the things in the world around us. I would ask the reader: if you set out to *pay attention to attention*, you would become convinced of the difficulty of doing so,

owing to the lack of clarity this process entails; yet if you still decide to do it, moving heaven and earth in your own ideas to be able to think through this option, with the passing of time you would notice that you enter a universe in which certainties are definitive and unique.

If instead of continually placing ourselves in pain and suffering, we would investigate who it is who suffers, and if instead of our constantly dwelling on the future, we would ask ourselves who it is that really wants to reach the goal, we should end up training ourselves in a kind of perception that would blossom into clear answers to those nagging fundamental questions which human beings ask themselves. The trick consists in being able to be consciously aware that the universe is happening. Awareness is the prime act par excellence, we should become skilful at being in the very instant in which the fact of knowing arises. When we achieve this, we become aware that consciousness becomes "without form", "free from stain or desire" and free from "any modification".

Sloka 35

"That which I Really Am fills all differentiated things, just as space (ether) fills within and without all differentiated objects. That which I really Am lacks change and is always the same. That which I Really Am is pure, unattached, immaculate and immutable".

Imagine a place where there is a pleasantly warm breeze, so you remove your shirt to feel the air brushing your skin. You might be aware of its touch on one part and later, sequentially, on some other part of your body; this would be a pleasant sensation – but then imagine that this sensation could be felt all over your body simultaneously.

Let us extend upon this idea and go a little farther: now you have to imagine that the sense of feeling, of touch begin to expand and is extended to include the mountain on which you are walking, to the trees there, to each of the branches, to the whole forest. Without lingering, it expands and goes on expanding to follow a river or rivers that flow through the region, the great and small animals that inhabit it… Now imagine you notice the scents that travel on the air while you perceive what before you grasped with your sense of touch, all of it happening simultaneously.

When this happens, when your total sensory perception comes together in a simultaneous mix, the non-differentiated activity produced in perception is amazing; nonetheless, it is not that any fraction of the events mentally detected by the senses is especially amazing in itself; what is amazing is the simultaneous totality of information of which one is aware. This is precisely what the *sloka* alludes to when it states: "That which I Really Am fills all differentiated things".

The most common examples drawn upon to convey the nature of consciousness are usually those associated with space and time. The notion of undivided continuity to depict consciousness is associated with space, which is subtle enough to allow volumes to be incorporated within it. While there is space, volumes are able to develop; no matter whether they move, change or transform, space remains untouched by such modification and, nevertheless, space as a domain is the support for the existence of all possible volumes. In the same way, consciousness is within and without the human mind; no matter what individuality it stimulates, consciousness has no parts yet it contains every single object that exists. Objects evolve but this does not mean that consciousness changes or is modified. Consciousness is beyond harm, without parts, ever continuous, and nevertheless the prop of differentiation.

This also happens with time; just realise that any given instant of time will incorporate the total sum of all events taking place in the entire universe. Time includes all things that there are at any given moment, it contains creation itself, everything is common to the same passing of time. In the same manner, consciousness, as the integrating activity, resumes the totality of creation; all events participate in the moment in which they were created only to participate again in the next instant as it occurs.

In the same way that objects are perceived to be a part of a place in space and a slice of time, they are also seen as forming part of a physical or psychological entity. Hence, we see the whole conjunction of material and ideal entities evolving through time and modifying throughout space yet, moreover, every object seems to become differentiated from the rest. In the human case, the mind acquires the possibility of identifying itself with the configurations that voyage through time and space, thus generating a deep sense of appropriation, of being the agent or author of what is being known – so that we become accustomed to thinking that I have a body, that I have feelings, that I feel or I understand, that I am happy or I suffer. This activity, which is the work of *tamas*, which is underlying in the mind and which generates the sense of I-ness, is termed "identification". The sense of identification is the hardest activity to eradicate from our minds, since it is what has accompanied us for the longest in our evolutionary process.

Sloka 36

"That which I Really Am is That Supreme** Brahman**, which is Eternal, Immaculate and Free, it is One, indivisible and non-dual, whose nature is Happiness, Bliss, Knowledge and Infinity".

We often ask ourselves what we essentially are; the most common answers are: we are a divine spark, we are the image and likeness of God, we are God himself, we are Being – the range of answers is not really that great. We could also state that there is no divinity, that all that life is, is a conjunction of biochemical coincidences … There is usually a "right answer" depending on whomever you ask. There are religious, philosophical, psychological, physical options; in short, there are answers to suit everyone.

Any solution to this fundamental issue of who we are has a common thread: we are all aware that we have the correct answer. Our mind sets up a scene that justifies the predictable answer in its own manner. Everyone, whoever is expressing such an opinion, has the gift of being able to store, process and lastly synthesise these memories to form a judgement. All of us have the gift of consciousness, of awareness, which backs up or justifies whatever outcome, which we claim to be right although it might differ substantially from others. For those for whom existence is empty, and equally for those for whom it is the plenitude of life, the reasons that are aired, whether or not they are logical, dismiss personal doubt and express a definitive opinion.

Yet just imagine now that we are able to study the nature of consciousness to understand not only how it functions but also determine the validity or otherwise of judgements arrived at by its means. So what do we require to study consciousness? First of all we should clearly define patterns of perception to then take the long stride to understanding the activity of comprehension itself. Let us hypothesise that the mind is *memory in a dynamic state whose purpose is to determine coincidences between present perception and information already registered in the memory.* What then are the processes or sites of such processes that are required for the mind to carry out the synthesis that leads to comprehension? We empirically

establish four: the storehouse of memory itself, *chitta*; the mobility of this memory to be able to store countless memories, *manas*; the matching of the object perceived and perceptions already realised, *budhi*; and, finally, the sense of appropriation – authorship – of the synthetic process, *ahamkara*.

Obviously, the analysis of consciousness in terms of the four above-mentioned activities necessarily involves the *budhi*, since it is this mental activity which scans for matches between perception and the images stored in the memory. When the memory finds the best match in the memory banks, the mind takes it to correspond to the perceived object.

Now, just assume we could isolate the mind's budhic faculty to study its behaviour and avoid the other functions confusing its activity. To be able to do this we would need to prevent the manasic and *ahamkara* qualities from cutting in, as the movement of mental matter and the sense of identification that produces I-ness or self-awareness, are elements that compromise the clear perception of the mind when we try to study *budhi*. In other words, we need to still the mind and stop identifying its activity with a personal agent. However, stilling the mind is not easy for most of humanity, and preventing the sense of personal identification with the action becomes even more tricky to achieve. This leads us to the conclusion that the analysis of the *budhi* calls for an extraordinarily unusual character whose control of perception is so tuned that such a case might only arise in one out of one hundred million people. Hence the enormous problem with studying the nature of consciousness: the mental requirements for this task entail a degree of control that frankly is all but impossible for humankind to achieve.

Even so, let us imagine that such a feat *is* possible – that the mind, *antakarana*, is able to settle into a type of perception in which the memory does not leap giddily from one *name* to another or from one *form* to another. Moreover, that the mind

does not assign ownership to action, meaning that perception is considered without any personal identification: there is action yet there is no agent, no author. If readers reach this point they will see themselves without any excessive mental activity and be in total awe at the inner instant, something that will prevent the appearance of the *I*. It is from this point, and no other, that consciousness and the mental activity that supports it can be studied, the latter being *budhi* or intellect.

The first thing any individual would notice, thanks to which the experience is universal, is the absence of all mental content – since, evidently, *manas* is momentarily deactivated. Thus, perception should be close to not perceiving anything, just detecting an immense void that fills all. In the *vedanta*, such an experience is known as *pratiahara*; the western term for this is the "Observation state". Whoever succeeds in damping down their *manas* to this extent would firstly note the fact of being in an immense limitless universe free from any material constituent. However, this void exists, and causes our living attention to exude an aroma of joy, peacefulness and intensity associated with inner perception. This joyful feeling is most infrequent in human beings; to such an extent that it is rare for someone to be able to maintain themselves in this state of consciousness in a continuous fashion, for minutes or even seconds. Notice that this is something which can never be done with thoughts or feelings, as their natures, being momentary, prevent any sort of continuity.

Where not only *manas* become stilled or deactivated, but the *ahamkara* faculty of the mind is silenced, one´s inner perception will change and attention not be paid to any particular place of the inner field, but rather be distributed throughout the whole. For that reason, and for the fact that this perception will lack any kind of final boundary or outer limit, the conscious act that produces attention will occupy the whole of the infinite inner space of one´s awareness.

Nonetheless, owing to the *essential* quality of attention, one would be aware of the smallest detail of one´s inner space while simultaneously attention itself would support and illuminate all other areas of perception. This kind of cognition, in which *ahamkara* has necessarily vanished, is known as the "state of Concentration", and its most distinguishing characteristic is that the inner void lacking in final boundaries is simultaneously perceived, everywhere. It is from this new cognitive viewpoint that we begin to become aware of the strength of consciousness. We cannot now say that it is an idea or a simple intellectual model responding to the necessity for a dialectic cognitive process. Here, consciousness becomes "massy" and is experienced as a seamless continuum, without any cause in anything other than itself.

It might seem that consciousness had finally been revealed, but no, there is still more. As soon as Concentration has been consolidated, consciousness presents a final condition: being witness to the reality beyond even the void itself, to expand throughout unimaginable places whose limit is temporal infinity and spatial absoluteness. It is here that *Sankara's* teachings have meaning and express very well what happens: Consciousness becomes Absolute Knowledge, Absolute Existence and Absolute Bliss. It is from here that it is understood that the whole universe is known by itself and that its essential nature is one of elation and infinitude; this form of perception is known as "Meditation".

Sloka 37

"The cognitive impression "I am** Brahman**", created by uninterrupted comprehension and practice destroys ignorance and the agitation caused by it, just as** rasayana **medicine destroys disease".

Adequately defining the mind enables us to study it more easily and thus be able to successfully foresee consequences in its functioning. Because of this it is necessary to devise a model that totally defines its functions and qualities. To this end, the *vedanta* establishes the subtle condition of mental substance and the four faculties which this generates. These are the *budhi* (intellect), *manas* (fluctuation), *chitta* (memory) and *ahamkara* (sense of identification); these are the elements fundamental to exploring a model that can be used to predict cognitive processes.

In previous *slokas* we looked closely into each one of these four functions that make up the *antakarana*, the mind. Because of this, in the case of any doubt, readers should reread these paragraphs[32] as necessary.

TABLE 1. THE *ANTAKARANA* AND THE *GUNAS*

	BUDHI	MANAS	AHAMKARA
SATVA	Comprehension Wonder Astonishment Learning Novelty	Logic Collaboration Support Imagination Happiness Fantasy	Unselfishness Compassion Virtuosity
RAJAS	Ardour Fear Control	Nervousness Doubt Anxiety Restlessness	Interest Futurism
TAMAS	Heaviness Ignorance	Fear Laziness Indolence	Egoism Wilfulness

The interaction of these four activities give rise to the mind's different characteristics and the admixture of the

32 Readers are recommended to re-read *sloka* 17 and subsequent.

primal material constituents, *satva* (balance), *rajas* (activity) and *tamas* (inertia) produce the conditions or inclinations shown in the following table. It is possible, depending on the preponderance of the subtle substance and cognitive activity in play, to stipulate various different characteristics of the mind. The table provides an array of these based on the preponderance of each of the three mental constituents associated with the basic functions of the *antakarana*.

Of the four functions of the *antakarana* there is one which is particularly highly regarded, and that is, the budhic activity or intellect, since it has the great quality of being the seat of conscious nature and reflects individual consciousness. Imagine that *budhi* is like a metal body whose form is painted black allowing it to absorb heat; also imagine that *budhi* is like a landscape in which the calm and crystal clear waters of a lake's surface reflect the heavens and whatever else there may be. The capacity of *retaining* and at the same time *reflecting* are *budhi's* attributes, thanks to the excess of *satva* in the mixture of subtle elements in the mind's make up; because of this it is the seat of intelligence, intellect and individual consciousness.

The idea consists in taking advantage of the essential nature of knowledge, of knowing, pertaining to consciousness, and using this activity to know – become acquainted with – consciousness[33] itself. Now that we have

33 There are two variations of the term consciousness: one alluding generically to the activity of *knowing* or of that which induces non-dual perception.; the other implying the capacity of knowing or awareness that is implanted in an individual whose cognitive appreciation is dual. Thus, the first kind of consciousness is seated in the *budhi* but reflects the second kind, individual consciousness, in the same way as a mirror reflects only two of the three dimensions of a volume**.** [The author terms the first variant conciencia (meaning the state or faculty of consciousness), and calls the second one consciencia, with an "s", (consciousness in the sense of "awareness") translator's note]. Thus consciousness is located in the *budhi* but reflects individual consciousness, just as a mirror reflects only two of the three dimensions of any volume.

defined consciousness as a non-dual continuum of knowing, in the same way knowing consciousness would also entail itself being known by itself as a non-dual continuum. That is why it is essential to remove or eliminate tamasic and rajasic elements that form part of the *antakarana*, which means *stilling* the mind and *dissolving* the sense of identification of the agent with the action; thus, to quieten down the mind, and act without anything that acts.

When perception lacking in mental movement is established, as is the case in inner meditation practice, or the realisation of action without there being any identification with it, which is the case with outer meditation practice, then forms of cognition surface as never before experienced. The simple condition of being uninterrupted witnesses to an existing event, without that changing, induces a sense of unaccustomed inner joy; the living nature of knowledge is revealed and the sense of immensity is felt as a daily experience.

Of all the things we are taken aback by in superior states of perception, there is one that stands out from the rest. I refer to the way there can be continuity of knowing without there being any activity of mental movement. Something like continual astonishment or awe that never comes to an end, a state of wonder which may last for minutes not to say hours on end without varying. It is akin to experiencing a totally new world in which the state of wonder leads to unique and vivid experiences. The continuation of budhic activity brings about the most astonishing of astonishments. Note that it is possible to know without any reflexive process, to be witnesses to a reality without there being any kind of dialectic process, one which seems to be flowing in a constant unceasing intuitive state, which just will not stop – like falling off a cliff without ever hitting the ground.

Because of this, *Sankara* places a great emphasis upon the uninterrupted perception of *budhi*. Simply the continual perception of *budhi* directed upon an inner or outer object, eventually leads, not only to knowing actual events but also their cognitive complements, meaning the rest of the universe. Hence, knowledge of *Brahman* is established, the non-dual continuum, whose essence is Absolute Bliss, Existence and Knowledge.

Sloka 38

***"Sitting in a solitary place, freeing the mind from all doubts and disconnecting the senses, meditate with unswerving attention on the infinite** Atman**, which is One without-a-second"**.*

Advaita vedanta philosophy stipulates, in its orthodox variety, that one should go through certain specific stages or periods of life: *brahmacharya* or period of learning; *grihastra*, or worldly stage, as householder and attending to common obligations; *vanaprastha*, or retirement with one´s companion alone, and *sanyasin*, translated as "renunciant", whose isolation is total. The *sanyasin* stage may be chosen at any given moment during life and it is independent of any caste or condition to which individuals might belong. Anyone may reach the status of *sanyasin*, without necessarily going through any of the previous stages.

The experience of the *sanyasin*, in which renunciation of the world is complete, allows searchers to sustain uninterrupted *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*[34], the definitive experience, which on becoming realised continuously for no less than twenty-one days, brings about liberation and confers the

34 The supreme state of consciousness in which the universe perceives itself in a simultaneous and ubiquitous manner. Non-dual consciousness as a continuum of knowing is perceived as knower and object known.

status of *jivanmukta*[35] upon the seeker. These figures often isolate themselves in solitary places, in forests or caves, so that their fellow human beings do not know them. On attaining this state, their compromise or responsibility towards the world regarding socialisation ceases, since the universe is now clearly seen to be an illusion. It is like being in a dream and having a solid compromise with the situations that may emerge, but at the same time having the knowledge of being immersed in a dream. This oneiric experience has no meaning, as one knows that the world which appears there is completely illusory, unreal.

In turn, there are other heterodox masters whose teaching approaches are also defined in the *advaita vedanta*, yet they do not follow many of the social and ritualistic rules which Oriental canons generally lay down. Perhaps *Sankara* would be the clearest case, among those who have reached the *jivanmukti* status in Eastern tradition, in assuming the role of a teacher who does not isolate himself or give himself up to solely contemplative activity.

Ramana Maharshi himself, a realised master in the *advaita* tradition, at first sought to isolate himself in caves in his mountain, Mount *Arunachala*; nevertheless, the multitude of devotees eventually persuaded him to return to leading a sedentary life in an *ashram* where he had no choice other than taking on a pedagogical role, teaching through silence.

Something similar happened to *Nisargadatta*: after becoming established in Reality he left for the Himalayas to retire to a cave. On the way he met a companion who was also a devotee of *Nisargadatta's* own master. When he told his friend that he had achieved Realisation, his friend remarked: "if you have already attained it, what difference is there, being in the Himalayas or staying at home?" After thinking about it, *Nisargadatta* answered: "That is true, why should I

35 The name which is given to those who reach the ultimate state of consciousness.

not return home?" Which in the end he did. He went back to his business selling cigarettes, a place where many people would come to ask him questions. After a while so many thronged to see him, that people from all over the world ended up going to India to listen to his store of teachings concerning the Self.

