

## **A step by step first exposure to advaita Through a dialogue of 1008 entries**

Important note: The following rambling conversation has been composed as an attempt to bring to the lay reader some truths of advaita, without venturing into long passages. So a conscious effort has been made to reduce each bit of the conversation to a single line on the web(with just eight exceptions). It has turned out to be a no-holds-barred dialogue, long and continuous. In the modern days of desire to learn ‘without tears’, this perhaps would carry a message to those of us who, inspite of their intelligence in everything pertaining to the world, think of themselves as dummies in advaita. Incidentally I imposed on myself another restriction, namely I will not exceed 1008 entries in this conversation. And thus it has been a useful ‘nidhidhyAsana’ (Contemplation on what I have learnt) exercise for me. And one may notice, the whole treatment goes in slow motion, step by step. Concepts are brought in, one step at a time. I think this is good for a purposeful nidhidhyAsana, especially for a beginner on the spiritual path. I apologise for not breaking it into smaller sections or chapters, because the continuous flow of thoughts would not admit breaks.

My PraNAms to all the Great Gurus of the world and the Guru of Gurus,  
Shri dakshhiNAmUrTi.

V. Krishnamurthy

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1. Shishhya: *Om namo gurubhyaH* (Prostrations to The Guru)
2. Guru : *JnAna-vairAgya-siddhir-astu* (May you achieve Wisdom and Dispassion)
3. S: I wish the painfulness in the world were unreal.
4. G: What makes you wish so?
5. S: Because I feel the pain.
6. G: Who is this that feels the pain?
7. S: I, myself.
8. G: Did you say 'yourself' or 'your self'?
9. S: What is the difference?
- 10.G: There is a lot of difference. But please answer my question.
  
- 11.S: I don't see any difference.
- 12.G: That is the problem; in fact it is a disease called '*samsAra*'.
- 13.S: I don't see it as a disease, but I see you are hinting at something.  
Can you explain?
- 14.G: Your self is different from yourself.
- 15.S: I see you are referring to that something called my self, which is not myself ?
- 16.G: You may better call it your Self, with a capital 'S'.
- 17.S: Where is it? I have not seen it or felt it.
- 18.G: You have never seen it because it is you yourself.
- 19.S: Just now you said there is a difference between myself and my Self.
- 20.G: But you said you don't see any difference.
  
- 21.S: So what is right? You are confusing me.
- 22.G: Good, that is where you have to start. State your confusion clearly.
- 23.S: What is the difference between myself and my Self?
- 24.G: One is perishable, the other is not.
- 25.S: I see. Yes, myself is perishable. But I am not clear why my Self is not perishable.
- 26.G: You are jumping the line.You have not yet accepted there is a Self other than yourself.
- 27.S: I thought you said that my Self is myself.

28.G: It depends on what you mean by the words ‘myself’ and ‘my Self’.

29.S: Are you not playing with words?

30.G: No. ‘yourself’ is what you ordinarily think you are. ‘your Self’ is what you are.

31.S: Then what I am is my Self. Is that right?

32.G: Yes, that is the final teaching of the Upanishads. Better to call it ‘The Self’.

33.S: What difference does it make to my daily life?

34.G: It makes this difference; if you don’t absorb this teaching, you are bound to suffer.

35.S: Are you referring to ‘me’ or , ‘my Self’ – which you are calling ‘The Self’.

36.G: The Self will never suffer; it is you who will suffer.

37.S: I am still not clear why you are making this distinction between ‘me’ and ‘my Self’.

38.G: When I talk to you as ‘you’ I am only talking to you as a body, with mind & intellect.

39.S: And in the other case?

40.G: I am referring to the Self or the *Atman* that is permanently within you – not the body, mind or intellect.

41.S: Is it then the *Atman* that is leaving the body at death?

42.G: *Atman* does not leave anything or come to anything.

43.S: Then what is it that leaves the body?

44.G: It is the manifestation of the *Atman* in the body, that leaves the body.

45.S: Where is this *Atman* manifested in my body?

46.G: It is not a physical entity that can be assigned a location in the body.

47.S: Then is it in my mind, brain or my intellect?

48.G: In one sense it is in none of these; in another sense it is everywhere.

49.S: How can that be?

50.G: Because without the *Atman*, neither the mind nor the intellect has any locus standi.

51.S: Why did you now leave out the body and the brain?

- 52.G: The mind and the intellect are more subtle than the visibly perishing body and brain.
- 53.S: Even those subtle things (mind and intellect) – can't they subsist without the *Atman*?
- 54.G: No. Without the presence of the Self or *Atman*, nothing in this world can subsist.
- 55.S: If nothing can subsist without the *Atman*, we must be able to feel *Atman* everywhere.
- 56.G: That is the point of the teaching. See *Atman* everywhere.
- 57.S: How do I see it? Nobody seems to be seeing it?
- 58.G: This is where the subject of Vedanta comes in.
- 59.S: So is it the contention of Vedanta that *Atman* is everywhere?
- 60.G: It is not just a contention. It is the Truth, the Reality.
- 61.S: How can it be proved to be the Truth?
- 62.G: What kind of proof are you looking for?
- 63.S: Of course, a rational, scientific proof.
- 64.G: But rationality and science are only products of the mind.
- 65.S: What is wrong with it?
- 66.G: Nothing is wrong; but the Truth of the Self is beyond the mind.
- 67.S: On what authority are you saying this?
- 68.G: On the authority of the Vedas and Upanishads.
- 69.S: OK. Let the Truth be beyond the mind; how then do we ever know the Truth of the Self?
- 70.G: By experiencing it.
- 71.S: What kind of experience? By the mind? You already said the body is perishable.
- 72.G: Mind also is perishable, though it takes a longer time. But the perishable mind serves as a useful tool.
- 73.S: Tool for what? To know the truth of the Self?
- 74.G: Yes. The perishable mind has to be used to seek the Imperishable Self.
- 75.S. There seems to be a logical fallacy here – Perishable thing seeking the Imperishable!
- 76.G. 'Seems to be' – that is right; the logical fallacy vanishes when you go deeper.
- 77.S: I don't understand.
- 78.G: The Perishable perishes in the Imperishable.
- 79.S: Looks like a conundrum.

80.G: Yes, scriptural statements will look like conundrums. We have to meditate on them.

81.S: I have heard this word 'meditation' all the time. Is this what meditation is all about?

82.G: In one sense, yes. But let us take up the subject of meditation at a later stage.

83.S: Then please explain to me how 'The Perishable perishes in the Imperishable'.

84.G: Like salt in water.

85.S: Then there would be no more salt. So does the Perishable vanish? Does only the Imperishable remain?

86.G: You got the point. The mind seeking to know the Truth, effaces itself, and ..

87.S: Becomes the Truth!

88.G: I like students who can comprehend so quickly!

89.S: But the whole thing looks like a made-up mathematical puzzle.

90.G: Puzzle certainly it is. It is the Grand puzzle of Life.

91.S: But I don't see where all this leads to, in real life.

92.G: Say 'in the reality of life'.

93.S: In the reality of life, I see pain and suffering all around.

94.G: Also some happiness.

95.S: Yes, happiness also; but happiness is so few and far between that it never surfaces.

96.G: Let us analyse this little happiness before we go to the 'suffering' part.

97.S: I am happy whenever I get what I wanted.

98.G: Were you happy when you wanted it?

99.S: Not fully. But I was excited at the thought of my pursuing what I wanted.

100. G: Were you happy before you started wanting it?

101. S: I don't understand the question; I think the question does not arise.

102. G: Yes, you are right. Happiness was not in question then .

103. S: 'Then' means?

104. G: Before you started wanting it, you were not unhappy, because there was no want.

105. S: I think you are trying to trip me by quibbling.

106. G: No, I am saying, the moment you wanted something, happiness receded from you.
107. S: But you are putting words in my mouth.
108. G: What words?
109. S: You are making me accept that I was happy before I started wanting something.
110. G: Certainly. Is there any doubt on that?
111. S: But I had other wants.
112. G: Let us go to the situation when you had your first want.
113. S: There is no such situation.
114. G: But you said you were happy sometimes.
115. S: Yes, life is a mixture of happiness and unhappiness.
116. G: Analyse how you were happy when you were happy.
117. S: I did not allow my 'want' thoughts to disturb me when I was happy.
118. G: You were happy, and the fact of not 'wanting' anything, continued your happiness.
119. S: Well, I think that may be the right way to put it.
120. G: Thus you started from the position of happiness, and a ripple of a 'want' disturbed it.
121. S: What are you leading me to?
122. G: It is 'want' that disturbs the happiness which is with you.
123. S: So if I am to continue to be happy, I should not 'want' anything. Is that what you are driving at?
124. G: You are right on the dot.
125. S: But it is an impossible task not to want anything.
126. G: First accept it in theory.
127. S: In other words, it is 'want' or 'desire' that makes me unhappy.
128. G: The man who has no wants or desires is perfectly happy.
129. S: What has all this to do with Vedanta which talks about the Self?
130. G: Everything. We have to analyse who is it that wants and makes himself unhappy.
131. S: I guess it is myself.
132. G: I am glad you used the right word – 'myself'.
133. S: I miss the point.

134. G: The Self has no wants and is always full of happiness or bliss.
135. S: You are asserting it without ascribing any reason.
136. G: Because the definition of the Self according to the scriptures implies that.
137. S: What is the definition?
138. G: The Self is Consciousness. The Self is Bliss.
139. S: This does not make any sense to me.
140. G: That is why we are going through this dialogue.
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141. S: If the Self is Bliss, then I should not have any suffering.
142. G: True. You have no suffering.
143. S: Guruji, it is not enough for you to say so. I must be able to say I have no suffering.
144. G: Who feels the suffering?
145. S: I, certainly.
146. G: Not so fast. In order to understand, let us take a simple example of a suffering.
147. S: Alright. Suppose somebody pinches me. I feel the pinch. Don't I?
148. G: Wait. Somebody pinches you. Strictly speaking, it is the body that is pinched.
149. S: But I feel it, because my mind recognises the pinching of my body.
150. G: So it is your mind that should suffer, not you.
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151. S: But my mind is mine.
152. G: That is the point. Your mind is yours, it is not you.
153. S: Are you not just hairsplitting?
154. G: No, the entire Vedanta depends on this. Your mind is not you.
155. S: But when my mind suffers, I suffer with it.
156. G: Vedanta says: Let the mind suffer or experience. Don't suffer or experience with it.
157. S: It is a tall order.
158. G: Who said it is not? The tall order is to bring your happiness back.
159. S: So Vedanta does not seem to remove my suffering; it allows my suffering to stay.
160. G: Vedanta intends to insulate you from your suffering.

161. S: What does that mean?
162. G: That which suffers is dissociated from you, the Self.
163. S: But in that case I have to be the Self.
164. G: Exactly. "Be your Self" say the scriptures. Then there is no suffering.
165. S: The remedy turns out to be more severe than the disease of suffering.
166. G: All that Vedanta tells you is to change your attitude to all experience.
167. S: When you say 'experience' do you mean both suffering and happiness?
168. G: Yes, whether it is happiness or otherwise, it is your attitude that is important.
169. S: Does it mean then, that I should simply be impervious to all experience?
170. G: Yes, that is the Gita teaching. You are not the experiencer.
171. S: According to Vedanta, then who is the experiencer?
172. G: The experiencer is the one who has identified with his body, mind, intellect (*BMI*).
173. S: Who is that one?
174. G: If there is one such.
175. S: It is not clear to me what you are saying.
176. G: If you don't identify yourself with your *BMI*, you are not the experiencer.
177. S: Who is this 'you' that is being talked about now?
178. G: That is a good question. We have to start afresh now.
179. S: Where do you want to start?
180. G: From the *BMI*. The *BMI* is your outer personality.
181. S: I see where you are going. The inner personality is the Self. Right?
182. G: Yes. But the Gita says there are two such selves (*Purushhas*).
183. S: What? I thought I was only one person. How can there be two selves for me?
184. G: There is only one Self. But we make the mistake of thinking that our *BMI* is the Self.



185. S: Earlier we said that the *BMI* is not the Self.
186. G: That is right. But almost all of us all the time make the mistake.
187. S: Make the mistake of what?
188. G: Of thinking that our *BMI* is the Self.
189. S: So what?
190. G: And that mistake originates a false self for us. This false self is the other Self.
191. S: In other words, we ourselves create a false self for each of us.
192. G: Yes. That false self, is termed the Perishable Self.
193. S: Then the real Self is the Imperishable Self.
194. G: Thus there are two, the kshhara *purushha* (perishable self) and the *akshhara purushha* (imperishable Self).
195. S: So the kshhara *purushha* is the result of identification with *BMI*.
196. G: And the *akshhara-purushha* is the Self, that is Consciousness, Bliss.
197. S: Now tell me who is the experiencer.
198. G: The kshhara *purushha* is the experiencer. Incidentally the *kshhara-purushha* is also known by the term *jlva*.
199. S: In other words, he who has identified with *BMI* is the experiencer.
200. G: Perfectly. Vedanta says: You are not the experiencer.
201. S: I see the reason now. It is because the real Self has no identification with *BMI*
202. G: So You, when you are not identified with the *BMI*, are no more the experiencer.
203. S: Shall we translate all this to the happiness-suffering syndrome?
204. G: Yes. It is the identification with the *BMI* that brings you an experience either way.
205. S: If there is no such identification?
206. G: There is no experience of happiness or suffering. You are what you are.
207. S: If there is no experience of happiness, then how do you say my Self is Bliss.

208. G: Experience is by the mind; it goes from one state to another.  
209. S: In the Self there is no mind to experience. Is that the reason?  
210. G: Yes. The Self is Bliss. That is what all scriptures say.
211. S: But what does it mean to say that the Self is Bliss?  
212. G: Bliss is our natural state.  
213. S: If I go and tell this to an ordinary man, he will not believe it.  
214. G: What is the natural characteristic of water?  
215. S: Coolness and liquidity.  
216. G: If water is hot, you will ask why it is hot. Won't you?  
217. S: Yes, I will. But I don't see how it is relevant now.  
218. G: The very fact that the hotness of water is questioned shows that hotness is not the natural characteristic of water.  
219. S: In fact the hotness disappears after a little time. To get the heat back one has to apply external force.  
220. G: When a fish is taken out of water it struggles to go back to its natural state of a watery atmosphere.
221. S: All this means that the unnatural state raises questions and implies struggle.  
222. G: Good analysis. When you are unhappy every one asks why you are unhappy.  
223. S: But when I am happy nobody asks me why I am happy.  
224. G: That is because happiness is your natural state.  
225. S: But I don't have the experience of happiness as my natural state.  
226. G: The moment you bring in the idea of experience, you are involving a mind.  
227. S: What is wrong with bringing in the mind?  
228. G: I shall take you to a situation where you are yourself nothing but bliss.  
229. S: I am looking forward to it.  
230. G: Do you usually sleep well?
231. S: Oh yes, I do. I sleep like a log.  
232. G: Were you happy then?  
233. S: It is a blissful experience.  
234. G: But to register the experience, mind should be there. Was your mind active when you were sleeping?  
235. S: Certainly not, unless I was dreaming.