Because of this, one of the characteristics of the orthodox stream of the *vedanta* has been that its exponents are in their majority anonymous; in the heterodox fraction, following an orthodoxy based on the *vedas* is not considered to be necessary. Thus, we have *Nisargadatta* who, after attaining the state, never endorsed, for himself or those who listened to him, a way of life based exclusively upon the scriptures. On the other hand, for *Ramana Maharshi*, most of his life and indeed his death were consistently lived according to the scriptures.

This has brought about the inconvenience that the tradition, while shining with its own light owing to the living inner experience of those who have succeeded in achieving the ultimate state, lacks any cohesive assemblage of masters forming their own "saga", since that which truly backs up Self-knowledge in the last analysis is direct experience of it and never simply the fact of being disciples of a realised master or part of an *ashram* or teaching institute.

There is another interesting issue to consider here which, in the words of the *sloka* is "freeing the mind from all doubts" – originally the *sloka* states: *"...freeing the mind from all desires…"* Most spiritual cultures have a considerable moralistic side to them, leading to the idea that the change sought in a devotee is a purely ethical or moral one. That is why war has been declared on desire, which become the enemy to combat. This has led to endless counter-productive errors, as the road to travel is in no way one based on morality. Inner search is not a fight between good and evil, of the sort

they have been bent on installing for the past two thousand years; the true path is through knowledge that seeks to eradicate ignorance. Hence, it is doubt, and not desire, which should be overcome. Certainly, work needs to be done on the mind, which evidently leads to right behaviour for the comprehension to be established Yet the inner quest is never a search for a pattern of social or ethical behaviour, where it is all too easy for the mind to take shelter in the hypocrisy of thinking one thing and doing another.

Desire, in its different aspects, including the sexual one, has acquired a pall of negation, lewdness, not to say perversion. The direct onslaught on such sensations, far from solving the problem, can only make it worse. The stupidity with which those who having least idea how to do it, seek to show us the inner path, have made women, sexuality and desire in general a focus of contamination – one they have tried to denigrate or suppress in many ways, not stopping short of violence. Women have been denied the same options as men, the same right to set out along the path of freedom; society, owing to the erroneous education that has poisoned it, has inculcated mistaken notions which have limited options open to women and their spiritual life.

It does not seem to be realised that if you deny or suppress your desires, you end up inseparably bound to them. This is particularly evident in our Western culture, having been so conditioned after two thousand years by a highly clerical, moralistic vision, which brands desire as harmful. Desire, as with all life processes, has always something to teach us when experienced in an opportune time and place. We can learn from it: for instance, that physical intensity drops away when it reaches its zenith, and the aftermath has to be accepted. Physical intensity makes it possible to experience moments of unique, unrepeatable surrender, which are sources of experience that can only be realised within

such circumstances. Seeking to deny all of this is absurd; it would be like trying to pretend that a certain colour – blue for instance – was negative or harmful, and arguing that it should be eradicated. How, why and for what reason, if it forms part of the natural order of things?

There is a very simple way of controlling desire along with all other mental activity inclined to appear when it does not correspond to what is happening in the present. Desires, as with thoughts, gain strength because we provide them with more of the same, just as a fire gets bigger if we throw more firewood on it. Fear, anguish, loneliness and other mental states do not exist independently from consciousness; for any mental condition to be conscious, attention has to be placed upon it; to put it another way, for any event to be experienced as real, consciousness has to be superimposed upon it, like salt on the oceans.

Thoughts and feelings are imbued with an aura of life only when attention is paid to them, when they are based on history, in the future or any situation that is not happening in the duly witnessed moment. Therefore, consciously placing yourself in the present, knowing that you are part of an instant that is happening, prevents the birth of any mental factor that does not form part of this moment. Skilfully identifying and paying attention to the *present which is happening* leads to exclusively reacting to it alone. An attentive and presential response to an event happening in the present, precludes the appearance of any other thought or feeling disassociated with such an instant. Paying attention to the present and being witness to each instant that happens is the decisive factor which educates the mind and strengthens its budhic quality so that, finally, the fundamental metaphysical quality, *viveka*,which distinguishes that which is Real and what is illusory, is born within.

That is why, if there is anything that should be vanquished it would be doubt. Doubt produces restless mental surroundings in which it is impossible to forge any kind of comprehension. Doubt does not allow for the appearance of firm understandings that lead to favourable answers and generate learning. Doubt leads to uncertainty, which broaches all kinds of fears and anguish when faced with life or faced with oneself.

In the *sloka's* original translation it goes on to say: "… *controlling the senses*…"; this has been changed to "… *disconnecting the senses*…", as the original could be interpreted as saying desire is to be avoided by such control of the senses, that is not seeing, not feeling or simply blaming the body for the appearance of desires; this could lead to such errors as punishing the body when they arise, thus purging desire by replacing it with pain.

True control of the senses is obtained when we disconnect them from sensory objects at will. This operation, which at first seems to be so difficult, is something we do daily before falling asleep. When we are tucked up in bed just before drifting off to sleep, our senses have to be disconnected, as if not there would be no way of slipping away. In inner meditation practice one must also go about this sensory disconnection. When attention is fixed upon one's inner world and the mind takes control of perception, one's senses gradually disappear. Thus, when the mind is capable of recognising the absence of thought, attention disembarks upon the living void that generates the lack of all mental content – just as happens moments before falling asleep. From there on, with senses disconnected attention can be fixed on firmer inner states until in the end it fixes upon itself, that is, it comes to pay attention to attention itself.

"The wise one who has firm discernment,** viveka, **on constantly paying attention to the** Atman, **merges the entire world-of-objects in non-dual Reality, in the** Atman**".

We previously noted that *viveka* is the quality of the mind that implies the intellect's very maturity. The intellect, or *budhi*, has the aim of determining the pros and cons of a perceived event, that is, it is the product of an act which finally determines the synthetic cognitive process. *Budhi* represents the very instant in which any understanding is managed, without it necessarily being adjusted to reality. Let readers suppose that they see someone approaching from a distance; this person is still too far away to recognise their face, yet the way of walking or the kind of clothes they are wearing makes you think that it's someone you know. However, when they draw nearer, we become aware that it is someone else and not who we previously thought it was. In this case, the intellect or *budhi*, by means of discrimination of pros and cons of events stored in the memory, initially thought the erroneous judgement was valid, only to later correct it through right judgement. This mental faculty that entails learning and comprehension is *budhi*, while *viveka* concerns a kind of comprehension that exclusively engages with that which is metaphysical.

Viveka is the faculty which discerns the Real, after *budhi* discerns the real (no capital letter). *Viveka* is a faculty which is only precariously established in human beings, whereas the *budhi*, good or bad, fixes upon things in the form of intelligence, logic and ordered reasoning. *Viveka* is the maturity of *budhi*. When *viveka* is developed in the mind of human beings it becomes easy to discern that which is Real and what is illusory (real). Because of this, *viveka* is defined

as the act that allows discerning between *Brahman* and *maya*, that is, between what is Real and what is illusion.

The fact that a human being might live constantly in doubt, in restlessness, will cause the mind to favour a kind of cognition process whose validity is established in the pros and cons arising from existing contents in the memory. In other words, it is our memory which determines the validity of what we know, thanks to the concordance between a perception and the actual contents established there beforehand. *Budhi* is said to be the faculty that establishes pros and cons since, when the concordance between perception and remembered image is achieved, what is known as "knowledge" or "comprehension" emerges.

It happens in the same way with *viveka* yet, in contrast to *budhi*, the memory does not establish the image of a non-dual event. In the case of *viveka*, comprehension does not require pros and cons, as *non-delimited* contents in the superior non-dual perception do not generate an imprint which the memory can retain through a *name* and *form*. This is why intuitive perception resembles the *viveka* act of cognition. Intuitive perception is direct, without the pros and cons that compare mental contents (reasoning) intervening. *Viveka* is truly valued exclusively in metaphysical comprehensions.

When *viveka* is developed in individuals, their perception of the world points up new conclusions regarding that which is Real. As we have mentioned, it is similar to being aware, while asleep, that you are dreaming. It is becoming aware of the totally illusory nature of something being known, even when the event happening seems to be totally real. While one is dreaming events seem to be real, the world is put into an order within a logic of its own; nonetheless, there are some of us who realise they are experiencing a dream while asleep. Hence, it is possible to note the illusory nature of something which seems completely real and existent.

Imagine a little child playing at riding a horse: he climbs on a broom with a sock over the end for a head. The child, in his innocence, really believes he is galloping on a horse yet his father who is standing next to him, obviously knows there is no such horse, it is only the child´s make believe that gels this judgement in his childish reasoning; *budhi* and *viveka* are comparable Whereas *budhi* discriminates reality which is valid for one´s own experience, *viveka* discerns reality *beyond* one´s own mental experience. *Viveka* transcends mental dialectic and establishes us in a world of continual comprehension.

The development of *budhi*, of the intellect, requires reflection and analysis, all of this being associated with a memory with various contents to be processed. When *budhi* is well-developed, this makes us intelligent, logical and with reasoning able to provide appropriate responses to any kind of question on which we have information. On the other hand, the absence of intellect, *budhi*, leads to our conclusions becoming slow, unreliable and on most accounts mistaken. *Viveka*, in turn, enables comprehension about that which is Real, about what the world Really is and what the cause is for everything that exists. Attention being paid to *what is happening* is essential for the development of *viveka*. To be able to hold on to *viveka* one needs one´s mind to be exclusively responsive to the *present*. To awaken *viveka* one needs to remain in the *here and now* in a continual fashion. These practices, undertaken time after time, incline the mind towards the emergence of metaphysical comprehension.

Practice might go on for months if not years; nevertheless, sooner or later this discerning faculty will emerge. When this happens, when *viveka* finally arises, the world slows down, and perception gains a real view of the magnitude of what is known. Then it is easy to be aware of the emptiness of fear and note the absence of doubt. The mind gains strength

through continuous attention and the immense void between thoughts begins to flood the inner world. The disciple will notice that each instant is unique and unrepeatable, that attention should be placed on the simplicity and the complexity of any act in life, that one is never alone and that Reality is beyond any kind of dialectical comprehension.

Sloka 40

"They who have realised Supreme Bliss, discard all identification with the objects of names and forms. Thereafter, they dwell as the personification or embodiment of Infinite Consciousness and Bliss".

Love is an experience that tends to integrate the lover with the beloved. While love grows, limits between the two vanish. Eventually, the lover and the beloved cohabit within a feeling born out of the happiness and the surrender of one in the other. In our culture, in the search of love one sends up prayers, becomes willing to make any sacrifice, and absence of love is the cause of disillusion, even death. Mystic love produces desolation when faced with separation from God, and brings ecstasy when we encounter it; love in a couple produces joy in life and the lack of it produces loss.

Love can be the driving force which builds up empires or the reason for their destruction. The overwhelming force of love leads us to lose ourselves in its embrace, and merge with the loved one. Let us imagine that this sense of integration did not only concern the idea of God or a loving couple, but rather, thanks to the modality of simultaneous perception that is offered by non-duality, could be realised with countless events, even with the entire universe and all that is. Imagine being *part of the whole in all things*, being integrated even in what there has been and what will be. To feel the fire and the freedom that total surrender entails.

This experience happens very seldom among human beings; there are comparatively few Western mystics who have put this experience into words, an experience which astonishes whoever listens. The floods of tears, the sighs of desperation and gratitude are just minimal attempts at describing a heart that explodes in a million pieces on becoming a part of every little thing.

The Supreme Bliss which *Sankara* talks about in the *sloka* is not a feeling a human being can contain or appropriate. It is a monumental error to suppose that this supreme state could resemble something which is stored in the memory. To live the intensity of Supreme Bliss one needs to be conscious of the truth of the Self, to genuinely understand it, with no doubt and with total clarity. There is no feeling in the mind that can come close to the indescribable bliss of Absolute Love, of *Ananda*.

Falling into the void left by the loss of the *I* fleetingly resembles falling from a cliff and not finding any point of bearing that serves as any reference. Later on, this loss of control, little by little, results in a change in perception and, therefore, in the way of understanding reality. Noting the world without feeling a part of it is sometimes deeply gratifying. Detecting the world, and simultaneously being both the perceiver and the perceived brings unusual freedom and lack of effort in one´s mental activity. Now, the mind, thanks to remaining within non-duality, observes the world from all possible angles. While the nervous system adapts, something which could take hours or perhaps years, perception remains totally calm, without any thoughts whatsoever and without the slightest twinge of doubt. Everything is experienced as absolutely perfect; each little thing, whatever it may be, is in its place. It becomes possible to be aware of the fact that no one does anything, that the very intelligence of nature is the efficient and material cause of the universe itself.

The sensation of inter-connection of everything with everything else is known as *Ananda*, Bliss, and the comprehension that everything takes part in everything else is known as *Chit*, Absolute Consciousness. The universe is experienced beyond time and space. The richness of *Chit* and *Ananda* is seen as the essential reason for the existence of everything, *Sat*. Human nature linked to past or future is riven, splits asunder, to give way to a correlation of events within the very order that interpenetrates all things. All fear vanishes, even the fear of pain or death. Most human feelings are extinguished through lack of an *I* to feel them. New forms of seeing and experiencing the world spring up; deeds and events are always new, unlimited as to time and space. Words unwind as spontaneous answers, as one´s heart beats spontaneously by its own nature. Everything happens of itself and nothing happens because of ourselves.

It is gratifying that, faced with this wealth in perception, there is no psychological exhaustion. On the contrary: what there is, thanks to the certainty of perception itself, is unequalled rest, an elation born of the very perception of knowing that things just "are". Thus, this certainty settles the attention and this in turn nourishes that same certainty, forming a cognitive driving force which feeds off its own dynamism.

When this certainty is constant and continuous, the very act of paying attention breathes life force into cognition. In this way when, for instance, an opinion is required, ideas are expressed according to a script that flows and develops in a natural and spontaneous manner, a script which equally determines what one should or should not say, in a setting of profound rest and zest for life.

This inner state that brings non-duality generates a richness of life that is totally different from what is known to human beings. Here, the intensity of a moment transforms each instant into something perfect; there is nothing missing

from this moment, because it has become something unique, and yet in all things. In this way it is possible to bring together perfect moments in unique circumstances that make what is perceived take on an unequalled and unrepeatable condition. This fact of not missing the least aspect of what one is experiencing, coupled with the certainty with which the process is steeped, generates an elation and inner space in which the universe is more and more able to enter; and the more the universe enters in, the more certainty there is, in a process *ad infinitum* with no end other than *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*.

Sloka 41

"Since *the Supreme Self's nature is endless Bliss, there are no distinctions such as knower, knowledge and the object of knowledge. It does not admit such distinctions within Itself. It alone is Pure Comprehension*".

Epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, is one of the four fundamental issues in the study of philosophy and seeks to get to the bottom of the mystery of knowing. It seeks to determine, for instance, if it is possible to know everything; it analyses whether perception depends on the subject or the object, and seeks to determine whether knowledge is rational discursive or immediate. The theory of knowledge is a complex theoretical network with hundreds if not thousands of viewpoints which attempt to give a meaning to a process that we practically know nothing about: cognition.

In the process of cognition there are a series of postulates that are taken to be valid at the outset, that is, they have the status of axioms given the obviousness of the concept they are defining. For instance, it is taken as axiomatic that the knower is different from the known – the subject and object must necessarily be seen in the light of perception

as different from one another. One thing is to perceive a landscape and the other is the landscape itself; one thing is the one who listens to a violin and the other is the violin itself; a memory is different from the person who remembers it. In like manner, it is presupposed that consciousness, as an intelligent event which produces knowledge, belongs to the subject, that is to say, the active agent in cognition is the knower's consciousness.

With these two basic suppositions, object-subject duality and individual consciousness, philosophers have attempted to create a framework that can explain perception and the process of knowing. Obviously there is no theory to date that achieves this, to the point that it is almost generally accepted that Reality, the Self, is That which Is, and is impossible to capture dialectically; not only is it impossible for the mind to understand what is Real, but also to tackle metaphysical questions, the sphere of reality where that which is Real, the Self, can be experienced.

Philosophy, for decades now, has remained practically inert: faced with the impossibility of being able to explain That which is Real, it has set about exploring linguistics and communication. One of the great problems is the way that it is being held back by its lack of interpretation of what technology is finding out, which is leading us into a new world. The theoretical sophistry of many philosophers, contemporary or otherwise does not get anywhere near to explaining, for instance, the quantum universe, within which atomic particles possess highly unusual characteristics, radically different from those of any larger-sized, substantial fraction. The theories of physics that are constructing new modes of reality are revelations from quantum physics which have scarcely been reflected upon. Or rather academic philosophy expresses no opinion, perhaps out of fear of losing its ancestral status.

A century ago or so, it was discovered through quantum physics that energy takes the form of quantum packets or quanta. What now is such a basic fact, was then a totally innovative one. To describe the universe as irradiating energy in discrete fractions implies a discontinuous reality. This alone presents to our gaze a universe never before imagined, yet if we add to this that the minimum fraction is Planck's constant and its existence ushers in the "uncertainty principle", then, we are led to marvellous conclusions. This indetermination or uncertainty leads to not being able to determine accurately physical variables of any system at a given moment, that is, we cannot know for sure the physical variables of a system and totally define them. The repercussions of these affirmations do not fit in with philosophy. This new model of reality suggested by quantum physics has not resulted in a philosophical development that would go about changing, modifying, or simply dismantling the monolithic edifice of Western thought, a construction which at present provides no path towards understanding That which is Real.