236. G: Were you dreaming?
237. S: We were talking of the situation when I was sleeping like a log.
238. G: Good. So then how do you know you were happy then?
239. S: Well, it is only a memory after the event.
240. G: In order that it may be a memory, it has to be an experience by the mind, to be recalled after the event has passed.
241. S: What are you driving at? I am confused. The mind was not active then.
242. G: That inactive mind, brings back a memory of happiness, when it wakes up.
243. S: That is the riddle.
244. G: Scriptures say: The *jIva* which was one with the *BMI*, now goes back to the Self, during the sleep of the *BMI*.
245. S: But the Self is Bliss.
246. G: So the *jIva* is one with that reservoir of bliss, during the sleep of the *BMI*.
247. S: Interesting!
248. G: When the *BMI* wakes up, the *jIva* resumes its usual mistake of identification with *BMI*.
249. S: It sounds like a thriller now!
250. G: And the mind, with which the *jIva* is one now, borrows that taste of bliss with which the *jIva* was in contact.
251. S: You mean now the mind talks of happiness as if it were its own experience!
252. G: Wonderful. Shall we resume now the topic of the *BMI* and the *Atman*, the Self?
253. S: Is there a connection between them?
254. G: No. The *Atman* is unattached and unconnected to anything. It is alone.
255. S: Then why do we have to talk about it, when we are on the topic of *BMI*?
256. G: Because it is the *Atman* which gives life to *BMI*.
257. S: In what sense? In the sense that the *Atman* is life?
258. G: Let us not use the word 'life' in this context. It has already too many connotations.
259. S: Then what does the *Atman* do to the *BMI*?

260. G: It gives sentience.
261. S: What! Consciousness?
262. G: Yes, the mind will not be conscious but for the *Atman*.
263. S: What about the body?
264. G: A mysterious knotting of the *BMI* and the *Atman* takes place at the birth of the body.
265. S: Why do you call it mysterious?
266. G: Because even Vedanta says it cannot explain it.
267. S: But do they know why it takes place?
268. G: The why, probably. But the why and how of this knotting are both difficult questions to answer.
269. S: But this knotting is a fact?
270. G: For if not, we would have an impossible situation – of an inert *BMI* with a sentience borrowed from nowhere.
271. S. Does not sentience mean consciousness ?
272. G. In a sense, yes.
273. S: What is the *Atman* conscious of?
274. G. That the *Atman* is conscious of something is a wrong statement in advaita.
275. S: Why so?
276. G. *Atman* is Consciousness. There is no second object for it to be conscious of.
277. S. First my question is: What is Consciousness without the concept of ‘being conscious of’?
278. G. Let me try an analogy. Have you seen light, without any object that is lighted?
279. S. Do you mean light per se, without any object that is lighted?
280. G. Exactly. Whenever you say there is light, you mean only that objects are lighted.
281. S: But light produces a visual sensation alright.
282. G: Our problem here is whether objects have to be there or not for the presence of light.
283. S. Coming to think of it, yes, you are right. Light is independent of the lighted objects.
284. G: So do you accept that there can be light without any lighted objects?
285. S. Yes, if it is just a question of existence of light.

286. G. So also Consciousness exists without the necessity of objects to be conscious of.
287. S. Guruji, You have really given me a profound truth.
288. G. And Consciousness, say the upanishads, is *Atman*!
289. S: Earlier we concluded that *Atman*, the Self is Bliss.
290. G: Thus it is both: Consciousness and Bliss.
291. S: You also said there is no second object in the context of *Atman*. What is the idea?
292. G. Yes. *Atman* is one and one only, without any second. This is a statement from the Upanishads.
293. S: Does 'one' mean, it cannot have parts?
294. G: Right. Also, 'Without any second' means there is no object other than *Atman*.
295. S: What does 'one only' mean?
296. G: It means there is no second *Atman*.
297. S. What about the *Atman* in you and the other *Atmans* in the other bodies?
298. G: Your problem is because you are considering *Atman* as a finite package sitting in the body.
299. S. No. I understand *Atman* is pervading the entire body. But there may be other *Atmans* also.
300. G. Here is where you have to go back to the declaration: Consciousness is *Atman*.
301. S: Why can't there be two Consciousness entities?
302. G: Consciousness has no boundaries of space or time.
303. S: So the Consciousness within me and the Consciousness within you are the same?
304. G: That is the point. Let the mind in me and the mind in you be not confused. It may lead to absurd conclusions.
305. S. Does it mean then that the *Atman* in all bodies is the same?
306. G: In all animate bodies, yes.
307. S: What about the inanimate? What about the universe of matter?
308. G: They are all *Atman*.
309. S: What! Is matter also Consciousness? That cannot be.
310. G: You are able to see, now, that advaita is not just a dinner conversation matter!

311. S: In fact earlier you said *BMI* is not *Atman* and now you are saying all matter is *Atman*.
312. G: Very smart. Now I have to extend your horizon of knowledge before I answer this.
313. S: I thought we are coming to the end of the discussion.
314. G: We are just beginning. Let us look at the universe around us.
315. S: I see a vast expanse of space and multifarious objects in it.
316. G: How long do they last?
317. S: Well, some of them last my lifetime; but some of them, like the stars, last for ever.
318. G: Don't say 'for ever'. You know even stars have a lifetime.
319. S: But the universe lasts.
320. G: Here we have to go back to our scriptures. It is said the universe itself has a lifetime.
321. S: What if?
322. G: So nothing lasts for ever. Everything passes away.
323. S: I am prepared to accept it as an innocuous truth.
324. G: It is not innocuous if you think further about it.
325. S: Please guide me which way to think.
326. G: The universe not only passes away but in the course of its life, it keeps on changing.
327. S: Of course, everything is undergoing a change.
328. G: What is change?
329. S: Change is something that occurs when one state of existence transforms into another.
330. G: How do you become aware of it?
331. S: I become aware of it by measuring it against the backdrop of a constant state.
332. G: Wonderful. That constant state – does it ever change?
333. S: Well, everything changes – in the context of eternal time.
334. G: So let us understand it correctly. There must be something that is constant always.
335. S: I do not understand the 'always'.
336. G: Behind all sorts of all changes, there must be something that is constant, that is invariant.
337. S: What is that invariant constant?
338. G: That must be something that is independent of time and space.

339. S: Maybe, you are right. For otherwise, it will also change.
340. G: Good. We postulate therefore a basic entity that exists all the time and everywhere.
341. S: It is only a postulate.
342. G: No. The Vedas and Upanishads cry from the housetops that it is the Truth.
343. S: Either way it does not matter to me.
344. G: My dear, you cannot slight the Vedas like that.
345. S: Pardon me, Guruji. Then let us come back to that postulated basic entity.
346. G: Shall we give a name to that entity, for purposes of communication?
347. S: I have no objection.
348. G: Let us call it 'It' or 'That'.
349. S: May I submit that you may think of a more descriptive name?
350. G: The Upanishads speak of it as 'It' and 'That'. But they also call it '*Brahman*'.
351. S: Well, this is better!
352. G: What have you postulated about this *Brahman*?
353. S: That It never changes and It is everywhere and all the time.
354. G: One thing more.
355. S: Something more to be postulated?
356. G: No. From your own postulate it will follow.
357. S: What is it?
358. G: That It is infinite.
359. S: What happens if it is not so?
360. G: The postulated changeless character will not hold good.
361. S: Can you explain?
362. G: If It is finite, then addition of something from outside It will change the original 'It'.
363. S: So *Brahman* is infinite. O.K.
364. G: It is also the all-pervading Consciousness.
365. S: How come?
366. G: We have still to see quite a lot of that basic entity, '*Brahman*'.
367. S: You have still to tell me about the meaning of *Brahman*.

368. G: I shall tell you what it stands for and you will get the meaning yourself.
369. S: By our own postulation it is the basic entity that exists always and everywhere.
370. G: It stands for the One Reality that pervades everything, animate or inanimate.
371. S: I would like an analogy for this pervasiveness.
372. G: Like gold in a golden ring.
373. S: Because of this pervasiveness, shall we say it is the Cause of all that exists?
374. G: Not only that. It is itself Causeless, nameless and formless.
375. S: Why nameless? We have already named it *Brahman*.
376. G: We only followed the Upanishads. Any other name would have suited it also.
377. S: But it exists. Everything that exists has to have a name and a form.
378. G: Everything that exists belongs to the category of pictures painted on a screen; while, ...
379. S: I see, *Brahman* belongs to the category of the screen.
380. G: So *Brahman* is like the ocean and everything else is a wave on the ocean.
381. S: But the ocean itself has a base, the surface of the earth.
382. G: That is why, analogies have to be used carefully. No analogy should be extended unwisely.
383. S: So is the ocean-wave analogy as also the screen-picture analogy only to tell me what supports what?
384. G: Yes. *Brahman* is the substratum which never changes while everything else changes.
385. S: Like the movie screen which is the base for all the drama enacted on it.
386. G: That is a beautiful example. Hold on to it. We shall use it later.
387. S: Can we give a better analogy?
388. G: *Brahman* is beyond all analogies. It cannot even be imagined.
389. S: Is it because there is nothing else other than *Brahman*?
390. G: It is because it is beyond space.



391. S: I get the idea, but still I would appreciate an explanation.
392. G: Imagine space without earth, without water, without fire and without air. Can you?
393. S: Certainly, I can.
394. G: Now can you imagine something outside of space?
395. S: That is pretty difficult.
396. G: That is what I meant. Earth to water, to fire, to air, to space is a passage from the grossest to the subtlest.
397. S: The negation of each grosser entity is possible within the framework of the more subtle one.
398. G: Certainly. But once we reach *AkAsha*, space, the negation of that cannot be done by the finite mind.
399. S: And *AkAsha* is to be merged in something more subtle, that is, *Brahman*?
400. G: The Vedas only declare the existence of this entity and call it '*sat*', that is, Existence!
401. S: Shall we therefore say that *Brahman* is the commonality of everything there is?
402. G: Now go back to the *Atman*, the Consciousness in all that is animate.
403. S: I see where you are leading me. You are going to connect this *Atman* with that *Brahman*?
404. G: You have just missed the mark. Not just 'connect'; I am going to say They are the same.
405. S: What! *Atman* and *Brahman* are the same?
406. G: Exactly. This is the fundamental conclusion of the Upanishads.
407. S: It is too much!
408. G: What is your reservation?
409. S: *Atman* is our inner essence. *Brahman* is what is everywhere. How can they be the same?
410. G: What is everywhere can be in your core also!
411. S: That doesn't seem to be enough logic for me.
412. G: That is why our elders resort to the authority of the Upanishads for this.
413. S: But the concept of *Brahman* is then again unclear.
414. G: Well, you cannot hope to understand *Brahman* purely by your intellect.

415. S: How else do I understand it?
416. G: *Brahman* is not an object of knowledge.
417. S: Then what is it?
418. G: It is itself pure knowledge.
419. S: You are only playing with words.
420. G: No. *Brahman* cannot be known in the usual way by which everything else is known.
421. S: Even by observation and experiment?
422. G: Because, *Brahman* is beyond cause and effect, substance and attribute.
423. S: Is it then just a void?
424. G: Not at all, because it is a bundle of consciousness.
425. S: Then how are we supposed to become familiar with it?
426. G: Why familiarity? You are It.
427. S: You mean I am *Brahman*?
428. G: Of course. But you have to qualify that 'I'.
429. S: In what way?
430. G: The 'I' has been covered and camouflaged by so many other things.
431. S: Earlier you said there are two selves, namely the outer (*BMI*) and the Inner.
432. G: The Inner Self is the *Atman*. It witnesses all your actions but is never involved in any of them.
433. S: Is that the one which is the same as *Brahman*?
434. G: Yes. We shall discuss that point later in more detail.
435. S: Now that you have mentioned 'actions', I have several questions.
436. G: You may ask them. But remember to include your thoughts in the category of 'actions'.
437. S: How can actions and thoughts belong to the same category?
438. G: Because thoughts are also actions -- actions of the mind.
439. S: Who is responsible for my thoughts and actions – most of which I would like to disown?
440. G: You can never disown any of your thoughts or actions. You have to be responsible for them.
441. S: In what way?
442. G: Thoughts and actions leave their *vAsanAs* in your mind.

443. S: What are *vAsanAs*?
444. G: *VAsanAs* are imprints of earlier tastes and tendencies. They form the cause of future birth.
445. S: And the state of no future birth is supposed to be *moksha*!
446. G: *Moksha*, release from births, cannot be attained until *vAsanAs* are exhausted.
447. S: How do I exhaust all my *vAsanAs*?
448. G: It is a good question. But let us do some organization of our discussion.
449. S: I am ready.
450. G: As you exhaust earlier *vAsanAs* you also acquire newer *vAsanAs*.
451. S: That is unavoidable.
452. G: But there is a strategy to avoid this acquisition.
453. S: I thought Vedanta is far from being a game of strategies!
454. G: But Lord Krishna is a strategist. He tells you how to avoid future *vAsanAs* sticking to you.
455. S: You mean in His Gita?
456. G: Yes. He says: Do your actions with detachment.
457. S: I have heard this word very often in religious expositions. Please tell me about it, Guruji.
458. G: The word 'non – attachment' is more expressive. Let us use it.
459. S: Does non-attachment mean that we should not be attached to anything?
460. G: It is the attitude of non-attachment that is recommended.
461. S: But if I am not attached to my work, how do I do it efficiently?
462. G: Actually only then you can do it efficiently.
463. S: It is perplexing. How can that be?
464. G: Because attachment will cloud the issues, as it did for Arjuna on the battlefield.
465. S: But how does Vedanta resonate with this idea of non-attachment?
466. G: It is Vedanta that gives the right rationale for non-attachment.
467. S: Shall I try to reason it out?
468. G: Go ahead, that is what I like.

469. S: Vedanta says that there are two selves in me: the perishable *BMI* and the imperishable *Atman*.
470. G: You have begun well.
471. S: The *Atman* is changeless, so does not do any action.
472. G: All action is done by the *BMI*.
473. S: But it is the Self that motivates the action.
474. G: No, the Self does not motivate the action. In the presence of the Self action takes place.
475. S: So who is responsible for the action: the Self or *BMI*?
476. G: *BMI* cannot act; it is inert.
477. S: Then it is the Self that is responsible.
478. G: That is where you miss a subtle point. There are two selves.
479. S: A self which identifies with *BMI* and a self which does not.
480. G: You be the Self which does not so identify.
481. S: But then who acts?
482. G: Action happens in the presence of You, namely the Self which does not identify with *BMI*.
483. S: But then I will become responsible.
484. G: No, You are only a witness, a silent non-participating, non-attached witness!
485. S: You mean: Let my mind think, Let my hand act ... Still should I remain just a witness?
486. G: Yes. That is the meaning of your identifying with the Inner Self.
487. S: This is walking on razor's edge!
488. G: That is why a Krishna had to explain that strategy!
489. S: Looks like we are cheating ourselves!
490. G: There is no cheating here. In the presence of the Inner Self, because of that presence, action takes place.
491. S: In any case the doer is I myself, right?
492. G: No. You are not the doer. Your attitude is '*na ahaM kartA*'. "I am not the doer".
493. S: But with this posture, I can go and kill somebody and say "I have not killed"!
494. G: First of all it is not a posture. But tell me, why would you kill somebody?