I would like to give an example of how scientific breakthroughs, such as those of quantum physics, are capable of introducing a new model of cognition. To show this we shall assume that, just as there is a non-dissoluble unit in quantum physics known as the "quantum", which corresponds to Planck's constant, at the cognitive level there is also a measurable unit in the realm of thought known as the "*I*". That is, the smallest discrete unit which can be conceived of in this respect is known as "*I*". There is no thought that the nervous system can detect in its functioning smaller than the fraction known as "*I*". The most complex thought, the most attractive idea, no matter what the composition, has the requirement of a strengthened nervous system and higher energy expenditure. The first thought that a human mind generates when it moves from a collective sense to an individual one is the sense of *I am*. Because of this, the sense

of *I-ness* is so deeply rooted in the mind, as it is the thought that we most reinforce by dint of our constant perception of the world and of ourselves.

To posit the *I* as a cognitive unit in the perception process immediately leads to the recognition, as in quantum physics, that it is impossible to mentally determine what is Real, since indeterminacy when it comes to the "quanticisation" of the *I* entails the appearance of a temporal-spatial segment in which it is impossible to know anything about the Real. Indeed, human cognition works, as does quantum physics, as a clearly probabilistic system. Whereas in quantum physics the equation that determines the probabilistic expression of its systems has been mathematically discovered, in philosophy it has not.

Before the thought *I* has been forged, before the actual appearance of the thought *I*, there is uncertainty that prevents the mind from functioning in a sequential manner, as it otherwise does. The mind's sequential functioning is specifically associated with the rational discursive process. That is, dialectical reasoning builds a kind of reality similar to that interpreted by classical physics, which has complex systems, with events (formations) such as mountains, aircraft, oak trees and memories. While on the other hand quantum physics is metaphorically speaking similar to the mental processes that involve calm mental states in which the egoic presence is hardly noticeable; in *vedanta* these states are called Concentration and Meditation.

Before any kind of thought appears, the mental mass of memory functions as a probabilistic superposition or overlay. With the onset of a thought, mental matter gathers the image from memory which takes on a relationship with perception which leads to a judgement of knowing. In the following instant, when the thought again vanishes (this happening repeatedly), a fleeting instant in this cognitive

indetermination arises, in which individual consciousness is not engaged in understanding an event. Instead, this individual consciousness sums up all that potentially exists.

The *vedanta* has it that the normal state of reality is the one where consciousness is simultaneously merged with the whole of potentially knowable reality, whereas the egoic state is one of the four possible states of consciousness, depending on the "psychological quantum" unit that is presented, as the fundamental base of perception in those states.

Accordingly, we categorically assert that there is a kind of perception in which consciousness can know everything knowable along with knowing itself knowing. This form of cognition is usually known as "non-duality". The experience of perceiving *everything within everything else* magnifies the known to such an extent that the Bliss that arises from the integration of all that is known becomes the very substance of the entire universe. It is here that Consciousness does not distinguish between knowing, knowledge and the known, since it is simultaneously all possible states and categories of cognition.

Sloka 42

"By means of constant Meditation, comparable with the rubbing of sticks to obtain fire, the flame of knowledge and the permanence of comprehension burn ignorance completely down to ashes".

The set of inner practices that tend towards inner awakening is known as *sadhana*. Normally, all masters offer a series of disciplines with the aim of adapting the minds of their disciples. These disciplines vary in nature depending on each student's character. There are those that are aimed at improving mental or physical aspects, through which it is believed students are prepared to establish greater control

over themselves. Ultimately, what is achieved is a special kind of comprehension regarding one's inner search.

When we are confronted by the profundity of comprehension, whatever this may be, we become aware that it always endures by itself; it is a force that lives freely within us. Comprehensions can only be modified by others, but never die by themselves. They are like inflated balloons underwater, when let go, they immediately rise to the surface, they never sink; hence, the nature of comprehension comes to float in knowledge.

The very act of comprehension forms part of a universal framework and is actually out of "our" bounds of understanding – beyond our ken – given that it is precisely what we essentially are. Comprehension is our path, as we are in its debt; we are what we comprehend. One thing is simple straightforward knowing, which evaluates and recognises any given object. This simple knowledge is information which may be kept on paper or in a file somewhere, to later on be able to consult it, transform or manipulate it. Thus, our Western culture is founded upon the storing of concepts, ideas and the explanations of such ideas; it is much less skilled in manifesting solid comprehensions that inwardly define the human being.

The comprehensions we are referring to may happen only rarely during one's lifetime; it is fundamental knowledge that serves as a fulcrum for our behaviour and daily actions, it expresses a force which induces immense wonder which the mind adjusts to while in its presence, it is the expression of a force that eliminates doubt or, more exactly, allows us to maintain ourselves in the absence of doubt.

The simple act of understanding we are alive forms part of us as something that "we know", yet this is not an understanding of the lofty magnitude we refer to. When we come across immense comprehension such as I seek to reveal

here, it always nourishes us, it has no need of protection, it forever belongs to us and it is the ground upon which our innermost unfolds.

There is a kind of comprehension that, because of its force, its splendour, is capable of totally transforming us. But, then, what is it that is transformed? Precisely, the mental incapacity which leads us to constantly doubt, remain unsettled, feel for the sake of feeling, to have us thinking in fear. The fundamental comprehension we are talking about eliminates doubt in one blow as the world upon which it is fixed is a whole and total certainty. There is nothing so beautiful as this very intense and strong comprehension. To comprehend is to be free. Unshakable comprehension is the most wonderful gift we can obtain, because its like a compass that always shows us the cardinal north of our lives.

Among the family of comprehensions, within the depth of certainties, there is a series of exceptional ideas that, unfortunately, are seldom if ever encountered. We are referring to metaphysical insights, which constitute the central hub of the mental reality we establish and which clearly situate us in terms of what we are and what the world is. To think we are in essence God, as acquired intellectual knowledge and nothing more, is poor fare indeed. We only have to suffer psychological upset to plummet into dismay or unease, we only have to feel chronic pain to lose ourselves in desperation. A deep comprehension is that which is as steadfast as a buoy afloat in a stormy sea. Among these metaphysical insights there is one which all readers will come across sooner or later, the deep comprehension of which will endow such yearned-for peace that one is yet to barely comprehend; this comprehension is declared as:

"All is *Brahman*; the universe is *maya*"

This statement, which can be assimilated as simple "knowledge" by anyone who reads it, can nevertheless take on the form and strength of true comprehension and conviction and thoroughly transform one´s life. There is a story that can vividly clarify this point. *Nisargadatta*, the last publicly acknowledged *jivanmukta*, was convinced by a friend after great effort to visit one who would later on become his master. It was an extremely worthwhile meeting and, later when *Nisargadatta* commented upon the fact, his master looked at him and said: "You are *Brahman*, understand this and act accordingly". *Nisargadatta* reflected deeply upon this apparently simple teaching that he had received, for three years. At the end of this time, he finally achieved understanding of the depth of the matter and became truly aware of the profundity of the teaching, which enabled him to attain the highest state of Realisation.

The strength of an immense comprehension, the power of a highly metaphysical comprehension, stamps a mark of certainty from where it is practically impossible to have any doubt whatsoever about anything; hence, freedom is attained. For this to happen, students should be utterly enthralled and enraptured by the comprehension born of the teaching.

Certainties such as "we are *Brahman*", that "Reality is *Brahman*" or "the differentiated universe is *maya*", allow us to transit the path of life and death without the slightest shadow of doubt. They allow us to transit the path of even most pitiless pain with the certainty that all is illusion; they allow us to become aware of eternity itself, to have first hand proof of what we really are: infinity, totally undifferentiated. Metaphysical comprehensions prosper by means of the discernment process, *viveka*. *Viveka* gradually becomes installed as long as there is an increasing ability to stay *in the present*. When it comes down to it, everything is resumed in generating this orientation *toward the present*, in

reacting continually and exclusively before *the here and now*, without the mind being waylaid by other prospects. Every time that the mind wanders off needlessly into the past or future one should lovingly bring it back to the present, to *what is happening*: eating, working, playing, dancing, resting, to the activity which is occurring; day by day, year after year. The constant and continual placing of attention on *what is happening* develops discernment, *viveka*, whose inertia provides the certainty of metaphysical comprehension itself, a condition which forever accompanies and conveys a new perspective, full of joy and elation without cause.

Sloka 43

"Just as the sun rises at dawn after darkness' destruction, *Atman* ***emerges with the destruction of ignorance when faced by the continued comprehension of the Self".***

In its composition, this *sloka* presents a tacit error which is fundamental to clarify to understand the nature of the *Atman* – that is, non-dual Consciousness when this refers to the individual. I should remind readers that *Brahman* is identical to *Atman*, and yet the term *Brahman* is usually used to refer to consciousness at a collective or universal level.

To be absolutely precise, it is not true that *Atman* appears when ignorance, *maya*, is removed, as the latter never caused its disappearance, just as annulling the false perception of a snake does not induce the birth of a rope, since the rope was always there, it being the efficient cause of the snake.

So *maya*, ignorance, does not really cause the *Atman's* disappearance; what ignorance brings about is the differentiated perception of the *Atman*. Thus, proper knowledge, that is, discerning perception (*viveka*) of Reality, reworks cognition so that it becomes non-dual. In our example, non-dual cognition does not destroy the snake

nor indeed the rope either; and even less does it change the snake into a rope; nor does it transform both into a third thing. Non-dual cognition modifies the knower-known relationship by inducing simultaneity in both aspects, which makes consciousness take on the non-differentiated role of cognition. The perceiver is now also what is known and, moreover, it continues being the knower.

This kind of clarification is important, as sometimes the *slokas* can induce confusion in the unprepared reader, owing to the difficulty of finding words to define what is beyond words.

Ignorance, *maya*, never really blots out *Brahman* or the *Atman*; what it does do is push perceivers into experiencing the universe from any one of the multiple and probable symmetries that the mind is capable of knowing in its dialectical analysis. That is to say, what *maya* produces is a differentiated facet of reality via the *Atman* – through temporal-spatial fractioning and sequencing. The brain, for instance, processes information, which reaches the brain by means of the senses, and the brain then does a cyclic sweep over it. This scan integrates the information into one single unit, into a system, although there will be multiple fractions of information making up each new unit. The cognitive process resembles the act of eating bread: we do not separately taste the flour, salt, yeast…; the information integrated as bread takes on its own unity and independence from all other possible events. Now bread becomes part of the memory as any other apprehended element and, hence, as an event later to be compared with other future perceptions.

The entire universe, in all of its different facets, is *Brahman*. *Brahman* is That which Is. When That which Is is mentally experienced through temporal sequences and spatial fractioning, we still witness That which Is - simply we perceive It through the veil of these sequences and this

fractioning. It is like observing a landscape through stained glass: the details of the landscape will be modified owing to the stained glass, although in actual fact, the objects that make it up have never really changed colour. Witnessing shapes through a new colour filter resembles perceiving the world by means of the dialectical process that the mind accesses while there is an *I* taking part in the cognitive process. The *I* is like the additional colours of the stained glass, which modifies perception when our gaze passes through it to observe the landscape.

Because of this, *maya* generates the multiplicity of the *Atman*, although the *Atman* has never been multiple, but rather non-dual. Just as when we sleep, the dreamer becomes the countless events that the dream is composed of: the dreamer is every single one of them, and is the sleeper lying there asleep, all at the same time. This resembles the particle-wave duality of sub-atomic particles. They are not exclusively waves and nor do they only behave as particles; thus, the *Atman's* multiple cognition is not actually fragmented, but rather the mind detects it as such because of the *I*'s intrusion, yet the *Atman* has always maintained and will forever essentially maintain its non-dual nature.

Returning to the metaphor we used earlier, if it were possible to witness the unfolding of an oneiric (dream state) process while being in the waking state of consciousness, it would be easy to detect the lack of coherence, the excessive fantasy and also the illogical happenings of the events of the dream, yet along with the dream, a dreamer is born. The dream makes sense and appears consistent to the dreamer, as he or she was born subject to the rules of this state, not to rules belonging to something previous to the dream. With rules within which differentiation emerges, through *maya*, a perceiver emerges from this differentiation who can make sense of what is known. This perceiver detects and gives

meaning to the differentiation of all things, beginning with him/herself. Being born with the attributes which create this state of perception; the differentiated perceiver is the result of this state, as such, the dual state can be nothing else other than him/her.

When the dual state is withdrawn, a new modality of perception emerges with the absence of the *I*. This lack of the *I* induces simultaneity in the mind; thus, when spatial and temporal division are dissolved, the fractioning of the perceiver regarding what is perceived is also dissolved, in parallel. In the face of this eradication of the perceiver-perceived fractioning, a new knower emerges with a non-dual nature. This non-duality allows the new knower, the *Atman*, to detect the universe in a ubiquitous and simultaneous manner.

The co-existence of two different states of perception, dual and non-dual, is not possible; each one of them creates its own attributes and own perceivers. What ignorance (*maya*) generates is the belief that the *I* is real; it maintains the *I* as a unit within time and space thanks to karmic processes that provide it with a sense of continuity. Thus, the *I* gains a sense of identity owing to its identification with the body, *prana* and the mind. This new system, integrated by functions composed of varied events, takes on the name of individuality, *jiva*.

Hence, it is not the *Atman* which appears and disappears; what appear and disappear are the diverse perceivers associated with the differing states of consciousness, depending on what the attributes that structure the mind consist of. It is the *Atman*, and not these varying perceivers, which is inherently stable. It is always there, it is always It. The problem with the affirmation of the *sloka* stems, precisely, from the implicit assumption that it is the differentiated subject which is stable – and yet it is not, just as a wave in the sea is not really differentiated nor in fact stable. We take it as

a hypothesis that the actual wave is "something", because of the fact that we can remember it and make reference to it when another wave is perceived, thus assembling a jigsaw puzzle of which the entire universe is the summation of the parts.

Sloka 44

"Although the** Atman **is an ever-present Reality, yet, because of ignorance, it is not realised. On the destruction of ignorance** Atman **is realised. It is like the ornament always worn around one's neck".

This example of *Sankara* reveals in part what the previous *sloka* sought to clarify, regarding the ever-present *Atman*, beyond whether or not *maya* is in the mind of perceivers. Just imagine you are desperately looking for a pencil all over the house. You need to write something down urgently and you firstly look on your desk where you are sitting. On not finding one, you look on all the shelves and in other rooms, getting more annoyed and frustrated. You search place after place, but the object you seek is nowhere to be found. In the end, at the height of frustration you raise you hands to your head and lo and behold, surprise! Your pencil was behind your ear all the time. It was always there, yet your eminently visual mind did not realise it was.

Something similar happens with the *Atman*, comparable to this example of the pencil. The mind occupies itself with habits of perception which reinforce and stimulate the continuity of individuality itself. We educate our mind to see the world in one way, which is why it becomes impossible to ask it to do any different. Our adaptive system, for instance, has allowed, human sight to be able to detect wave frequencies ranging between infrared and ultraviolet, and similarly there are limits to the frequency range we can hear,

taste and smell. It is obvious that we cannot determine a kind of reality that is simply impossible for our mind to register.

The insertion of the sense of *I* in cognition generates limitations on our form of perceiving the world and restricts information, which other modalities of cognition without the *I* may present to us. The very act of detecting a dual representation of the world as the basis of cognition, makes it impossible to recognise other possible facets of information relationships. The act of reinforcing dual cognition by means of our behaviour patterns, prevents us from approaching forms of knowledge other than those in which subject and object are experienced as independent from one another. Because of this it is so difficult to give meaning to or an explanation of the *Atman*, as the mind simply cannot, through its neurological development, see the world in another way to what culture and upbringing has implanted.

One of the major defects that we continually maintain in our perception is situating ourselves in invalid time and space realities. For instance, we allow our mind to wander while we are on the bus or train, we carry out a job without being present in it, permitting the intrusion of pointless thoughts and feelings; we get upset for no reason, we invade fractions of time that should be used in other assignments. Human beings' major problem is their lack of mental order, their inner chaos. This disorder is reflected in being reactive when faced with (non-existent) situations and recreating atmospheres that only exist in the imagination and personal fantasy.

Everything really starts in infancy, when the personal sense begins to slowly emerge, giving way to another form of interpreting the world. Children do not create the same bonds of identification with their feelings as adults do. When they reach five- or six-years old they begin to become aware that they feel, they suffer, that their mind full of information

begins to have a life of its own. No one shows them what to do with their thoughts or emotions; adults are too busy worrying about the future, so that the child's uncertain present begins to become obscured: they do not know what to do with all that they are beginning to experience. In the end culture wins. Teenagers must have psychological walls to protect themselves from a culture which they reject and do not understand, yet everything follows its course and the survival instinct leads youngsters to be incorporated into the current culture that heretofore they criticised, to be turned into all that they never wanted to be or accept.

From this sad picture they take it from their education and upbringing that they are sinners, are flawed, that they are not able to save themselves, but rather must be saved by the clergy, who are there for that purpose. It is still widely accepted that a moral life will take them to heaven and the contrary will damn them to hell. They are taught to fear the divine, which castrates them, disabling them from having a logical belief about higher things. With the fear of God deeply embedded, they withdraw within themselves and, involved with a chaotic and unbalanced mind, learn to lie, dissimulate, to play at feeling worthy or being so in the eyes of others. Their lives are now based on an uncertain future that is looming up on them. The eternity of heaven is shown to them like bait to a greyhound. If they comply with the commandments of their faith they can obtain a visa to eternity and eternally celebrate the Last Supper. Yet they are not blessed, they are just as hypocritical as those who taught them to lie and be afraid. How can a mind educated within such patterns fix itself on and exclusively react to the present?