495. S: Because I need to kill. I want to.
496. G: What is the need?
497. S: Oh, it could be several things. Revenge, maybe.
498. G: That is it. By bringing things like revenge, jealousy, etc. you have brought in attachment.
499. S: Attachment to what?
500. G: Attachment to the result of your action.
501. S: What is wrong with it?
502. G: Then you are not in identity with the Inner Self. The Inner Self is indifferent to all results; and it has no attachments.
503. S: But suppose I need to kill because it is my duty, like that of a soldier on the front.
504. G: Are you doubly sure that you are only doing your duty and you have no hate of the object of your hurt?
505. S: You mean, like a doctor on the surgery table?
506. G: Yes, that is a right example.
507. S: So if hate is not there, is killing right when done as a duty?
508. G: It is on that basis, the military justifies itself.
509. S: You are now entering the political arena.
510. G: No, you are missing the most important point about the state of the mind.
511. S: What is it?
512. G: There should be no hate, no attachment. Then the sin or otherwise of the action does not devolve on you.
513. S: Is this what is known as Karma yoga?
514. G: Karma Yoga builds up on this idea and gives you a methodology to act up to this.
515. S: What is that methodology?
516. G: It is known as '*yajna*'.
517. S: I have no clear idea what it is. But I have heard the word.
518. G: How does a dedicated nurse in a hospital work?
519. S: You said 'dedicated'. So she must be doing her work excellently well.
520. G: Does she have any self-interest?
521. S: Maybe she is interested in her monthly pay.
522. G: Suppose she works for the love of it and does not receive any salary.

523. S: She must be really a very dedicated soul.
524. G: Now what would you say about her work?
525. S: She must be great!
526. G: Leave aside the appreciation. Here is somebody working for the sake of work and is not having any self-interest.
527. S: Is this called the *yajna*-type of work?
528. G: Yes. Gita says every action should be done with a *yajna* spirit.
529. S: Easier said than done.
530. G: As usual Krishna tells you how. Dedicate all your actions to God.
531. S: I can certainly dedicate all my actions to God, but still be doing wrong things.
532. G: Dedication means you do only that type of work which your God of dedication would like you to do.
533. S: And avoid that kind of work which that God would not want me to do – I can see the game.
534. G: Perfectly right. Dedication means voluntary acceptance of discipline for the sake of your object of dedication.
535. S: The concept of *yajna* is really great!
536. G: Not just great. It is the greatest contribution of Hinduism to the ways of living for the whole world.
537. S: But what is the point of all this, except to say it is good?
538. G: The bottom line is this. By doing every work as a *yajna*, you avoid the *vAsana* of the work sticking to you.
539. S: Where did '*vAsana*' come here in this picture?
540. G: We were saying that when you work with detachment, sin or otherwise of the action would not devolve on you.
541. S: Does the *yajna* attitude give you detachment?
542. G: Exactly. When you dedicate your action to your God, it means you have no self-interest.
543. S: But aren't you interested in the result of your action?
544. G: You are like an actor on the stage. Result on the stage, of the action on the stage, is the Director's responsibility.
545. S: Oh! Here the Director is God! But Besides the example of a hospital nurse, can I have other examples of this?
546. G: During the pre-independence times of India, many of our freedom fighters had that dedication.

547. S: Some of them were not believers in God. Who or What was their God of dedication?
548. G: Mother India or *BhArat-mAtA* was their Goddess of dedication.
549. S: They even laid their lives for Her sake.
550. G: When every action is done in this *yajna* fashion, work becomes worship.
551. S: What is so great about worship? Why worship? Why God?
552. G: Are you taking me into a discussion of God?
553. S: I was only waiting for this opportunity.
554. G: Articulate your doubts.
555. S: Earlier we concluded that *Brahman* is the Ultimate and it is nameless and formless.
556. G: Certainly. So what?
557. S: Then why do we worship several Gods and Goddesses with different names and forms?
558. G: *Brahman* is infinite in existence, infinite in knowledge and infinite in Bliss.
559. S: If *Brahman* were infinite in Bliss and is also all-pervading, then Bliss should be all-pervading.
560. G: Of course it is.
561. S: Don't tell me that, Guruji. We have only to look at the tragedies in the world.
562. G: Tragedies are natural in world-life. They cannot but be there. You have to transcend them to see the Bliss.
563. S: It looks like escapism from reality.
564. G: I am not asking you to run away from it.
565. S: What else does 'transcending' mean?
566. G: As a citizen of the world your duty is to go and do your best, first to prevent and then remedy, the tragedies.
567. S: Then why are you asking me to look beyond them?
568. G: Looking beyond is not looking away. You should not turn your head the other way.
569. S: You are puzzling. Please make it simple.
570. G: Be in the world. Be an honest citizen. Do your duty. But have an attitude of transcendence.
571. S: How does that help?

572. G: It helps in your ascent to spirituality.
573. S: You have not yet told me why I have to be spiritual.
574. G: I thought you showed interest in spirituality.
575. S: I was only exhibiting an academic curiosity.
576. G: An academic curiosity would only lead to scholarship; it would not lead you to *Mokshha*.
577. S: I apologise, Guruji. I stand corrected.
578. G: In fact, in order to absorb advaita, there are four prerequisite qualifications prescribed by Shankara.
579. S: I would like to know them, certainly.
580. G: First, a capacity to discriminate between what is permanent and what is ephemeral.
581. S: Even the beginning seems tough!
582. G: Secondly, a dispassion towards desire for acquisitions, here or in the world hereafter.
583. S: I see why you played down my academic curiosity!
584. G: The third one is an intense anguish for obtaining release from the cycle of births and deaths.
585. S: It is easy to agree with this, but it is the intensity of feeling that is in question .
586. G: And a conglomerate of six qualities: Equanimity, Self-control, Self-withdrawal, Endurance, Tranquillity and Faith.
587. S: Blessed are those indeed, who have all these!
588. G: Let us now come back to the topic of transcendence of transience.
589. S: You mean whatever is transient must be transcended?
590. G: Good. The scriptures have a beautiful way of saying this.
591. S: I would like to hear that.
592. G: All that is transient is called *mAyA*, in Vedanta.
593. S: I thought *mAyA* meant Illusion.
594. G: What is illusion?
595. S: Illusion is something which appears but is actually non-existent.
596. G: Then *mAyA* is not Illusion.
597. S: Then all those expositors of Vedanta, who translate *mAyA* as Illusion, are wrong?
598. G: It is not a question of translation; it is a question of what impression is conveyed.



599. S: So if *mAyA* conveys the meaning of illusion, meaning appearance of falsity, then that is not right?
600. G: *mAyA* simply means whatever is transient, that is, comes and goes.
601. S: What about a dream?
602. G: Yes, dream is *mAyA*. Our scriptures say that the whole universe of creation is a *mAyA*.
603. S: Does it mean then that we are all living in *mAyA*?
604. G: Don't ask that as if you are surprised. Your surprise is because you are still thinking that *mAyA* is falsity.
605. S: If *mAyA* is not falsity, then is it real?
606. G: I told you whatever is transient is *mAyA*. Our life comes and goes. Happiness and suffering come and go.
607. S: Then in that case the world is also a *mAyA*; because it comes and goes.
608. G: Therefore the transience of the *mAyA* has to be transcended.
609. S: How is that possible?
610. G: How did *mAyA* originate?
611. S: I know my dream originates from me.
612. G: But the origin of the Cosmic *mAyA* by which the world came into existence, is not known.
613. S: Don't the Vedas say something about it?
614. G: They say it is the work of *Ishvara*, God.
615. S: Where did this *Ishvara* come from now?
616. G: *Ishvara* is man's conception of *Brahman*.
617. S: I don't get you.
618. G: Now comes the punchline of advaita!
619. S: I am all alert!
620. G: *Brahman* is attributeless. In particular, nameless and formless. It is never the object of perception or thought. But man's mind finds it difficult to grasp that impersonality. Anytime he thinks of *Brahman*, he has already made it an object of thought. Either he gives it an anthropomorphic form or he gives it a name. Either way what he is doing is he is thinking of a *Brahman* with attributes. It is called *saguNa Brahman*, commonly known as *Ishvara* – equivalent to the Almighty God of all religions. The attributeless *Brahman* is known as *nirguNa-Brahman*.

621. S: But in reality, what is the contention of advaita? Is *Brahman nirguNa* or *saguNa*?
622. G: *Brahman* is *nirguNa*.
623. S: Then why do we at all need a *saguNa Brahman*?
624. G: We cannot but. You saw that just now.
625. S: Still this impersonal *Brahman* along with a personal substitute bothers me.
626. G: What would you have?
627. S: Only the impersonality.
628. G: Then you cannot even talk about it. The definition of *Brahman* would not allow any duality.
629. S: Are you saying that *Ishvara* concept comes only in the case of duality?
630. G: How else would *Ishvara* arise?
631. S: Then advaita, which means non-duality, should not have any concept of *Ishvara*.
632. G: Other than *Ishvara* there is no guide for us to reach *Brahman* or to grasp the basic non-duality.
633. S: But a worship of *Ishvara* would mean we are coming down to duality.
634. G: “*na anyaH panthA ayanAya vidyate*”. There is no other road to *Moksha*.
635. S: Is that the reason why we are worshipping several Gods and Goddesses?
636. G: That is the philosophical reason.
637. S: But the idea of several Gods completely throws overboard the concept of non-duality!
638. G: You must know they are only different names and forms of the same Ultimate.
639. S: But the Puranas speak of multifarious stories of the different Gods.
640. G: You must have also noted that in each such case the God of that Purana is raised to the status of *Brahman*.
641. S: Does it mean then they are all various manifestations of *Brahman*?
642. G: Choose your style of interpretation. It does not matter so long as you are not deluded by the names and forms.

643. S: Yes. If *Ishvara* arises in the way you have described, then He is also coming and going. Is that also *mAyA*?
644. G: Yes, but with a difference. In the case of God He controls His *mAyA*. Whereas we are in *mAyA*'s control.
645. S: Can *mAyA* be considered as God's Potential?
646. G: In a sense, yes. In fact, two facets of Energy (*shakti*) are associated by us with *Brahman*.
647. S: Is this what is called *PrakRti*?
648. G: Yes. There is a *parA-prakRti* and there is an *aparA-prakRti*. 'parA' is supreme and 'aparA' is not-so-supreme.
649. S: I have heard them talked about as *parA-shakti* and *aparA-shakti*.
650. G: You are right. It is *aparA-prakRti* that corresponds to *mAyA*.
651. S: Is it the source, origin of all matter and the universe?
652. G: In Vedanta cosmology, it is the qualitative *guNa* or *svabhAva* from which all matter arises.
653. S: Whereas, in Physics, it is the quantitative matter, their weight, substance and constituents, that are fundamental.
654. G: These *guNas* are inherent in *aparA-prakRti* (Cosmic Energy). It is what gives matter its substance.
655. S: In other words, Energy is self-existent and Matter is the product of this omni-present Energy.
656. G: Whereas, in Physics, it is the other way.
657. S: I see now, in Vedanta, *PrakRti* is the source of all matter in the universe.
658. G: For that reason, *PrakRti* is also called *PradhAnaM*, the Fundamental.
659. S: But it is very subtle, isn't it?
660. G: Yes, it is the unmanifest thing that manifests into everything. Therefore it is also called *avyaktaM* (unmanifest).
661. S: But it is not manifest all the time.
662. G: It alternates between manifestation and unmanifestation. So gets the name of *kshhara*, the Perishable.
663. S: Is this then the Perishable *purushha* (*kshhara-purushha*) in us, that you referred to earlier.
664. G: No. Wait. The spiritual undercurrent vibrating in all beings, called *jIva*, is under a matter envelopment.

665. S: I see. The matter envelopment, that is perishable, comes from *PrakRti*.
666. G: *JIva* itself, our spirit component, is a fragment of the *Cit-shakti* (Pure Consciousness) of *Brahman*.
667. S: I thought you said there are two *shaktis*, *parA-shakti* and *aparA-shakti*.
668. G: Yes. The *parAshakti* has three facets: Desire (*IcchA*), Action (*KriyA*) and Consciousness (*jnAna* or *cit*).
669. S: Is *parA-shakti* the source of our *jIva*?
670. G: *JIva*, the *kshhara-purushha* in us, is just an atomic fragment of that Power of Consciousness (*cit-shakti*).
671. S: So that is why our essential content is Consciousness. Is this our *akshhara-purushha*, the Witness in us?
672. G: Exactly. It is also called *kUTastha*, the One which remains unchanged like the anvil in a smithy.
673. S: If I remember right, the Gita talks of a third *purushha*, namely, *purushhottama*.
674. G: The *Purushhottama* is the supreme who appears as the other two *purushhas*.
675. S: Can I have a picture that incorporates all the three *purushhas* and their roles?
676. G: The roles are actually three poises of the same *purushhottama*. The *kshhara-purushha* – who is the result of identification of the *jIva* with the *BMI* – reflects the varied workings of *PrakRti* and thinks of himself as the ego-doer of works. He is the one that remembers ‘I slept well last night’. So He is *saguNa*, personal. On the other hand when the *Purushha* takes the poise of *akshhara*, he is *nirguNa*, impersonal. He is dissociated from the doings of the *guNas*. He is aware that *prakRti* is the doer and himself is only the witnessing self. The *purushhottama* creates, sustains and dissolves, through His *prakRti* and manifests in the *jIva*. In the *akshhara*, He is untouched and indifferent. In the *kshhara* He is the immanent Will and the present active Lord.
677. S: It is all pretty complicated. Why don’t you give some analogies?
678. G: Certainly. Let the entire space represent the *Purushhottama*. Then the space within a jar is the *akshhara-Purushha*.
679. S: That fits in with the *Purushhottama* appearing as the *akshhara-Purushha*, just because of the limitation of the jar.

680. G: Now fill up the jar with water. Outer space is reflected in that water. This reflected space is the *kshara-Purushha*.
681. S: What goes on in the reflected space due to vibrations in the water, does not affect the jar-space, the *akshhara*.
682. G: Not only that. The reflected space, the *kshara*, hides the very presence of the jar-space, the *akshhara*.
683. S: Wonderful. When you throw the water away, the jar-space comes to light.
684. G: Exactly. That water is our mind. The Supreme, reflected in our mind, is what makes us the *jIva*, the *kshara*.
685. S: When there is no separate thing as mind – water in the jar – the *akshhara* shows up by itself.
686. G: There you have the entire picture.
687. S: PraNAms, Guruji, That makes matters clear! Now I think we can resume our discussion of *Cit-shakti*.
688. G: *Ishvara* Himself is another fragment of that *Cit-shakti*. He is *Brahman* conditioned by our intellect (*cit*).
689. S: Is *Ishvara* then the base for all the beings in the universe?
690. G: Yes. All beings are in Him, says Krishna in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gita.
691. S: But I have heard that He immediately appears to contradict Himself.
692. G: True. You seem to be very familiar with all controversial things.!
693. S: Krishna says in the very next *shloka*: “Beings are not in Me”. Guruji, You have to clarify this for me!
694. G: Are you familiar with the snake-rope analogy?
695. S: Certainly. A rope appears as a snake or a streak of water in dim light.
696. G: I bring the light and I now question you: ‘Where was the snake?’. What would you reply?
697. S: On the rope.
698. G: Now I ask: ‘Was the snake there?’
699. S: No, Guruji, it was never there!
700. G: Now the same thing happens with the Lord’s statements.
701. S: I don’t think I fully understand it.