It is because of this that humanity does not attain stable emotions, and nor do people recognise the stable levels of perception in which consciousness may be placed day by day. We have been educated as sinners and the result is the

constant suffering that comes about when faced by change, by the lack of stability in perception. Not only are human beings made to see themselves as limited, they actually believe this. They are continually asked to undergo rites and follow dogmas just as sheep follow the leader. However, you only have to become aware of the intensity of an instant for wonder to burst into life. Yes, wonder, that brand of comprehension that annuls time. Immersion in the *present* makes every instant unique and exceptional, an elation never before experienced. It is here, within wonder, that we have the opportunity to react in the *present*, when the gates to a completely unknown universe are opened.

Perhaps readers will at some time or another have had a perfect moment, in which there was nothing missing and all else superfluous, some place in which the moment was alive and fulfilled by itself? Every instant in life can become a perfect moment, yet we should educate our minds to pursue the reality of the *present* and stop hiding, dissimulating, and justifying ourselves in our own mediocrity.

Sloka 45

"*Brahman* ***seems to be*** *jiva*, ***individuality, because of ignorance,*** *maya*, ***just as a tree trunk can be thought to be the ghost of a man. This*** *jiva* ***is destroyed when one succeeds in perceiving its Real nature".***

The *jiva* concept should be understood as meaning individuality. If someone should ask us what exactly we are, we would probably answer: "I am my body, my experience, my mind". Hence, the conjunction of elements which interrelate and create a common entity are those which make up a personal identity. The *jiva* is something to this effect, the conjunction of elements that make up our very individuality.

From the standpoint of the *vedanta*, the *jiva* is basically made up of four aspects or structures that, on bonding together shape an individual. These four aspects are: the physical body or *anno maya kosha*, the energetic body or *prano maya kosha*, the mental body or *mano maya kosha* and the body of knowledge or *vignano maya kosha*.

TABLE 2. CONSTITUENTS OF THE *JIVA*

KOSHAS	BODIES	SYSTEMS
Vignano maya kosha	Body of knowledge	*Budhi* (intellect) *Chitta* (memory)
Mano maya kosha	Mental body	*Manas* (reasoning) *Ahamkara* (I-ness)
Prano maya kosha	Energetic body	*Prana* *Apana* *Vyana* *Udana* *Samana*
Anno maya kosha	Physical body	***Organs of knowing***: 5 senses ***Organs of action***: hands, feet, anus, tongue, sex organs

Just suppose that a deep insight in your life leads you to bury part of your past. This past is evidently a part of the reality that you are made of. Therefore, metaphorically speaking, on destroying it, we can attain freedom, since our mind ceases from imprisoning us in the doubt and the restlessness as it did before. The same thing happens as affirmed in the *sloka* by *Sankara*. Correct non-dual perception destroys the *jiva*, individuality. In fact, the individual is not destroyed on the attainment of liberation, simply the mind ceases giving meaning to words such as: *I am, my, mine*; it inhibits any mental identification along with the grammar

used when speaking or thinking with any kind of personal pronoun. It is like someone who lives alone and, after getting to know someone else, decides to live together with that person. At that point they may stop saying *I am, I want*, *I need.* To avoid having problems they begin to say: *we are, we want*, *we need* – that is, their language starts to operate in the plural and now inflects as *we*. Something similar occurs in the mind of someone who fixes attention on the present. Their language and thinking changes, as constant non-dual living takes meaning away from identification with what is *mine*, with *what I am*, with *what I desire* or *what I need.* That is, such a person operates without a sense of belonging to the experiences which are realised or the thoughts which appear.

Sloka 46

"The ignorance characterised by the notions 'I' and 'mine' is destroyed by the knowledge produced by the realisation of the true nature of That which is Real, just as the sun removes the wrong notion about the right directions to follow".

The fundamental problem with common perception, we repeat, is its modality of fractioning the continuum of perception, a division which is generically known as "duality". Just as a glass prism refracts the white light that shines on one of its sides and splits it into the seven colours of the rainbow, the activity known in Sanskrit as *ahamkara*, *I-ness*, the sense of *mine*, of *agency* or *appropriation,* splits the continuum of perception and creates objects different from one another. As a consequence, the knower is also experienced as different from the known.

It is because of this that all great religious and philosophic traditions have sought to eradicate the sense of egoism, of selfhood; what is different here is that egoism is not questioned from an ethical point of view but rather from the

epistemological viewpoint. That is, egoism is not looked on as the absence of virtue; it is approached from a true and essentially cognitive point of view, not an ethical one.

The insertion into the mind of the sense of "mine" mars the sense of simultaneity belonging to time and establishes the past-present-future sequence; it divides the sense of ubiquity belonging to perception and generates the fractioning of space, thus creating the sense of above, below, in front, behind and to the sides. The insertion of *I-ness* into perception modifies the information of that which is Real belonging to non-duality and manifests as a differentiated mental expression. In this new differentiated expression, the spatial-temporal framework is observed as a reference point for objects known there. This is how the dual world appears to us as we usually see it. By eradicating the *I, mine*, otherwise operating in the *antakarana*, the mind, information which composes the world, is again experienced as non-dual.

If the mental sense of "*what is mine*" returns and breaks into into cognition, the world appears once more to be differentiated, situated within a sequential, logical, spatial-temporal framework. Because of this, the *vedanta* seeks to eradicate the condition of *mine*, or what is generally known as "identification". Thus, human beings through ignorance, *maya*, take it for granted that not only do they exist as independent entities but they relate to their mind and body and they identify with them, saying *I am, I have*. Such identification is as unreal as that of a dream entity created in a dream that witnesses its own existence while forming part of the dream state, and as false as the reality that is born in the dream.

It is normally quite hard to eradicate the sense of identity which occurs in the mind, as it is to be aware of the illusory nature of a dream when one is in it. Our identification with our mind and body is so taken for granted that, when we

mentally process information, we conclude that we *are* who we remember we are; every time we know something we *are* assuring ourselves that it is we who know. The identification of the mind and its expression of *what is mine, from me, of I* is so deep-rooted that we believe we are in charge of action and knowledge.

How can we eradicate such identification? Simply enough: It is eradicated spontaneously when attention is firmly and exclusively placed on the *present*. The *present* is the only cognitive setting in which the one who knows does not require the sense of being the knower of the perception. The *present* has this unique and exclusive characteristic that eradicates the sense of being in charge of what is known (being known) in a tacit, absolute and total manner.

Sloka 47

"The yogi gifted with complete illumination sees through the eyes of discernment, viveka, the totality of the universe in his own Self and considers things as a whole and as one at the same time".

Let us imagine that one of the characters in a dream detects that the dream universe surrounding them has only a momentary reality, so they realise that all that had been created would vanish the moment the dreamer woke up. Such characters know that they will also vanish when the dream comes to an end, giving way to the dreamer, whose reality is undeniable.

Just think of the possible options of life our dream character might have on awakening, as their dissolution is inevitable. One could say, perhaps: "*will I continue to exist when my dreamer wakes up*?..."; well no, dream figures are part of the dream and must dissolve when it ends. Perhaps they could ask themselves; "*will I keep my individuality*?…"; well

of course they won't; their individuality is part of the oneiric creation. Then they might ask: "*will I die when the dreamer wakes up*?..."; evidently not, as in reality the dream figure has never really existed enough to be able to say that they would be destroyed.

In summary, all dream characters who recognise themselves as part of a dream realise that they form part of an illusory reality and will disappear when the dreamer awakens. They ask themselves what will become of them when the dreamer wakes up and the dream dissolves, to which there is no firm answer.

To think that our dream figure would become one with the dreamer when he or she awakens is even more fantastic, as the dream figure would lose all trace of themselves. The dreamer's personality would negate any kind of option of individuality to the character in the dream. The latter do not maintain their identity, as they are non-existent, nor do they become one with anything, as their personal history is in any case fantasy. And, nevertheless, such figures are capable of witnessing the greatness of a reality that is unfolded before their senses while the dreamer sleeps; they feel the breeze on their skin and their heart kindled with the fire of love, they see people be born and die while their illusory life teaches them to comprehend more about themselves.

Faced by the question of what is the Real? there are countless possible answers. The dream figure has the right to ask the question as well and, just as happens with us living in the waking state, the possible answers to these questions are not yet written. The *vedanta* has a very *sui generis* answer to this. Firstly, it suggests that characters in our dreams are essentially consciousness, and it is thanks to this that they can understand, know, learn and give meaning to life, even though they are illusory and momentary. Secondly, it suggests that the dream figure and the dreamer possess an identical

consciousness, that the dreamer's mind is the cause of the dream and, as such, the dream creation is but a prolongation of the dreamer's memory and understandings. The dream figure does not exist independently from the dreamer. Thirdly, there are no diverse individual consciousnesses associated with the innumerable possible dream figures. The dreamer's consciousness nourishes all of them; each dream figure assumes knowledge to be their own, out of pure ignorance. Fourthly, it is not possible to say for sure whether the dream figure's consciousness exists or not, we can only be sure it does not differ from the dreamer's. They are not the same either; we can only say they are non-different from each other.

The same sort of analysis can be carried out on any individual in the waking state who takes the experience of their individuality for granted. The answers to the dilemma of *reality* would be similar to those suggested above and the responses equally as eloquent and seemingly confused. The *vedanta* suggests something that can be known to be true only when it is experienced: the lack of *I-ness* in perception dissolves boundaries between knowers and what is known, leading to the knowledge of all in all things, of comprehension being in everything and simultaneously everything in me, just as *Sankara* suggests in this present *sloka*.

As the *I* dissolves various things happen which initially seem to be impossible, but which the experiencer of such a situation understands clearly. Depending on the extent to which the *I* dissolves, levels of Concentration and Meditation can be reached, levels which can vary yet, no matter how deep the experience of non-dual states, one of the following will happen: one of the most amazing and marvellous visions that non-duality endows is to become aware that all things are interconnected by Existence, Love and Consciousness; to be witness to the Self being in all things and all things

forming part of the Self. This is not just a poetic idea or poetic licence that the author uses to embellish his writing. The reality of *all being in all else* is inexplicable magic, yet one that can be experienced.

Sloka 48

"Nothing whatever exists other than the** Atman**: the tangible universe is truly** Atman**. As pots and jars are nothing but clay and cannot be said to be anything but clay, so too, to the enlightened one all that is perceived is the Self and nothing but the Self".

This *sloka* is one of the most complicated to explain, because of the relationship between the *Atman's* metaphysical disposition and the empirical condition of the universe. The relationships that there are between the creator of the universe and creation have always been looked upon from at least three possible viewpoints. In the first, the creator is identical to creation; and in the second creation is independent from the creator, and in the third that which is created evolves independently from the creator until it finally achieves the same status of reality.

Each of these three options has something in its favour and something against it. These three approaches to the relationship between creator and creation are truly the product of mental exercise based on logic, yet none of them is the valid result of analysis provided by direct experience. Depending on the conviction of the staunchly religious concerning the validity of any one of the options mentioned here, wars, carnage and discrimination could well arise as a result. The various religions place the creation-creator relationship based on intellectual strategies that suit their own convenience. So in this way, they create their own dogmas and rituals.

However, there is no rational explanation that any of these theories can give for certain. This is because the mind is unable to explain anything beyond itself. Metaphysics, whose order of complexity is mentally ungraspable becomes a category of essential reality impossible to understand using a mental approach. Because of this, some religious systems establish faith as a recourse of acceptance, by means of imposed rules and dogmas.

The most coherent thing to do would be to ask any mystic who has had the experience of seeing God, what God was like and ask for his (or her) explanations on the matter. But here a new inconvenience arises: the mind of one who seeks to give an explanation in the form of a metaphysical answer needs to use language that in itself imposes limitation. As we have seen, the mind can only accede to information whose class of reality can be compared with another whose *name* or *form* previously exist. Previous contents which make up memory will be completely limited to a spatial-temporal framework and each individual's personal interpretation. Because of this, mystics usually employ silence and may even express those experiences that cannot be expressed in words through weeping. Mystics may excel in poetry by means of which they suggest a hint of the magic world that is their inner experience and which they otherwise cannot share.

Mystic do not seek explanations – they just surrender themselves to the experience of love, just as someone in love surrenders to their beloved. Mystics are not interested in giving reasons so that others understand them; those who love are not worried about being understood.

The *vedanta* states that it is only possible to understand that "the tangible universe is really *Atman*" if and when the mind moves into non-duality associated with the state of Meditation. As long as perception is not from this state of consciousness, any kind of information is just theory. There,

in Meditation the universe is experienced as the substance of Consciousness. .

Only from there is it possible to affirm that matter, energy and any kind of fraction of ethereal substance that could possibly exist, are only modifications of the non-dual continuum of Consciousness. And it is when this has been experienced, when the perceiver's vision has succeeded in exploring every corner and crevice of the universe, that perceiver becomes aware that to Love, to Know and to Exist are similar realities upon which the dialectic mind projects countless categories of differentiation. In the end, given non-dual Reality, all is essentially Consciousness, nothing can be more than Consciousness; there, one witnesses that the entire universe is *Atman*, that it always has been and ever shall be.

Sloka 49

"The** Jivanmukta**, gifted with the knowledge of the Self, abandons the identification with his** upadhis **because with the knowledge of his nature and perceiving that he is Existence, Wisdom and Absolute Bliss, he naturally becomes** Brahman**, just as larvae upon growing assume the nature of bees".

According to tradition, when disciples manage to remain continuously in a deep state of Meditation for twenty-one days, they acquire the conscious and unconscious non-identification with their *upadhis*, with the bodies that generate the sense of identification. Within this prerogative the mind is no longer aware of the sense of *what is mine*, nor is there any identification with *I have life* or *I have energy*; moreover, the identification with *I am my body* ceases. This rooting out of all physical, energetic and mental content never happens again, this is why those who attain such a state are known as *liberated* ones. This condition resembles the enlightenment attained by *Buddha* in the Buddhist tradition.

This process of detachment produced by continual Meditation is really a state of deconditioning of the mind. All habits that arise as a recourse for mentally sustaining the *I* cease, with the subsequent re-adjustment of habitual behaviour. A liberated one, a *jivanmukta*, now has no awareness of dread or doubt. The mind is totally unable to become distracted by moments which are not in the present. That which are usually known as "emotions" and "feelings" are extinguished, along with "pleasure" and "exultation". Mental states are left behind and are replaced by a similar state to that of constant and profound attention. Never again does a single thought which is inadequate or not reactive to the present intrude into any instant of time, never again does the mind feel the yoke of anguish and desperation. Continued attention, which is maintained in an uninterrupted way without any determined effort, forges states of elation generally unknown in humankind. The joy without object, the joyful act of deep contentment and the marvel of simply existing become the backdrop of any kind of deed, routine or activity.

Non-identification with the body leads to total control over physical activities. The ability to control one´s heartbeat and other involuntary functions at will becomes common in these cases. Pain, although felt, simply occurs. Actions are observed from an exceptional viewpoint and the intensity of any event allows for contemplation of things in a forever new and unique manner. Inner silence resembles an immense block of pristine steel yet brimming with life. The sense of elation that this constant presence provides makes the least movement or reaction inspire a sense of harmony among all things. It becomes easy not to think; in fact, thinking for the sake of thinking becomes bothersome.

The eradication of the *I* and lack of identification with life and liveliness cause life and death to seem less important.

Illness and health are elements that simply happen owing to an order which is never doubted. The simplicity in one's actions and lack of excessiveness in speech turn any commentary into an astute and valid teaching. All expectation dies, just as rivers flow into the sea. Learning has no importance, whether in its acquisition or loss. The experience of the Self is so immense that it overshadows any quest or mental necessity. The *jivanmukta* is free from his mind, from his mental, energetic and physical conditioning. Finally, when physical life comes to an end, he reaches the level of *videhanmukta*, that is, liberated without body, thus achieving Total Liberation.

The *videhanmukta* is like space within space, his consciousness is the Knowledge that flows through the universe, his body creation itself. His status never changes with the birth or death of a universe. He is time and its absence, he is that which has been and what shall be, he is being and not being. Free from any category yet possessing all of them, free from individuality, he is All.

Sloka 50

"A** yogi **who becomes** jivanmukta**, liberated in life, after crossing the ocean of illusion and having slain the monsters of doubt and aversion, is united with peace and rests in the bliss only provided by the Realisation of the Self".

Jivanmuktas maintain their sustained perception in a variety of non-dual cognition, always associated with the state of Meditation. Non-dual perception is highly fluid, it resembles sliding over ice: there is minimal friction. In the same way, non-dual cognition takes on a role quite lacking in friction, that is, cognitive effort; perceiving and reacting in the world do not generate the slightest conflict or the slightest psychological expenditure, when perceivers know they become aware of

what they know. It resembles the psychological effort needed to breathe normally, that is, none at all.

Each student, as they gain more mental control, reach the point where they can stay longer in non-duality. It is the uninterrupted permanence in non-duality which determines the infinite variety of mastery that can be obtained while they tread their inner path. Whether it be through the way of devotion or of discernment, it is possible to place oneself uninterruptedly in the heart or consciousness of that which is divine.

When metaphysical discernment, *viveka*, finally appears, it becomes possible to witness that the objects in the world are in themselves unstable, fleeting, and that Reality consists in their non-dual integration in simultaneous perception. When this happens, when perception is within all and all is in perception, then an unimaginable world flourishes for human beings, a universe which unfortunately, even though so close, is perhaps impossible for them to distinguish clearly.

If readers could picture the effort needed to carry a refrigerator up a spiral staircase to the top of a building. The stairs are difficult to negotiate and the household appliance heavy. It is all the more difficult to carry because the stairway, being spiral, doesn't leave space for many hands. The two people who have been performing the task from the beginning, toiling up the stairs, reach the point where their hands and arms are numb from carrying the weight, yet they cannot let it go, creating a tension which brings about actual physical pain. After carrying it up all the stairs through hard work and tension, they finally arrive at the place where the fridge has to go. When they put the fridge down they relax, slumping onto the floor of the kitchen momentarily exhausted. Just think of their minds, now resting from all effort, relaxed through the physical intensity that finally came to an end. This sensation of relaxation, release, which comes

after great physical effort, is not dissimilar to that of non-dual perception. The relaxation in non-dual perception is such, that it produces a kind of silent, living joy that continually maintains itself as the background to daily perception.

The great masters, the *buddhas* and *jivanmuktas*, in the end achieve success in that their mind maintains itself in a non-dual state that never changes. Like any other common person, they are capable of observing and reacting before the world; they detect an object in an individual fashion and have the skill that any human being has to distinguish one from another, yet they distinguish them while *lacking* any individual sense, due to the absence of *ahamkara*, *I*-ness. The non-dual flow that brings this level of perception never evidences a trace of individuality. Their minds, without the slightest effort, "know without anyone knowing", "do without anyone doing". Within this perceptive flow they live in a manner similar to those who have had a drink, and have relaxed their psyche, allowing their communication to flow, which they were unable to do before.

In this continuous state of non-duality too, "the joy of Being", "the joy of Knowing" flow here, there and everywhere. To see the world *integrated* into a non-differentiated unity is like seeing a bead necklace, its beads all held together on a string. At the same time that you see the necklace you see the beads, just as the *jivanmukta* observes *parts* and the *whole*. Consciousness, as integrating element of knowledge, flows in all directions without any active centre, without *I*-ness hastening to define what is known as its own. Thus, situated in *no place* in itself or in things perceived, it lives as water in water, space in space, knowledge in knowledge.

Where exactly is the *jivanmukta*? We can see such a figure walking, eating and doing other common everyday things, like any other person. Nevertheless, when the *jivanmukta* observes the world, consciousness knows that

That is happening, things occur without there existing on his behalf any localisation whatsoever in which he himself is experienced. He is not inside or outside his head, his identity is not situated behind or in front of his eyes, nor to one side or the other of his body; his cognition is imbued with a total lack of effort, for the simple reason of existing and knowing that he exists. This mode of perception administers such excellence in the body that there is no tension in the knowing. The nervous system is maintained absolutely rested, transfigured, at peace. It is, definitively, non-dual perception that provides the fact of being the non-localised experiencer of the world and witness to a reality without bounds.

Sloka 51

"The** jivanmukta**, who abides within the Self, absolutely relinquishing all his illusory attachments and illusory external happiness and satisfied with the bliss derived from the** Atman**, shines uninterruptedly like a lamp placed inside a jar".

When we recall a colour, yellow for instance, we immediately evoke a representative shade of the notion we have of this colour. In this case we identify the idea of yellow with the shade that derives from the memory we have of the colour. Our mind, *antakarana*, is explicitly designed to relate memories to perception. The *anatakarana* processes information at a very high speed. Although our mental perceptions are like still photographs that succeed one another, the speed at which they are articulated is so high that our perception seems like a continual stream, just as happens when we watch a film at the cinema and we see the continuous action on the screen.

In an automatic manner and owing to the *ahamkara* aspect of the mind, perception and its memory (thought) remains associated with a perceiver. The dialectic process (thought)

arises immediately, and a sense of *identification* also arises with the process that induces the appearance of an owner, the owner of the perception that is being realised. This identification is usually known as "*I*-ness" or the "egoic" sense, that is, an actor's or agent's appropriation of a thought. In this way, when thinking occurs someone appears who thinks: the actor, the owner of the thought. Along with this the *I*, *what is mine*, the subject, the perceiver, appears – all this summed up in the sense of individuality.

The birth of a sense of individuality happens through the *identification* of the thought with the non-existent actor whose essence is just a memory, an idea. Where one kind of thought is recurrent it favours the creation of habit. Thus, this strengthening which entails thinking constantly becomes a mechanism of conditioning, which will also be the basis for our genetic chart that is born from our adaptation to the environment in which we evolve.

The *jivanmukta's* mind continues to think yet there is no identification process between memory and actor. A *jivanmukta* is able to remember without any problems at all or reflect about the future, but there is never any sense of identification that endows individuality. As such, the *jivanmukta* is free from *what is mine*, and *belonging*, which leads to the mind not building an active centre which we denominate "personal consciousness", but rather it acts from the very flow of its natural and non-differentiated condition. Because of this, the *jivanmukta* looks at himself yet he does not see himself as an individual entity; this sensation is extremely pleasing, as it entails a rest from perception and the introduction of mental representations little known to humankind. These new mental representations, which appear on functioning without I-ness, are described by *Sankara* in their maximum expression as the uninterrupted joy that the

jivanmukta naturally and continuously experiences for the simple reason of existing, knowing, and loving.

When people frequently *identify* themselves with their thoughts, they see themselves being trapped by the emotional or intellectual processes that operate in their mind. They do not manage to see that thoughts are independent from those who experience them; and so such people remain submerged, absorbed by the unrest or happiness the thoughts produce. The process of *non-identification* implies separating, distancing the thoughts that the mind processes, from the knower of such an operation. When knowers finally succeed in separating from the thoughts that the mind produces, then they are surprised to become aware that they are not a thought but rather a continuum of consciousness that flows everywhere. They become able to understand that they are not different from the space which opens up within them, which is also able to contain the entire universe in the profound processes of meditation.

This *non-identification* with the mental world means that the *gnani*, the *jivanmukta, may* appear cold or even distant. Simply within him, the joy that provides discernment, *viveka*, is brewing, installing a new form of inner joy, the elements of which all having the sense of continuity in common. This allows one "to take a step back" and separate oneself from any moment of emotionality which is produced by identification, when faced with mental activity – regardless of what fear or doubt might be present. The *jivanmukta* is firm in the evidence that That which is known is non-different from Him. With this continuous comprehension, fears and doubts are reduced to minimal importance allowing one, as it says in the *sloka,* to live "absolutely relinquishing all illusory attachments".

"The contemplative sage, although he abides in the limitations of his** upadhis**, is not impregnated with their qualities. Knower of all, he lives like an ignorant person; unattached, he moves like the wind".

The *jivanmukta* retains awareness of his body, his vitality and his mind. He can feel the existence of physical pain, testify to illness and even submerge himself in his own memories. The only difference between a *jivanmukta* and a common person is the capacity of *non-identification* that operates in his mind. All human beings make any mental or physical experience they go through their own, something personal, to such an extent they take it that they have individual consciousness and think that *it is they* who carry out actions, aware of themselves being the performer of everything that is done. When they get up in the morning *it is they* who make the superhuman effort to prise the warm blankets away that cover them up on a cold winter's day; it is t*hey* who need to wash their body, dress themselves and get ready for their daily work; *it is their* body which becomes hungry and needs to have breakfast to keep up their strength. Hence, every action is always interpreted from the viewpoint of the one who undertakes it.

All normal people in their own daily language always conjugate the verbs in first person when they feel to be the doer of action. They think and say: I am walking, I am working, I am washing; hence, all activities that imply action become verbs associated with the personal pronouns: I, you, he, she, it, we, you, they. The verb, on being conjugated, immediately takes on the subject and person of whoever is carrying out the action, just as the rain that falls into the sea immediately takes on the salt tang of the seawater.

Non-identification prevents the appearance of the sense of *I-ness* in undertaken deeds, whether mental or physical. In this the mind processes information without there being a sense of belonging or appropriation. The subject's attention remains intact, yet it encounters no active centre where it is presumed there is a centre of individuality. So the action is done yet *there is no one who* does it; there is knowledge yet *there is no one who* knows. The mind being free from the sense of *I-ness* changes the modality of perception and new cognition rules are established which determine the appearance of new states of consciousness.

The *jivanmukta* has the possibility of converting thoughts into objects, that is, he can experience himself non-identified with them. Usually anyone attributes the mental condition he or she is experiencing to themselves. If at one moment they are happy, they define themselves in such a manner; if, on the other hand, they are sad, again they assume the role of being sad. This psychological activity frequent among human beings is like supposing that a totally clean pane of glass takes on the colour of its natural translucent self. Observing from inside a house through the windows, the panes take on the different hues that the landscape outside visually transmits. The same thing happens with the sense of human mental identification: feelings, thoughts, sensations and passions are integrated with the *I*, all being combined to create a conscious entity that differs from all other individualities. The mind endows this individuality with the sense of past and the way the time flows, such that the individual has an evolutionary direction towards the future. The *jivanmukta*, on the other hand, does not possess an active centre from which to operate, which we could call the *ego*. Consciousness remains active yet it does not take on any individual role. What is known is still known, the knower still knows himself or herself; nevertheless, no sense of difference is observed

between the knower and what is known; the sense of non-dual perception has emerged.

For the same reason, as the *sloka* points out, *jivanmuktas* are known as "the great ignorant ones" or "the twice born", as they were once born from the womb and then born into the supreme perception, the one which allows them to reach and then cross the "ocean of illusion". This is referred to in some other cultures, as for instance, Zen Buddhism, with the title of "Great Ignoramus", which is attributed to the master who has attained *satori*[36], since even after having known everything that can be known, this does not show. Nothing extraordinary is perceived in this person, who seems to the eyes of the world just as ignorant as everyone else.

Sloka 53

"On the destruction of his vehicles,** upadhis**, at the moment of death, the contemplative one, the** jivanmukta**, is totally absorbed into Reality,** Vishnu**, the all-pervading spirit, like water into water, space into space and light into light".

When the moment of transit comes about and death takes the physical body by surprise, the *jivanmukta* departs on the final journey to dissolution into Absolute Consciousness. The *jivanmukta's upadhis*, that is, the sage's physical, energetic, mental, knowledgeable and blissful[37] bodies, fall away, without there being a karmic core that might serve as a focal point to the permanence of their identities, just as a doll made of salt dissolves into the totality of the ocean, on being thrown from the beach into the waves, and is absorbed.

In the presence of death and exempt of all *karma*, there is absolutely no reason for subtle or physical matter to be associated with an individual centre of functioning. With the

36 The direct knowledge of Reality, similar to what in the *vedanta* is known as *samadhi*.

37 See *sloka* 9 and following.

body having fallen away, *prana* diluted and mind dissolved, consciousness takes on its natural non-dual condition. This non-differentiated condition has never been modified, it has never really been anything else nor has it changed in any way. Non-dual Consciousness has always maintained itself as the substratum and essence of any individual act, just as the coiled up rope is the efficient cause of the perceived false snake.

In most people the dilution of the energetic or pranic body follows the death of the physical body. Thus, wrapped in the mental matter which constitute their own minds, they form part of a world of ideas equally as solid as those that compose a dream. Owing to unfinished *karma*, their minds persist in creating an individual centre which forges a sense of personality. It is precisely because of mental, energetic and physical tendencies – which form part of the mental conditionings that endure as a focal point of existence – that the premises of birth and established primal conditions are determined, to initiate the development of a new configuration of *upadhis* in the next life on Earth.

However a *jivanmukta*, having no unfinished *prarabdha karma*, and with his physical body, *prana* and the mind all decomposing into their basic primary constituents, becomes drawn into That which is Consciousness caught within non-differentiated Consciousness itself. This obviously non-dual conscious activity that remains before, during and after death is known as *videhanmukti* or Great Liberation. *Sankara*, refers to it symbolically as *Vishnu*, the maintaining aspect of the Hindu *trimurti* or trinity, the prodigious conscious nature that is a *jivanmukta* at the moment of the final transit of death.

The *videhanmukta* is not affected by the death of the universe or the appearance of the subsequent one. It is just a pure, full state of cognition, which through its intensity becomes associated with deep Bliss and profound Existence

Sloka 54

"Brahman ***should be conceived as that achievement beyond which there is no other superior achievement, as happiness beyond which there is no other superior happiness, as knowledge beyond which there is no other superior knowledge".***

When one sails upon the ocean of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, to which there are no confining shores and whose waves arise and subside just as universes appear and disappear, it is possible to descry that in this state of perception there is no goal left to obtain. Absolute Non-dual Consciousness, which is given the name of *Brahman*, is simultaneously aware of every corner of the entire universe, presiding over any slightest change. Time and space are variables posterior to actual Consciousness and do not create parts; time does not split into past and future. There, in *Nirvikalpa*, the eye which beholds sees everything, the hearing that listens hears everything and the touch that feels feels everything. The magical arrangement of a universe interrelated through Consciousness is perceived to be active, yet, at the same time, nothing moves within it.

For the Non-dual Consciousness of *videhanmukta*, now having become *Brahman*, the universe is immobile and in motion all at the same time and even where faced with change everything remains forever identical and without modification. However, all the other beings engrossed in *maya* are directed into the future by time, while space diversifies them into innumerable parts. A single reality arises with different forms of interpretation: the dual and non-dual.

Beyond *Nirvikalpa* there is no beyond; there are no boundaries left to cross. *Brahman*, enfolded in his mantle of infinity, moves through his own non-limitation. In such an incommensurable ocean of existence, the experience of

knowing *everything in everything else* triggers the magical experience of the Bliss that can only be experienced there. Love is expressed in waves, like vast cosmic tsunamis, that surge outward giving life to all beings. It is impossible to explain the intensity of what happens there in words, except stating that the fantasy that we entertain concerning what is Real becomes totally absurd and inept. No human being can possibly imagine it without the evidence of a completely alive and loving universe without limits. No one can imagine how Consciousness is capable of overseeing Knowledge that encompasses all that there is in the labyrinth of existence. This inebriation of Bliss and comprehension of infinity is only reserved for those whose ego has been totally and completely dissolved.

There in *Nirvikapla's* fire of perception absolute contemplation emerges and any sense of the beginning and ending of things ceases, because That, *Brahman*, sustains Itself, the Self is experienced and lived, in the purest knowledge of the Self. There everything that has been, is and shall be is consumed. That is eternal freedom, that is *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*.

Sloka 55

"Brahman, ***the non-dual Absolute should be conceived as That which once seen, leaves nothing more to be seen, That which having become one leaves nothing left to be and That which, when known leaves nothing else to be known".***

We could ask ourselves: what is that answer which does not produce a new question? *Brahman*, That which is Real, the non-dual Absolute is that answer. Knowing it is to know all answers without producing any new questions. The certainty on knowing *Brahman* presents a singular freedom: the ceasing of all mental turmoil.

Human knowledge goes in the direction of finding answers which stem from observations; it seeks to recognise laws that integrate the objects studied and tries to describe such interrelationship through mathematical equations or empirical theories; the worlds of physics and philosophy always seek further goals to explore. Each new valid piece of knowledge fits as a fraction of a new whole which is constituted by the newly discovered knowledge. As knowledge increases, the panorama of our knowledge of the very universe itself is amplified. This way of gradually increasing knowledge through new discoveries, in theory, leads us to know the fundamental laws that make up our reality. In the end, it is supposed that human beings will be able to plant a flag as the discoverers of their universe. With pride they will show off this banner of progress, parading it before the up-coming generations lest they forget the fact of this vast achievement. Yet, is there really an end to human knowledge? Can we personally be knowers of the great mysteries by which we are surrounded?

Can we know everything, get to know everything? This is an interesting yet frankly unobtainable option. If we abide by the axioms of the scientific method, it is impossible to describe the totality of knowing, as science axiomatically restricts the form of analysis in which we assume a valid investigation should operate. A method of analysis based on splitting and segregating, as the means to know everything, is not only contradictory but absurd. Taking for granted and accepting, for instance, that the entities that the scientific method accept are the only true ones, that is, the entities made up of material substances evident to our senses, prevents the inclusion of the ideal universe and all that that domain confers on material substances.

One response to the ultimate problem of cognition, and all knowing in general, is to suggest a new scheme for what

is known as "reality". The new paradigm arising out of this new definition of reality would allow the establishment of original canons of analysis and new forms for the study of the universe. In this case, let us take it that *what is real is that which on knowing it will allow us, in a simultaneous and ubiquitous way, to comprehend the existence of the object of study and its cognitive complement.* To define that which is Real within these new parameters requires new definitions for the daily cognition that all human beings realise when observing the world around them. We propose as an axiom for such an event that the sense of *I* can be eradicated from the mind without the latter losing its conscious state. Moreover, we will also take it as an axiom that consciousness is an entity whose nature is a continual and non-differentiated flow of knowledge, that is, essentially, consciousness knows and knows that it knows.

If we encounter a cognitive ambience of the sort mentioned in the previous paragraph, consciousness could detect the absence of *I* in cognition, because it in itself is knowing, and as such can recognise immediately any object and its cognitive complement. Consciousness would be able to know and know itself in all things simultaneously. This form of representation of reality is known as *Brahman*. The practical atmosphere in which this reality may be witnessed is the constant ongoing reaction to physical and mental events stemming from the domain known as the *present*.

Sloka 56

"Realise that** Brahman **is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute, which is Non-dual, Infinite, Eternal and One and which fills all that is existent above, below and all that exists between".