702. G: If you ask the Lord: 'Where are all the beings?', what would He reply?
703. S: 'They are in Me'.
704. G: But if you then ask Him: 'Were they ever there?'....
705. S: He will have to say 'They were never there. Only I was there and am there.'
706. G: This is exactly what is happening in that Gita *shloka*. This is the beauty of the great *mAyA* of *Ishvara*.
707. S: Is that why we have to transcend *mAyA* or *PrakRti* to reach *Brahman*?
708. G: Exactly.
709. S: How do we transcend *mAyA*? Through the use of our intellect?
710. G: Intellect is not enough. Intellect is for doing *Atma-vicAra*, that is, intellectual enquiry about the *Atman*.
711. S: What will this enquiry do?
712. G: It will churn the mind thoroughly and bring all the dirt to the surface.
713. S: Is our mind then like a trash can that we can empty at will?
714. G: I wish it were. You cannot throw away the mental dirt by that means. You can only purify them.
715. S: How do we do that?
716. G: By pouring continuously into that reservoir of the mind, thoughts of God and of noble things.
717. S: Guruji, may I request you to go back to explain *mAyA* further? It is really very tricky.
718. G: You are not the only one who feels so. The entire world feels it so.
719. S: Let me particularise a few questions on *mAyA*.
720. G: That would help me too.
721. S: Is *mAyA* real or unreal?
722. G: You have asked the most difficult question first. *mAyA* is neither real nor unreal.
723. S: How can that be?
724. G: It is real because we see the effects of *PrakRti* existing before us.
725. S: It is also not real because, ...
726. G: Being of the nature of transience, it vanishes in due time.

727. S: If something vanishes after a certain time, is it not taken to be real?
728. G: The word 'real' has to be carefully handled. On one side there is the absolute reality of *Brahman*.
729. S: Because it is ever there and its presence can never be negated or denied.
730. G: Yes. On the other extreme there is an absolute unreality like, say, a hare's horn, or, the son of a barren woman.
731. S: Actually they don't exist at all.
732. G: That is why it is called absolute unreality. The Sanskrit term is "*asat*". It is absolute non-existence.
733. S: Then '*sat*' means reality?
734. G: In advaita '*sat*' means absolute reality, the Sanskrit being "*pAramArthika satyaM*".
735. S: What about the reality of the world?
736. G: It comes between '*sat*' and '*asat*'. It is neither '*sat*' nor '*asat*'. '*vyAvahArika satyaM*' operational reality.
737. S: What about dream reality?
738. G: Dream is real only to the dreamer and during the dream only. It is subjective reality, "*prAtibhAsika satyaM*".
739. S: So there are four kinds of reality?
740. G: All that come in between '*sat*' and '*asat*' are bunched under the term '*mithyA*'.
741. S: So '*mithyA*' includes both operational reality of the world and the subjective reality of the dream. Is that right?
742. G: Yes, *mAyA* belongs to the order of reality called '*mithyA*'. It is neither '*sat*' nor '*asat*'.
743. S: The way you have described it implies that the world belongs to the '*mithyA*' type of reality.
744. G: Yes. That is why Shankara's famous quote says: "*brahma satyaM, jagat mithyA*".
745. S: I have heard it translated as '*Brahman* is the reality, the universe is unreal'.
746. G: That translation would be wrong if you mean by 'unreality' the absolute unreality called '*asat*'.
747. S: Can you elaborate this further?
748. G: In all cases of '*mithyA*', the 'is-ness' is not questionable. But the understanding of 'what it is' is wrong.

749. S: But I think there are still some loose ends.
750. G: Like?
751. S: Is creation by *Ishvara* real or not?
752. G: Creation also belongs to the ‘*mithyA*’ category, neither absolutely real nor absolutely unreal.
753. S: But within the *mithyA* category, there seem to be several shades of difference in reality.
754. G: In fact, everything that is made up from something else, has a lesser permanence than what it is made of.
755. S: Yes, clay is more permanent than a clay-pot.
756. G: If you keep pursuing this idea of permanence relentlessly, you will find all except the Absolute is impermanent.
757. S: But I was referring to the shades of difference in reality, for instance, the reflection in a mirror.
758. G: It belongs to the category of subjective reality, within all impermanence, that is, *mithyA*.
759. S: Is there any other?
760. G: You may recall the standard example of a rope appearing as a snake, in a dimly lighted environment.
761. S: That is also subjective reality.
762. G: Yes. The appearance of a snake is only real to the observer of that appearance during the appearance.
763. S: And it vanishes when the environment is lighted.
764. G: It is said that the existence of the universe itself is like this appearance of snake on the rope.
765. S: What corresponds to the rope here?
766. G: *Brahman*, of course.
767. S: In other words, there is only *Brahman*, everywhere?
768. G: Certainly. We see the universe, instead of *Brahman*, erroneously.
769. S: What is the cause of this error?
770. G: Our own Ignorance.
771. S: But Man has been seeing this universe ever since he first appeared on this earth.
772. G: That is why the Ignorance is called ‘beginningless’ – “*anAdi*” in Sanskrit.



773. S: We know when it started – I told you, when man first came on this earth.
774. G: In Hindu Vedanta, there is no first, for these things. Because Time is cyclic. Creation and Dissolution recur.
775. S: That explains the “*anAdi*” nature of Ignorance. But Ignorance of what?
776. G: Ignorance of two things: “I am the *Atman*” and “*Atman* is *Brahman*”.
777. S: I would like to think about these two statements more carefully.
778. G: To help you think and contemplate, the Vedas have given them in four ‘*mahAvAkyas*’.
779. S: I would love to understand them.
780. G: Each of the *mahAvAkyas*, incorporate both of the above two statements of which man, by nature, is ignorant.
781. S: One interruption. Before we try to remove the ignorance, should we not find the cause of the Ignorance?
782. G: That is where even your scientific spirit would not help you in Vedanta.
783. S: I don’t get you.
784. G: The cause of the Ignorance is one of the few things declared to be unexplainable.
785. S: How can Vedanta ignore this aspect of Ignorance?
786. G: They say Ignorance is the effect of *mAyA*.
787. S: And they get away with it?
788. G: There are two powers of *mAyA* that do havoc. One veils the Truth. Another projects what is other than Truth.
789. S: The veiling of Truth by *mAyA* is understandable. But it is the projection that is more puzzling.
790. G: Let us go to the different analogies for this relationless relationship of the projected Universe and *Brahman*.
791. S: I know already four: Snake on a rope; Dream; Reflection in a mirror; Movie on a screen.
792. G: There are some more: Water in a mirage; Silver in the mother-of-pearl; Beads strung together on a string.
793. S: The last one seems to be the easiest.
794. G: But it helps the understanding of a delicate principle called “*anvaya* and *vyatireka*”.