The human experience which accompanies loving, knowing or the act of existing is part of our essential nature.

Over the course of our lives we learn to observe the diverse complexities thanks to which it is possible to gauge degrees of feeling, loving and existing, which go on unfolding as our life goes on. Their differing facets become established and classified within moral, legal and social scales among other parameters. In the end, after many years, we have an immense kaleidoscope of experiences which enrich our life, and which serve us as parameters to the attainment of the goals we set ourselves.

There are those whose life unfolds along paths that are filled with love, in any of its facets; others follow paths of experiences along which knowledge is indispensable. The different shades of experience, which we gather into our life moment by moment, are unlimited. Most of them are passed down by word of mouth or in written stories that are continually renewed, songs which are composed frequently and films which show the diversity of all natures along with thousands of other acts which generally serve as a channel to the immense flow of life we accumulate.

Thus, in this manner, our knowing and our feeling are duly compared with all those variants of knowledge and feelings which different stories remind us of. Our knowledge ranges from the brilliance of the sages of old, to present-day scientists, to the trite and corruptly stupid. In the same way, love is fractioned out between the limits of the mystical and those of its opposite counterpart, narcissism. Our experience of life along with its complexity would seem to always have a written, spoken or aural *reference* point thanks to which we discern a kind of special intensity between the possible extremes to be lived.

In contrast, experiences such as the ones *Sankara* refers to: *Sat*, Absolute Existence, *Chit*, Absolute Knowledge and *Ananda*, Absolute Bliss, form part of a file of experiences unknown to the majority of humankind. Finding written,

read or spoken testimony by which to understand these experiences are about, is difficult indeed. We have to do with situations whose frequency of occurrence do not in any way reflect the idea of experiences beyond the limit of anything the vast majority would recognise.

The act of experiencing *Brahman* in oneself and comprehending the immensity of a knowledge beyond all written description, the option of becoming *Brahman* and being witness to a love that floods the entire universe, is not a common or frequent act. It is easier to put on a baffled expression or, simply, smile a wry smile as if to say you are out of your mind – rather than feel that such a thing could be true. Do you know what would happen if you were to say to any priest or pastor that you feel the deep and silent call from God within, when it is exclusively they, the church, who set themselves up as judges of such an event? Do you know what would happen if you spoke about this at work or with friends? They would all probably put on a startled expression, look at you askance, or dissolve into laughter after hearing you. Such extreme experiences are so infrequent that they are considered aberrations, experiences typical of people with some kind of neurosis.

Our culture has its commercial language and, as such, the minds that live with these words become the same. Exploration of our inner world is not usual or not undertaken at all, to such an extent that words are not created to define achievements, characteristics and qualities for that which has to do with our essential being. It is easy to see that language is gauged in themes that concern technology, a subject in which new expressions spring up on a daily basis that define new functions. The metaphysical world is practically annulled due to the lack of clarity in defining That which is Real.

"Brahman should be realised as that Immutable Substratum defined by the Upanishads through discarding that which it "is not": it is not perishable, it is not destructible joy".

The West sees matter as being the substantial basis of reality. Matter is considered to be a substantial entity whose nature can be checked by means of the senses. The fact that it can be measured allows there to be no kind of uncertainty regarding its existence. Other kinds of reality, such as the ideal one, are not considered to be equally as valid as the material one, since it is impossible to confirm the existence of ideal levels and confer on them a single stamp of reality that goes for all of them. Hence, therefore, we encounter material and ideal substances, and of the two, matter is admitted by the scientific system as the element which sustains the reality that makes up our universe.

There are realities, as in the case of the dream state, in which the entities it is composed of are exclusively mental products. While we are asleep we have direct experience of the events which happen there. All buildings, trees, plants and persons therein form part of the flow of experienced events. Their reality is never questioned, as the experience presented by senses (also ideal) endows what is being known with validity. Nevertheless, on awakening everything disappears and a new order of reality arises with new rules of existence: the waking state. In the case of the dream state, the events are exclusively mental creations and yet they have the status of being totally real while they are being experienced. The ideal substance is the very basis of the dream state, yet in the waking state, matter is considered to be the substantial basis of reality.

To divide substance that makes up reality into matter and the ideal is rather limited. This division resembles the major political parties, which are often two in number, and have to

create a nucleus for all the social expectations that we citizens may have. Western philosophy has a stone in its shoe that prevents it from defining reality more clearly, when it sets out to classify it within the exclusive premises of "material" and "ideal". There is a new approach to this question of what the basic substance of all that exists is, and that is, to enter into the realm of *information*[38].

Information as the substantial basis of reality is a innovation, a novel intellectual enterprise. It presents us with a new possibility: considering information as if it were a "substance" prior to both the material and the ideal. Information possesses special characteristics that create relationships between the worlds of philosophy and science, thus developing two theories in the same direction that link with knowing.

We could also define *Brahman* as an infinite amount of non-differentiated information that knows and knows itself simultaneously and ubiquitously, that is throughout all time and space. When meditation is experienced at a profound level and *samadhi* is experienced, the material or ideal are not the driving forces of the substance experienced. The universe, in *samadhi*, is experienced as something similar to placing the seven colours of the rainbow one after the other onto a round disc: on spinning the disc, its surface immediately turns white. The experience of *Brahman* does not reveal a special kind of material or idea as the ultimate substantial reality. *Brahman* itself is the universe and its substance is Consciousness, Love and Existence themselves, which are in no way differentiated.

38 We suggest that readers read both "*Cuántica & Meditación*" and" *Los Campos de Cognició*n". These are books in which the author explains the analysis of the terms used here, leading to consideration of information as substantial element.

Sloka 58

"Deities such as** Brahma **and** Indra **taste only a particle of the unlimited bliss of** Brahman **and enjoy in proportion their share of that particle".

One of the great differences between Western and Eastern theological systems is that the latter sees divinities as entities that are continually intervening in creation, which is ongoing. The East assumes that creation is not a process reducible to one initial instant which later develops in a form of not very clearly determined automatic evolution, through the so-called "laws of nature".

In the East, the intervention of the whole range of divinities, *devas*, is in progress at every instant, which impulses the movement of life through the basic aspects: birth, maintenance and destruction of all beings. This process of change initiates a dynamic of birth and death by means of a constant cycle that induces evolution. In all orders of existence in the universe, gods, divinities or *devas* in the form of *guiding intelligences*[39], are operating as impulses of life, from the tiniest to the very highest form of universal intelligence, and it is they who are in charge of giving a sense of order to the diverse fields of existence. Their main characteristic is responding intelligently, reacting to the elements that are being produced in nature; nonetheless, divinities do not have the faculty of reacting with free will and deciding through personal interest[40]. They are entities

39 *Devas*, in all their diverse gradations, from the initial *trimurti* of *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* to secondary *devas* along with others, are generated by the thought of *Ishvara*, the God Creator. When *Ishvara* thinks, the universe is set in motion; *devas* are simply the directing intelligence of such movement, and they resume and assimilate what could be called the "immoveable forces" of nature.

40 The minds of *devas* are highly satvic, that is, they channel conscious purity, which leads them to not react by acting egotistically, since this quality is very tamasic, the kind of matter predominant in the human mind. It would be right to suggest that the laws of universal gravitation or the order that rules in

which are totally possessed by the force of creation, that of maintenance or that of destruction, depending on what corresponds in each case.

From this perspective, life is a process that is continually on the boil, which can be explained from a mythological viewpoint as a constant battle among diverse forces that struggle to express their own natures and conditions. Because of this, it is suggested that it is possible to interact with such intelligence through special mechanisms of communication given expression by ritual. Whether they are through gestures, visual or sonorous, rites, sacrifices, or sacred actions, they seek to establish a communicative bridge with one or other divinity, as guiding intelligence, with the aim of obtaining the favourable result desired by human beings.

If all is *maya*, illusion, what sense is there in devoting attention to *devas*, which also form part of this unreality? The "thought" that everything is illusion is very different from the "certainty" that everything is illusion. Sometimes, the only thing that is done is to think that everything is illusion, without any more assertion than the actual instantaneousness of the thought which is being emitted. From non-duality it is perfectly legitimate to pay attention to the force and expression of divinity, as a non-differentiated event of the very created universe itself. From non-dual experience known as *Brahman*, the universe is a continuum whose parts are simultaneously a whole without boundaries. The existence of *devas* does not call into question non-dual Reality, since those who have eyes to see That which is Real are aware that *devas* and other entities are simply a continuum of non-differentiated Consciousness.

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celular mitosis are intelligent expressions of the laws of nature; the East simply anthropomorphises such conditions by means of mythology and calls them *devas*.

"All objects are pervaded by** Brahman**. All actions are accompanied by Consciousness: therefore** Brahman **pervades everything as milk pervades butter".

Readers might like to take note that even if we wanted to, we cannot stop knowing. Attention might be led astray, distracted, yet even then something is being known. Here knowing resembles existing, since from birth to death existence remains associated with the physical body. Knowing and existing are activities that are always happening without ever stopping at any moment.

Readers may fall asleep, yet even then you will be knowing events that make up dream reality. You can say that you do not dream, but you could also say that you simply cannot remember them. At bottom, the activity of knowing is like the activity of existing: it endures, it maintains itself all the time. Whether you are distracted, attentive or asleep the activity of knowing maintains itself as a continuous flow.

Consciousness is considered as the productive activity of knowing. Mental experience requires consciousness to be able to know, just as plants need the sun. In the *vedanta*, consciousness and mind are completely different activities. Consciousness is seated in the mind as solar fire settles on metal and heats it. Just as the sun lights up the moon and this reflects a part of its luminosity, equally, non-dual Consciousness illuminates the mind with knowing, which in turn is reflected by individual consciousness[41].

Accordingly, in this *sloka*, *Sankara* establishes that consciousness prevails over any change and moreover it is the basis upon which such change happens. In the West it is difficult to understand this approach, as the individual

41 We refer reader to footnote 33 for more about this particular topic.

consciousness is taken to be an activity of the mind just as the light of a candle includes in itself the heat it emits while, at the same time, it radiates light. This divergence of suggestions produces models which are on occasions opposed and leads to a definition of the mind and human behaviour according to surprisingly divergent models. The Western theory does not succeed in defining what relationship there is between mind and consciousness expressed in a clear model, the latter causing the appearance of countless behaviour patterns.

The *vedanta* establishes three activities with similar characteristics of continuity: the act of existence, *sat*, which endures during and after physical life; the act of being conscious, *chit*, which is maintained as the basis of the five states of consciousness; and that of loving, *ananda*, as the integrating element of all information. Finally, in the experience of Meditation the fact that all three are expressions of the same non-dual nature comes to be revealed. The *advaita vedanta* works especially on developing the analysis of *chit*, consciousness, and seeks out meticulously to study this activity.

The sages of the Vedanta stumbled upon a dilemma when they initiated an exhaustive analysis of consciousness, thousands of years ago: consciousness resists investigation as an object of study for one very simple reason: to be able to analyse consciousness one needs the help of that same consciousness, thus an apparently vicious circle is established. Even then, the sages were able to determine some of its characteristics such as, for instance, the way in which it is self-illuminating, that is, it only depends on itself to be what it is. They became skilful at the art of knowing consciousness from the standpoint of consciousness itself, in the end becoming aware that the universe itself is the substantial projection of Consciousness. Hence, they came to the conclusion that the knower, what is known and the force

of knowing constitute a non-differentiated whole which is known as "non-duality".

In any case, *Sankara* expounded his thinking, based on the categorical and emphatic statement that the universe is non-dual, at a time when decadence and decline was clearly looming for both Buddhism and Hinduism. Countless schools of thought sprang up out of nowhere and many philosophers preached their particular mode of interpreting the *vedas*. Hence, the *Charvakas, Jainas, Sikhs* all came to the fore in an atmosphere of confusion and a degree of turmoil, when there was not open confrontation between the different viewpoints.

It is in this confused state of affairs that *Sankara* began, as was the custom of the day, to confront dialectically the well-known exponents of different schools of philosophy, out-arguing them all one by one in open contest, thus extending the basis of a new model of reality to which he gave the name "non-duality". Non-duality as an idea was an organised compendium of teachings advanced by his masters *Govindapada* and *Gaudapada*, who had created the atmosphere so that *Sankara* could, with renewed mastery, delineate what is still the most complex metaphysical model that exists.

Summing up *Sankara's* teachings, *Brahman* is defined as a non-differentiated stream of Consciousness that pervades the entire universe and should be considered as the basis of all the information of which the universe.

Sloka 60

"It should be understood that** Brahman **is neither subtle nor dense, neither short nor long, without birth or change, without form, qualities, colour and name".

In this *sloka Sankara* again sets about giving us a clearly *advaita* description of reality. The *advaita* system seeks to find a solution to the problem of determining the nature of reality

without creating any substantial category that the mind is able to rationalise.

When we discuss substance on a philosophical level in the West, we are referring to the kind of matter of which bodies are composed and structured. Substance makes possible sensory detection and perception of the things composed of it. Substance can assume innumerable different categories, thanks to which we can construct the myriad of different bodies or entities which inhabit the universe. Perhaps the closest expression to what is defined as "substance" as referred to in the East, is what we would call "information".

Both the chemical substance that makes up material bodies and the ideal substance that makes up ideas form part of the categories that are established in the West to analyse the constituents of the universe. However, information is the substance prior to matter and ideas, that which makes it possible for whatever material or ideal structure to be composed, at the same time, enjoying complex attributes which the latter two do not possess.

One of the great advantages of information is that we can establish mathematical expressions to enable its analysis. Information can be expressed by means of set theory and takes on the quality of approximation when it is analysed by means of Cantor's theory of transfinite numbers[42]. Any infinite set can be expressed mathematically through the summation of finite sets. Thus, to give a practical example, one metre and a half metre are two finite numeration sets with a-dimensional points that can be expressed as an infinite set. In this way, we would end up with an infinite set derived from different finite sets.

42 George Cantor, Russian mathematician, introduced the term "transfinite" to refer to any kind of numbers that grouped together make up their own kind of infinity. Cantor argued that the term *infinite* can be applied without any distinction to any kind of non-finite grouping, hence, revealing a difference between the infinity of two infinite sets.

Something similar happens with information and its grouping together, which we know as "field". Hence, fields of information can be associated with a mathematical grouping of finite elements. The great difference from set theory is that a field of information is composed by definition, of an infinite number of sub-fields. To clarify this for readers who may be finding this confusing, just suppose we observe a landscape and attempt to count all the snippets of information that make it up: green, leaves, animals, sounds, smells, colours and so on and so forth; we could characterise many of these pieces of information according to the physical sense we employ. Yet the prior description "green" and "leaves" are implicit in the field "branches"; "animals" and "sound" imply "cries"; "scents" and "colours" imply "flowers" and "fruit". What the *vedanta* sets out to explain is that each information field, in turn, has its own intrinsic information fields, such that any information field, by definition, has an infinite number of informations.

All limited groupings of numbers are known as "*finite sets*". Thus, any *field of information*, while limited, will have infinite snippets of information; we term this field *closed*, since it has specific boundaries, as in the case of the landscape we seek to observe. In reality, we are not trying to see the city, or the cars, or mentally reminding ourselves of things, but rather seeing the landscape alone. In the *vedanta,* what is referred to as Reality is the ensemble of snippets of information that operates when a closed field opens up allowing for the inclusion of all the other snippets of information from all other information fields.

Another difference from set theory is that an information field has similar characteristics to those which the *vedanta* assigns to consciousness[43]. For instance, consciousness is not

43 To analyse the nature of consciousness thoroughly, we suggest the reading and detailed study of "*Los Campos de Cognición*" and also the recent book "*Cuántica & Meditación*" written by *Sesha* (www. vedantaadvaita.com).

fractionable, nor does it have a primordial element within it that serves as a hub or core for its constitution; information is also a-dimensional, that is, it does not come under any specific category, yet, on becoming associated within fields, creates them all. Thanks to this symbiosis between information and consciousness it is possible to transform a field of information into a field of cognition.

When the property of consciousness is added to a field of information, the latter becomes identical to a field of cognition. In this way we are able to link epistemology with metaphysics; that is, we can interrelate theories that explain the nature of things and knowledge of them. Hence, we define that which is Real as any open field of cognition. Every closed field of cognition which can become open through correct cognition is Real. On recognising any closed field, that is, a perceived event, it is possible to be aware of the complement to that field, of all the other cognitive events happening, and when this is done in a simultaneous fashion, then that which is Real is known. The empirical cognitive element which allows this activity is what in the *vedanta* is known as Meditation. The right way to go about meditative practice is by withdrawing the sense of *I* from cognition, and to do this, one only has to have one's perception locked into the present.

Hence, in the end, information is the substance of Consciousness, just as the great maxim says "All is *Brahman*".

Sloka 61

"*Brahman* ***should be considered as the light which illumines the sun and all other astral orbs but which is not illumined by them. Brahman is That which causes all things to shine.***"**

We have used the term "consciousness" as being the capacity which favours knowledge and self-knowledge. This capacity to evidence the world and oneself exclusively

belongs to human beings. Thus, strictly according to this Western definition, neither animals nor vegetable species nor the mineral world have the distinguishing marks of consciousness. It is true that, being conscious of ourselves and the world around us, is an exclusively human act – and yet we can also be aware of it in the order seen in nature's intelligence in all its diverse processes.

Obviously, nature is intelligent, it is profoundly well-ordered. One only has to analyse the human body in all its complexity to perceive the immense wisdom contained in every organic function. The order we witness in cellular mitosis, enzyme processes or indeed cognitive perception itself, indicate that we simply form part of a range of knowledge which surpasses us by far. This natural intelligence which is manifest in the many laws of nature, entails a level of consciousness and, hence, an intelligence, that we are not clearly aware of.

We observe nature and thanks to this our knowledge becomes learning. We imitate the procedures which nature has always carried out, with the sole aim of understanding the laws by which it functions. So, how could one affirm that nature is not intelligent and as such not conscious? The specialisation of our nervous system allows the realisation of complex activities along with being conscious of them, for instance thinking, feeling, learning and so on. However, the mineral and vegetable worlds do not possess a level of nervous specialisation that allows human achievements; nonetheless, they have the possibility of managing ordered chemical reactions according to universal criteria that might lead to obtaining atomic energy or the emergence of photosynthesis, among many, many other possibilities. Mammals already have judgement that takes them further and further from the consciousness of the species, and allows them, little by little, to attain their own personal self-awareness.

The work of the psychologists Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung established a new paradigm with regard to consciousness. They announced that there is input from knowledge of experiences hidden in the mind or knowledge simply distributed throughout and common to all humanity. That is to say, consciousness is an activity that, taken all in all, forms part of collective and personal ancestral knowledge. Plainly, we know very little about consciousness. We *vedanta scholars* have been analysing it for millennia and we have found a way of studying it; to do this we have learned to place ourselves in the field of perception of consciousness itself, thus acquiring the skill of *maintaining* attention on the very instant that the mind is knowing in the unfolding present, which is done by eradicating the sense of *I-ness* from cognition.

The *vedanta* goes on to talk about *oneiric consciousness*, that is, the knowing which occurs in dreams; also about *wakeful consciousness*, that is, the knowing which is in operation while we are awake and the mind thinks; and about *consciousness* in the *observation state*, referring to knowing which arises in the first stage of focussing on the present; about *consciousness in concentration*, in which the mind expresses itself in a non-dual manner within a closed field of cognition, and about *meditative consciousness*, in which cognition is associated with an open field of cognition[44]. The five states of consciousness established are the result of inner observation done by numberless people down the ages who succeeded in gaining knowledge which they mindfully passed on in dense detail over countless generations for millennia.

Consciousness expresses itself in ways more varied than water does with its solid, liquid and gas states. Consciousness

44 The terms open and closed fields of cognition are from the pedagogical approach established by *Sesha* to enable studying the different states of consciousness. We advise readers to read *Sesha's* complete work on the subject "*Los Campos de Cognición*", to enable the precise study of this approach.

brings about the entrance of knowledge which floods the minds of geniuses, which flows in the intuition of wise men and women and which operates in the most common processes of reasoning. Consciousness is here, there and everywhere, just as the sun lights up its surroundings without cease. Like the sun, consciousness illuminates without the need of being illuminated; it is only observed by itself, it is only known by itself.

Sloka 62

"The Supreme** Brahman **shines by Itself, it pervades the entire universe inwardly and outwardly, just as fire permeates the inside and outside of a red hot ball of iron".

Brahman is the term denoted to universal non-dual Consciousness; it is Absolute Consciousness, Absolute Being and Limitless Bliss. The *advaita vedanta* deals with *Brahman* from the point of view of consciousness. Because of this anything concerning cognition, the mind and consciousness is of great importance in the *vedanta* system. The treatment given to consciousness by the Vedanta is quite different from that given in any other system or model of thought Readers should be clear about the concept of the "the presential continuum". There is always a present that instant by instant flows, in such a fashion that one is never aware of any break. This flow resembles that of consciousness, in which there is never any cessation of our knowing, understanding and attending. Always and in every single moment one knows, one is knowing – of course this is subject to any of the possible states of consciousness that may be activated. There is always knowing, there has never been a moment in which there is no consciousness, whereas neither has there been a moment in the present that was passed over, undetected.

This concept of continuum is truly complex to grasp. It is a flow of knowing which embraces everything, just as the spatial continuum embraces all volume or the temporal continuum impregnates all beings. One of the metaphors which comes closest to *Brahman* being a continuum of consciousness, is that of a river which flows never-ending. This continuum of water, which flows along its perpetual course, determines that there is always water, wetness, sound, bubbles, waves and all other things we associate with a river. In exactly the same way, streaming consciousness basically includes three things: the knower, what is known and the power of knowledge. This triple formulation is what, associated with the mind, allows one to realise cognitive synthesis.

Nevertheless, it does not all end here. It so happens that *knower*, *what is known* and the *power of knowing* are not to be seen exclusively as being independent, even though the rational mind sees them as such. From the standpoint of the *vedanta*, *knower, what is known and knowledge* are individual expressions and at the same time simultaneous; as, for instance, multiple independent shapes and colours together make up *a whole* when one observes a landscape. Non-duality is a special kind of cognition which allows objects to be known as *part* and at the same time *whole*, just as a sub-atomic particles are simultaneously waves and waves.

Apart from the fact that consciousness behaves as a *continuum* and is seen to be *non-dual*, it is *self-illuminating* and *not observable,* that is, consciousness is permeated by knowing, it not being able to become an object of perception for anything other than itself. Because of this, when any "object" flows in the non-dual stream of consciousness it becomes *permeated* by the power of being known; in the same way, when a "subject" flows immersed in the non-dual

stream of consciousness that subject becomes *enfolded* by the capacity of knowing and knowing that one knows.

Just as an iron ball spontaneously absorbs heat until it becomes red-hot when placed upon a fire, in the same way, when the mind flows in the stream of consciousness, it acquires the capacity of *knowing* and *being known*. Furthermore, the mind eradicates the differentiation between knower and that which is known, by removing the *I* from perception. Hence, both knower and what is known act simultaneous in a role which is known as "non-duality".

Sloka 63

"*Brahman* ***is other than the universe, yet there is nothing different to*** *Brahman***.** ***If anything seems distinct from*** *Brahman* ***it would be like a mirage in the desert".***

This statement by *Sankara* is perhaps one of the most complex of the whole text. It allows *Brahman* the exotic property of being different from the universe, and yet at the same time emphasises that it is impossible for the universe to exist independently from *Brahman*. It resembles a play on words, a paradox or downright contradiction so that it becomes difficult to extract the meaning from such a statement, whose consequences are vast indeed.

Brahman is not exactly different from the universe, but rather, different from the *dual version* we have of the universe when we know it with our minds. One can be aware of the universe in basically five varied forms, depending on the state of consciousness from which it is perceived. What *Sankara* seeks to establish in his straightforward manner is that the universe which unfolds before our rational vision is not *Brahman*, neither in its magnitude, nor in its qualities.

Being aware of *Brahman* within the limited mental optical viewpoint is a mistake which impedes the exact definition of

that which is Real. Owing to the fact that the dual mind is only capable of knowing the universe through the fractioning of concepts, it is not feasible to comprehend the real character of *Brahman* from such a standpoint, the standpoint of duality. This is why *Brahman* is different form the universe – it is different from the dual universe which the mind is aware of while it is subjected to the duality imposed by the *I*.

However, nothing exists which is different from *Brahman*, as it is the essential basis and ground of existence. Anything which exists, though it is seen from a dual standpoint, has *Brahman* as its essential base. Perhaps an example which will shed some light on this tangled skein of concepts: that of the relationship between dreaming and being awake. *While one is in a dream* everything which is there is different from the dreamer who creates it but, at the same time, nothing in the dream is any different from the dreamer who creates it. While dreaming, when we see a mountain we cannot state that such mountain is the dreamer who at that moment should be placidly slumbering in bed; equally so, although we are still asleep, it is undeniable that the mountain is the dreamer's mental creation. The mountain is and is not real, yet *Brahman* always is.

Bearing all this in mind, *Sankara* states that to accept the universe as being different from *Brahman* (in our parallel example it would be assuming that the mountain is different from the dreamer), is just an appearance of difference, a simple illusion, just as a mirage in the desert is triggered by a mistaken perception of dual reality.

Brahman has the virtue of behaving paradoxically, a quality only possessed by the infinite. Hence, though it is, it is not recognised; but whatever is recognised mentally is not *Brahman*.

This paradox of reality is resolved if we interpret individuality as an accident, and the infinite as the essential

basis of what we are. Seeing individuality as an accident entails the recognition that dual perception is merely an incorrect and limited form of cognition. Because of this, undoing the mental basis which informs duality, the *I*, it becomes possible to cultivate the correct form of cognition and establish that the infinite is the essential basis of what is individual.

The *vedanta*, in its own terminology, defines as *adyarupa* the taking of something which is non-existent to be valid – that is, a process of superimposition – and defines as *apavada* the witnessing of the Real is the continuum of non-dual Consciousness. Thus, *apavada* is the process of "undoing superimposition".

Sloka 64

"All that is perceived, or heard, is** Brahman **and nothing else but** Brahman**. Attaining the knowledge of this Reality, one sees the universe as the non-dual** Brahman**, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute".

There is one ultimate comprehension that sustains, supports and encompasses all other comprehensions: this is the comprehension of Absolute Self, of the Divinity in Me, of the Totality in Me; it is the comprehension that everything is *Brahman*, that all is Real, that all is Self, that Existence, Knowledge and Bliss are non-different. When human beings rest in this comprehension which matures step by step, it then becomes a path which searchers after truth can truly travel upon.

In the end, when this comprehension of the Self matures, *Brahman* becomes a witness to be found at every twist and turn of the path; so all searching ceases. Up and down, in front and behind – all vanish. Life and its absence are never more to be feared; whatever happens is accepted, whatever it may be. When the body comes to the end of its task and it

turns to ashes, the *prana* and the mind dilute into space and consciousness feeds the immensity of the universe. From this point, the very Self will be witness to a thousand twilights, to the births and deaths of countless universes, grief and joy will be facets of the infinity of faces which existence possesses.

Here, love is not a feeling or a sentiment, it is the mantle that caresses and cherishes eyes, skies and rain. Fire from suns becomes the shining splendour which turns lovers into immortals, and the darkness of the night into the silence that cherishes all that is fragile and changeable. The past ceases, all search is ended, the hunter hunts himself and becomes prey in devouring his hunger for knowledge. How can one put into words something which only the mystic's tears comprehends? Only those who have seen God will yearn for this union, only those who never ask can find all the right answers.

Sloka 65

"Though** Atman **is pure Reality, Consciousness, Bliss and is ever-present everywhere, yet It is perceived by the eye-of-Comprehension alone: one whose vision is obscured by ignorance,** agnana**, does not see It, the all luminous** Atman**; as the blind do not see the resplendent sun".

A digression on the concepts of *Brahman* and *Atman* would be in order here, to avoid error creeping in when using them.

Vedanta philosophy embarks upon the study of existence from an original standpoint, where reality can be expressed based on an individual or collective perspective, in such a way that the collective version could be as peculiarly extensive as desired, while taking it to be the summation of individual units.

Thus, an individual unit could be a "finger" and its collective counterpart could be "hand"; this, in turn, could be seen as an individual unit forming part of the collective

unit "arm" or "body" and the latter, in turn, could form part, as an individual unit, of the collective unit "human race", and so forth.

The same thing happens with inanimate or non-animal elements: the individual unit "tree" could be encompassed within the collective unit "forest"; the individual unit "river" could form part of the collective unit we could call "sea", and so on.

Along these lines, an odd innovation in *vedanta* thought consists in transferring the above analysis to the nature of consciousness. This can receive a similar treatment to the one we applied to animate or inanimate physical organisms. As such, the human unit of consciousness could be expressed from the individual perspective or also as a sum of them. The individual unit of consciousness associated with a physical body is known as *chidaabasa*, and the sum of individual entities that are expressed in a cosmos are known as *mahat*.

In the same way, the *vedanta* suggests an individual Reality and a universal one, which are known as *Atman* and *Brahman*, respectively. Nevertheless, to avoid any confusion it introduces an emphatic statement through the enunciation of a great maxim or *mahavakya* which relates them: *Aiam Atma Brahman*, *Atman* is *Brahman*, and there can be no dichotomy insinuated between their natures.

Since *Atman* and *Brahman* are Absolute non-dual Consciousness, they are the essential basis of knowledge and of all final synthesis in the form of comprehension. *Atman* abides in knowledge and clearly so in comprehension. Comprehension exclusively operates in the present, and so *Atman* is also the nature that sustains the present and reveals it to be a continuum.

Sloka 66

"The jiva, free from impurities, being heated in the fire of knowledge kindled by hearing qualified masters, its Self shines of itself like gold".

The structural unit that makes up the human being is known as *jiva*. We refer here to the physical, pranic, mental and knowledge bodies. These four sheaths or *koshas* that *apparently* clothe the *Atman* have the characteristic of producing identification, along the lines of "I am my body", "I am alive", "I doubt" and "I know". *Jiva* is a term which, in our language, means "individuality".

As was mentioned previously, the *jiva's* consciousness, that is individual consciousness, is usually known as *chidaabasa* or reflected consciousness. The *vedanta* meticulously defines each property involved in cognition, in such a way that there is no room for error in describing any process that operates in knowing. This immense heritage of words tends to overwhelm students who are not accustomed to such terminology yet, in the end, when one understands, through direct experience, the way each state of consciousness is linked, the meticulous detail with which this activity is described is simply welcomed.

The *jiva* is the sum of the *anno maya kosha*, *prano maya kosha*, *mano maya kosha* and *vignano maya kosha*[45]. The *Jiva* represents all that can create a sense of personal identification. The mind or *antakarana* corresponds to *mano* and *vignano maya kosha.* In turn, individual consciousness is seated in *vignano maya kosha*. When *Sankara* suggests that impurities should be removed, he is referring to the notion that the constituents that make up the *koshas* should, by means of different disciplines overseen

45 In *sloka* 14 readers can refresh their memory regarding the sheaths or *koshas* with which the *Atman* is apparently covered.

by a master, transform their tamasic or inert, and rajasic or active components into satvic or balanced ones.

Yet spiritual discipline alone does not lead to inner freedom. Knowing is not a product of arduous discipline which is only capable of changing rajasic and tamasic habits into satvic ones. Comprehension is not a product of something that came before. Any effort at inner search banishes doubt, yet it does not produce comprehension. Comprehension is an ever-present activity, it is never born nor is it altered, it does not prosper and flourish nor does it wither and die; it is always present in every activity, even when there is none. Experience dispenses with doubt yet it does not bring about comprehension. No matter what activity human beings realise, manage or master, they only confirm the absence of doubt; comprehension does not depend on skill or abilities, I am simply aware that I know or I am aware that I do not know.

One seeks to free the *jiva* from impurities through inner practice, as between all the different mental comprehensions which an individual gathers there are only thresholds that separate them, there are not differences. Human beings think they are knowing one thing or another when they look at a plant or a stone, but comprehension is a continuous activity; for that reason, from the short-sighted mental viewpoint that insinuates itself thanks to ceaseless thinking, it is possible to note that between each mental comprehending there are not differences but rather thresholds which, in the light of the individual mind are seen as fractions.

Comprehension is the ripe fruit of consciousness, it is the faculty which allows us to know, to witness; it is the culmination of knowledge. The treasure of comprehension allows us to know what we are, to discover what reality is, in spite of the apparent change which operates in the mind.

"The** Atman**, the sun of knowledge that rises in the sky of the heart, destroys the darkness of ignorance. The All-pervading one sustains all and makes everything shine, including the Self".

Atman is That which is Real; it is identified as being the natural essence of consciousness, that is to say knowledge, the power of knowing, the very act which enfolds learning. For the *vedanta*, *Atman* is That which is Real, and at the same time, That which is Real is non-dual Consciousness. The insistence on developing a practical method to gain self-witness of consciousness thus becomes understandable. This process of self-witnessing consciousness is known as Meditation.

Meditation is the highest state of consciousness, as well as the name of the practical mechanism which leads to the perception of open fields. The state of Meditation has a witness of reality which it perceives; this witness in the Meditation state is known as *Atman*. The *Atman* is the subject which knows the entire universe non-differently to Itself; *Atman* is the supreme state of the Knower of the very universe.

Just as *Atman* comprehends the entire universe, the *I* assumes it comprehends what it thinks. The only thing which frees us is to love unselfishly or *comprehend* what we know. The only thing which really brings peace is to love deeply or comprehend limitlessly. However, we should be clear that comprehension is not the same as clarity concerning the synthesis which the mind creates when it reasons; comprehension is far more immense than the simple result of cognition. Comprehending that we are really a non-dual continuum of Consciousness generates knowing which grounded in serenity. To forge comprehensions that do not

give way before illness, power or death is symptomatic of having discovered an a-temporal treasure. The greatest comprehension is immutable, it does not require anything else but itself to contain the truth. The fundamental comprehension is to know ourselves as *Atman*, as this non-dual flow of knowing, which is the substantial basis of the universe in all its categories. When one knows *Atman* one becomes *Atman*; there, in that supreme state, one never fears death, the future, silence or loneliness. Immersed in *Atman* nothing else is searched for, nothing else is desired; from this moment no answers, no reasons or justifications are any longer of any importance, only the present moment and the presential experience associated with it is valid.

Sloka 68

"He who renouncing all activities, who worships in the sacred and immaculate sanctuary of** Brahman**, which is free of all the limitations of time, space and direction, which is present everywhere, which is the destroyer of heat and cold and all other opposites, and which endows eternal bliss, becomes all-knowing and all-pervading and attains thereafter immortality".

There are those who renounce action and there are those who renounce the fruit of action; these are two completely different situations. Those who renounce the result of action are known to the sages as *karmayoguin*, but those who renounce action itself are known as *gnanayoguin*. The *vedanta* stipulates that the first step to achieve *gnana*, the path of discernment, is the living experience of *karmayoga*. No one can renounce action, and as such the world, if they have not before had sufficient preparation for it.

How many have wished to renounce the world impelled by their erroneous inner search and ended up simply hiding their own inner misery from the world and from themselves!

How many have renounced the world without being ready and have ended up being prey to their own personal needs! There are effectively two kinds of renunciation: the renunciation of the fruit of action, a circumstance which liberates, due to its preventing the appearance of new *agami karma*[46] , and the renunciation of action, which is realised by those who have had *uninterrupted* vision of Reality, who are also often known as *sanyasins*.

Our Western culture has provided and still provides searchers of the divine the possibility of isolating themselves from the world in order to dedicate themselves steadfastly to themselves. The many monasteries bear witness to the boundless desire to create an atmosphere far from worldly clamour. Nevertheless, mental laxity has led so many seekers to be impotent witnesses to their own hell, because of their naivety in believing that one only has to desire that which is divine to achieve it. Hundreds of atonements, penances, punishments and pious readings are crammed into those who seek to prepare themselves to serve the divine, for years, when really they are only seeking to feel at peace with themselves. No one has a worse ego than those who seek saintliness.

Trying to get two politicians with opposite ideas to agree is possible in the end, through voters acting as a barometer, an indicator which can eventually bring them to reach some kind of agreement. Yet put two religious from different faiths together to negotiate and such agreement is impossible, since they both believe they own the God they represent and the God-given power which they feel is theirs by right to exercise.

The *vedanta* seeks infinity through the very act of knowing. Delving deeply into the mystery of perception, disciples learn

46 *Agami karma* is one of the three kinds of *karma* that is generally studied in Hindu tradition. *Agami karma* is the one that emerges when subjects incarnated in a physical body identify themselves with the action they realise. On becoming identified they project their personal appreciation into the future, their sense of *I*, thus a vicious circle is unavoidably set in motion, known as *samsara*, or the wheel of death and rebirth.

to see how the universe takes on a different hue when it is observed from the viewpoint of mental tranquillity. There, established in the continual simplicity of the present, one can be witness of all change flowing in quietude, just as waves move upon the face of the immovable ocean. To witness the power of the Self through the repeated activity of self-knowledge will one day lead you to comprehend that you are the gods; that the unselfish feeling of Love, which integrates all things, beats within your heart, and within your head infinity unfolds in the form of Comprehension.

Part Two

Atmabodha

Epilogue

The *Atmabodha* is one of the best-known works on *advaita vedanta* and, in its relative briefness, it ably describes the nature of non-dual cognition and the reality of the Self through very simple, poetical examples. Throughout its *slokas*, *Sankara* describes the nature of Consciousness in meticulous detail and explains all kinds of relationships using simple situations which all readers may understand.

In this sense, it constitutes an extremely apposite and deeply encouraging map enabling one to become acquainted with the nature of Consciousness. The ideas he puts forward are exceptional yet always illustrated by examples and situations which are common and frequent. This is what makes the *Atmabodha* so great a work and *Sankara* such an important spiritual master and teacher. It is truly remarkable how a genius like *Sankara* explores profound yet lofty realities using such plain everyday language. The way that he treats fundamental elements derived from the *vedanta* is truly exquisite, especially regarding the nature of Consciousness, the subject of *Brahman*, the non-dual connotation of his nature and the vision of primordial reality as Absolute Existence, Knowledge and Bliss.

Atmabodha

by Sri Sankaracharya

Sloka 1

"I am composing the Atmabodha or Knowledge of the Self to serve the needs of those who have been purified through the practice of austerities and who are peaceful at heart, free from cravings and desire Liberation".

Sloka 2

"As fire is the direct cause of cooking, so Knowledge, and no other form of practice, is the direct cause of Liberation; as Liberation cannot be attained without Knowledge of the Self".

Sloka 3

"Action cannot destroy ignorance because it is not in conflict with ignorance. Only the understanding endowed by Knowledge is capable of destroying ignorance, as light dilutes dense darkness".

Sloka 4

"It is only because of ignorance that the Self appears to be finite and brought down to 'name and form'. When ignorance is destroyed, the non-dual Self, which does not admit any multiplicity whatsoever, truly reveals Itself by Itself, Its true nature being non-dual, just as the sun when clouds are removed".

Sloka 5

"The practitioner, thanks to repeated understanding that daily endows their experience, purifies the mind enveloped by ignorance, which disappears, as the powder of the kataka-nut disappears after the muddy water is cleansed".

Sloka 6

"The world, which is full of attachments, aversions, etc., is like a dream. It appears to be real, as long as we stay asleep, but appears to be unreal when one is awake [i.e., when true wisdom dawns]".

Sloka 7

"The universe appears to be true so long as the non-dual Brahman, the ultimate Reality, the substratum, the basis of all this creation, is not comprehended. It is like the illusion of seeing silver in mother-of pearl".

Sloka 8

"Perception of the multiple and differentiated 'forms' exclusively exist in the mind of those who perceive them, their substrate being the eternal and all-pervading Vishnu, whose essential nature is Existence and Consciousness. 'Names' and 'forms' are like golden ornaments and bracelets, and Vishnu is the gold".

Sloka 9

"The all-pervading akasha, Void or Emptiness appears to be limited on account of its association with various conditionings [upadhis] which are different from each other. Space becomes one on the destruction of these limiting adjuncts. So too, the non-dual Brahman, the omnipresent Truth which appears to be diverse on account of Its association with the various upadhis also becomes one, non-dual Reality on their destruction, through the act of sustained attention on these differentiated upadhis themselves".

Sloka 10

"Because of the unceasing mental activity of the perceiver, holder of individual consciousness, the diverse upadhis (differentiated forms) such as caste, colour, lifespan and position are super-imposed upon the Self (Atman), as flavour, colour, etc., are super-imposed on water".

Sloka 11

"The gross-body provided by karma, is consequence of past actions and made up of the five great subtle elements. It becomes dense when half of one of the subtle elements joins with an eighth part of each of the other four. The gross-body is known as the 'tent-of-experiences', the 'medium' through which pleasure and pain are experienced."

Sloka 12

"The five vital energies [pranas], the ten organs, the manas (mind) and budhi (intellect), formed from the rudimentary pure elements before their "five-fold division and mutual combination with one another" and this is the subtle body, the 'instruments-of-experience' of the individual, the "intermediate one" in the experience of pleasure and pain".

Sloka 13

"Ignorance or avidya, which is indescribable and without beginning, is the basis of the causal state. It is an upadhi superimposed upon the Atman. Be sure that the Atman is different to the three upadhis".

Sloka 14

"Because non-dual Consciousness is the basis of the five sheaths (koshas), the non-dual Atman appears with differentiated attributes, the same happens to glass on being endowed with colours such as red and blue, when it is superimposed upon red and blue cloth".

Sloka 15

"Through budhi, the discriminative self-analysis and logical thinking function of the mind, it is possible to distinguish the non-dual Brahman from the superimposed sheaths that enclose it, in the same way as one separates rice from the husk, bran, etc., with a mill stone".

Sloka 16

"Although the individual perceiver is not aware of the Omnipotent non-dual Atman as the substantial basis of all differentiated things, It is manifested in the mind associated with budhi, like a reflection in limpid water or an unmisted mirror".

Sloka 17

"Thanks to the activity of viveka it is possible to become aware that the non-dual Atman is non-different to the dense body, sense organs, mind, budhi and prakriti, and it is the witness of these functions, after the manner of a king."

Sloka 18

"Just as the moon gives the sensation of movement when a cloud passes before it, so also to minds lacking in viveka, discernment, the Atman seems to be active, when in truth the perception of the world is only a mental superimposition which involves the senses".

Sloka 19

"The dense body, senses and budhi occupy themselves with their respective activities, with Atman's inherent Consciousness as support just as men work with the support of the light inherent in the sun".

Sloka 20

"Some, because they lack viveka in their powers of discrimination, superimpose on the pure Atman, the Absolute Existence and Knowledge, all the varied functions of the dense body and the senses, just as common people attribute the characteristics of blueness and concavity to the sky".

Sloka 21

"Thus, as in trembling waters the moon's reflection seems to move, in the same way, owing to the lack of discernment, viveka, the agency of action, enjoyment and other limitations that only belong to the mind are delusively superimposed over Atman".

Sloka 22

"Attachment, desire, pleasure, pain, etc., are perceived to exist so long as the budhic function of the mind endures. They are not perceived in deep sleep when the mind ceases to exist. Therefore these differentiated functions belong to the mind alone and not to the Atman".

Sloka 23

"Just as luminosity is the nature of the sun, coolness is that of water and heat that of fire, so too the nature of the Atman is Eternity, Purity, Reality, Consciousness and Bliss".

Sloka 24

"The notion of "I know" is produced by the antakarana's indiscriminate blending of two aspects of the Atman: Existence and Consciousness".

Sloka 25

"The non-dual Atman never experiences any change, neither is budhi endowed with Consciousness. However, the ignorant man thinks the

Atman is identical to budhi, and as such falls prey to the illusion of considering himself the one who sees and the one who knows".

Sloka 26

"When one confuses the Atman with the individual, it is like taking a rope for a snake, and one experiences fear; when "It" realises it is not the individual but rather the Supreme Atman then fear is not experienced".

Sloka 27

"Atman illumines the reality of the mind and the sense organs, etc. just as a lamp illumines a jar or a pot, but these material-objects, upadhis, by themselves cannot illumine their own Self".

Sloka 28

"Just as a lighted lamp does not need another lamp to illumine its light, so too, Atman which is Knowledge in Itself needs no other Knowledge to know its Self".

Sloka 29

"By a process of negation of the upadhis through discernment, viveka and the help of the scriptural statement that says of Brahman: "It is not this, It is not this", the oneness of the individual soul, jiva, and the Supreme Self, Atman (as indicated by the great vedic aphorisms) is able to be realised".

Sloka 30

"The physical body along with differentiated subtle elements recreated by avidya, primal ignorance, and prakriti, whose illusory nature is identical to differentiated objects, are as perishable as bubbles. You have to realise, through constant discernment, viveka, that you are the Immaculate Brahman, completely distinct from your differentiated wrappings".

Sloka 31

"That which I Really Am is free of mutations such as birth, senility and death, as what I Really Am is different from this body; what I Really Am is unattached from all the objects of my senses, such as sound and taste, as in My essence I lack sensory organs".

Sloka 32

"That which I Really Am is free from attachment, sorrow, malice and fear, for what I Really Am is other than the mind. What Is lacks prana and mind, it is pure, it is higher than the high and is imperishable".

Sloka 33

"Prana, the mind and all the sense organs, ether, air, fire, water and earth, were born of That which I Am, because That is the substance and sustenance of all differentiated things".

Sloka 34

"That Which I Really Am lacks attributes and action, it is eternal and ever pure, it is immaculate and free from desire, there is no change; because of this it truly has no form and causes Me to be free always".

Sloka 35

"That which I Really Am fills all differentiated things, just as space (ether) fills within and without all differentiated objects. That which I really Am lacks change and is always the same. That which I Really Am is pure, unattached, immaculate and immutable".

Sloka 36

"That which I Really Am is That Supreme Brahman, which is Eternal, Immaculate and Free, it is One, indivisible and non-dual, whose nature is Happiness, Bliss, Knowledge and Infinity".

Sloka 37

"The cognitive impression "I am Brahman", created by uninterrupted comprehension and practice destroys ignorance and the agitation caused by it, just as rasayana medicine destroys disease".

Sloka 38

"Sitting in a solitary place, freeing the mind from all doubts and disconnecting the senses, meditate with unswerving attention on the infinite Atman, which is One without-a-second".

Sloka 39

"The wise one who has firm discernment, viveka, on constantly paying attention to the Atman, merges the entire world-of-objects in non-dual Reality, in the Atman".

Sloka 40

"They who have realised Supreme Bliss, discard all identification with the objects of names and forms. Thereafter, they dwell as the personification or embodiment of Infinite Consciousness and Bliss.".

Sloka 41

"Since the Supreme Self's nature is endless Bliss, there are no distinctions such as knower, knowledge and the object of knowledge. It does not admit such distinctions within Itself. It alone is Pure Comprehension".

Sloka 42

"By means of constant Meditation, comparable with the rubbing of sticks to obtain fire, the flame of knowledge and the permanence of comprehension burn ignorance completely down to ashes".

Sloka 43

"Just as the sun rises at dawn after darkness' destruction, Atman emerges with the destruction of ignorance when faced by the continued comprehension of the Self".

Sloka 44

"Although the Atman is an ever-present Reality, yet, because of ignorance, it is not realised. On the destruction of ignorance Atman is realised. It is like the ornament always worn around one's neck".

Sloka 45

"Brahman seems to be jiva, individuality, because of ignorance, maya, just as a tree trunk can be thought to be the ghost of a man. This jiva is destroyed when one succeeds in perceiving its Real nature".

Sloka 46

"The ignorance characterised by the notions 'I' and 'mine' is destroyed by the knowledge produced by the realisation of the true nature of That which is Real, just as the sun removes the wrong notion about the right directions to follow".

Sloka 47

"The yogi gifted with complete illumination sees through the eyes of discernment, viveka, the totality of the universe in his own Self and considers things as a whole and as one at the same time".

Sloka 48

"Nothing whatever exists other than the Atman: the tangible universe is truly Atman. As pots and jars are nothing but clay and cannot be said to be anything but clay, so too, to the enlightened one all that is perceived is the Self and nothing but the Self".

Sloka 49

"The Jivanmukta, gifted with the knowledge of the Self, abandons the identification with his upadhis because with the knowledge of his nature and perceiving that he is Existence, Wisdom and Absolute Bliss, he naturally becomes Brahman, just as larvae upon growing assume the nature of bees".

Sloka 50

"A yogi who becomes jivanmukta, liberated in life, after crossing the ocean of illusion and having slain the monsters of doubt and aversion, is united with peace and rests in the bliss only provided by the Realisation of the Self".

Sloka 51

"The jivanmukta, who abides within the Self, absolutely relinquishing all his illusory attachments and illusory external happiness and satisfied with the bliss derived from the Atman, shines uninterruptedly like a lamp placed inside a jar".

Sloka 52

"The contemplative sage, although he abides in the limitations of his upadhis, is not impregnated with their qualities. Knower of all, he lives like an ignorant person; unattached, he moves like the wind".

Sloka 53

"On the destruction of his vehicles, upadhis, at the moment of death, the contemplative one, the jivanmukta, is totally absorbed into Reality, Vishnu, the all-pervading spirit, like water into water, space into space and light into light".

Sloka 54

"Brahman should be conceived as that achievement beyond which there is no other superior achievement, as happiness beyond which there is no other superior happiness, as knowledge beyond which there is no other superior knowledge".

Sloka 55

"Brahman, the non-dual Absolute should be conceived as That which once seen, leaves nothing more to be seen, That which having become one leaves nothing left to be and That which, when known leaves nothing else to be known".

Sloka 56

"Realise that Brahman is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute, which is Non-dual, Infinite, Eternal and One and which fills all that is existent above, below and all that exists between".

Sloka 57

"Brahman should be realised as that Immutable Substratum defined by the Upanishads through discarding that which it "is not": it is not perishable, it is not destructible joy".

Sloka 58

"Deities such as Brahma and Indra taste only a particle of the unlimited bliss of Brahman and enjoy in proportion their share of that particle".

Sloka 59

"All objects are pervaded by Brahman. All actions are accompanied by Consciousness: therefore Brahman pervades everything as milk pervades butter".

Sloka 60

"It should be understood that Brahman is neither subtle nor dense, neither short nor long, without birth or change, without form, qualities, colour and name".

Sloka 61

"Brahman should be considered as the light which illumines the sun and all other astral orbs but which is not illumined by them. Brahman is That which causes all things to shine."

Sloka 62

"The Supreme Brahman shines by Itself, it pervades the entire universe inwardly and outwardly, just as fire permeates the inside and outside of a red hot ball of iron".

Sloka 63

"Brahman is other than the universe, yet there is nothing different to Brahman. If anything seems distinct from Brahman it would be like a mirage in the desert".

Sloka 64

"All that is perceived, or heard, is Brahman and nothing else but Brahman. Attaining the knowledge of this Reality, one sees the universe as the non-dual Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute".

Sloka 65

"Though Atman is pure Reality, Consciousness, Bliss and is ever-present everywhere, yet It is perceived by the eye-of-Comprehension alone: one whose vision is obscured by ignorance, agnana, does not see It, the all luminous Atman; as the blind do not see the resplendent sun".

Sloka 66

"The jiva, free from impurities, being heated in the fire of knowledge kindled by hearing qualified masters, its Self shines of itself like gold".

Sloka 67

"The Atman, the sun of knowledge that rises in the sky of the heart, destroys the darkness of ignorance. The All-pervading one sustains all and makes everything shine, including the Self".

Sloka 68

"He who renouncing all activities, who worships in the sacred and immaculate sanctuary of Brahman, which is free of all the limitations of time, space and direction, which is present everywhere, which is the destroyer of heat and cold and all other opposites, and which endows eternal bliss, becomes all-knowing and all-pervading and attains thereafter immortality".