795. S: I have not heard of this.
796. G: “*anvaya*” is inclusion: The beads together cannot hold unless you conceive the substratum of the string.
797. S: And what is “*vyatireka*”?
798. G: The string can hold by itself without the beads. This is the ‘exclusion’ of the beads.
799. S: I don’t see clearly the connection of this with *Brahman* and the universe.
800. G: The Self is the string in which every non-Self is strung like beads. The fact that the Self is the continuity or connection part of the string in all that is non-self is “*anvaya*”. The non-self is dependent on the Self for their appearance as non-self, just as the beads are dependent on the string for their appearance in a line. The fact that the Self itself is still separate from the non-self is “*vyatireka*”. The Self is independent of the non-self, just as the string is independent of the beads. Again, the existence of the Self in deep sleep while the *BMI* is dormant is *anvaya* (accordance). That the Self is conscious independently of the *BMI*, as in deep sleep, is *vyatireka* (divergence).
801. S: My praNAms to those seers who saw all this.!
802. G: Let us get on with our analogies. Water in mirage and Silver in mother of pearl are both of one kind.
803. S: In both cases the appearance is well-known and repetitive. In both cases there is no medium involved.
804. G: But in the case of the reflection in a mirror the mirror happens to be the medium.
805. S: Am I allowed to do some more analysis of these analogies?
806. G: Go ahead.
807. S: Rope appears as a snake. Better lighting shows it as only rope.
808. G: So also *Brahman* appears as the universe. A Guru gives the better light by pointing out the Truth.
809. S: OK. After you have told me the Truth and I have understood it, still I see only the universe, not *Brahman*. Why?
810. G: To see this you have to go to the analogy of the water in the mirage or the silver in mother-of-pearl.
811. S: I see. In both cases even after knowing the Truth, the same wrong appearance stares me in the face.

812. G: But even here there is an objection. You can't use either the water in the mirage or the silver in the mother-of-pearl.
813. S: You mean the water will not quench my thirst and the silver will not get me any money?
814. G: Yes. But the water in the universe quenches my thirst. And the silver in the universe gets me money.
815. S: Well, that means the analogies are not perfect.
816. G: In fact there is no perfect analogy. Still let us continue our study. Now go to the dream analogy.
817. S: What about it?
818. G: In the dream, there is (dream) water which will quench your (dream) thirst.
819. S: I think I am missing something.
820. G: If the universe, which is only an appearance, satisfies many of your needs, the dream also is of the same kind. Whatever thirst you have within the dream, there is water in the dream that quenches your thirst. The silver in the dream gets you money in the dream. So the dream analogy is a fairly close analogy to the reality or unreality of the world-appearance.
821. S: Is it why there is so much talk about the operational world being just a dream from an absolute point of view?
822. G: You said it right. From the absolute point of view.
823. S: Are there other features of the dream analogy?
824. G: There is something unique. That the dream is not real dawns on us when we wake up from the dream. The dreamer, when he dreams, takes it to be totally real. There is no guru coming in the dream and telling you that it is all only a dream and that you should better wake up from the dream into the outside world. On the other hand, in the operational world of reality, though we take the universe to be real and existing. we have our guru telling us that this is a dream from the absolute point of view and we have to wake up from this 'dream' of a world! He himself lives beyond the 'dream-of-the-world' stage, yet he comes 'down' from his absolute level into our 'dream' and talks to us in this 'dream' of ours about the Truth that is beyond this 'dream'! Without the dream analogy in our culture, it would be almost impossible to comprehend the Guru's teaching that the Truth is beyond this visible operational world of reality!
825. S: Fantastic! There is so much about the dream analogy!
826. G: Now we are ready to go to the *mahAvAkyas*.

827. S: Are we taking them up one by one?
828. G: No. I am going to discuss only one of them. “tat tvam asi”.
829. S: I have heard this comes in Chandogya Upanishad and belongs to Sama Veda.
830. G: Right. ‘That Thou art’ is the meaning.
831. S: Do I take it that we are going to establish this by reasoning?
832. G: No. This declaration is not an objective fact or experience that can be inferred from other knowledge or reasoning.
833. S: Is it then an intuitive experience?
834. G: That is what our elders say.
835. S: Who is the ‘Thou’ in the *mahAvAkya*? I see the word ‘That’ represents *Brahman*.
836. G: ‘Thou’ is the inherent substratum in every one of us without which we just don’t exist.
837. S: Then it is our inner Self, the *Atman*.
838. G: But here it appears to have been given an individuality of its own, since ‘Thou’ is being addressed.
839. S: This individual ‘thou’ being identified with the unqualified infinite *Brahman* is rather perplexing.
840. G: It is not the identification of a finite something with the infinite *Brahman*. Whenever a person A seen now is identified with a person B seen long ago, we are not saying that the external features, like names, dresses, mannerisms, and various temporary identification characteristics of A and B are the same. We are only saying that the essential persons behind the two are the same. So also, discarding the temporary characteristics of both ‘thou’ and ‘that’, we try to look only at the essentialness in both. The ignorance (*avidyA*) associated with ‘Thou’ is the temporary characteristic of ‘Thou’. The feature of being the cause (*mAyA*) of the universe is the temporary characteristic of ‘That’. The essential commonality arises by looking at ‘Thou’ minus its ‘*avidyA*’ and at ‘That’ (= *Brahman*) minus its ‘*mAyA*’.
841. S: In other words Thou minus *avidyA* is the same as That minus *mAyA*.!
842. G: The temporary characteristics that we discard in favour of the essentials are called ‘*taTastha-lakshhaNas*’.
843. S: And the essential ones?
844. G: They are called ‘*svarUpa-lakshhaNas*’. Those of the Supreme are: Existence, Knowledge and Bliss.

845. S: What does the understanding of these and the *mahAvAkyas* do? Is understanding enough?
846. G: Neither is it enough nor is it easy. You have to have Guru's Grace for it. And then you have to live it.
847. S: In what way?
848. G: By seeing God everywhere. You must be able to see the wood and not the elephant in the wooden elephant.
849. S: But the elephant is there!
850. G: Certainly. When you play with a child, yes. But when you are with yourself, the elephant is a burden.
851. S: But I am told that so long as there is the ego in me I cannot have this divine perception; is that right?
852. G: Yes, we are all born with certain *vAsanAs* carried from our past lives.
853. S: These *vAsanAs* are in our mind only.
854. G: But mind is nothing but thought-flow into several channels according to the strength of our *vAsanAs*.
855. S: Some of the channels must be good and some of them must be bad.
856. G: Our ancients have classified two of them to be good and thirteen to be bad.
857. S: What are the two good ones?
858. G: *ShraddhA* and *Bhakti*. *ShraddhA* is Faith in the divine content of Man.
859. S: And of course *Bhakti* is Dedication and Devotion to that divine content.
860. G: But because of our bad *vAsanAs* the thoughts usually tend to flow into one or more of the thirteen channels.
861. S: What are the thirteen? I guess one of them is the ego.
862. G: Actually it is the most important. It is the captain of the gang of thirteen.
863. S: And the other twelve of the gang are ...
864. G: Can't you guess?
865. S: I have heard about *KAmA*, *Krodha*, *Lobha*, *Moha*, *Mada* and *MAtsarya*.
866. G: Yes. Lust or Desire, Anger, Greed, Delusion, Arrogance and Jealousy. These are well-known.
867. S: What are the other six?

868. G: *rAga*, *dveshha*, *IrshhyA*, *asUyA*, *dambha* and *garva*.
869. S: *rAga* is Attachment and *dveshha* is Hate. What do the others denote?
870. G: *IrshhyA* is the uncomfortable awkward feeling that ‘all these miseries are happening only to me!’
871. S: The word ‘*asUyA*’ – is it not the same thing as *mAtsarya*?
872. G: No. *asUyA* is what downplays the legitimate positives of the other person, and enjoys that downplaying.
873. S: But then what is jealousy, *mAtsarya*?
874. G: It simply cannot brook the rise of the other person.
875. S: Then there is *garva*, which is pride. But I am not so clear about *dambha*.
876. G: It is show of importance and projection of oneself by assuming an explicit credit role even when it is not due.
877. S: What is the role of Ego in all this?
878. G: It is always in the background but is the motivator and agent of every thought-flow of the mind.
879. S: Well, that does’nt seem to be terrifically wrong.
880. G: It is wrong because it is what makes you think you are the doer of everything.
881. S: But I have been advised by you to have the attitude of ‘I am not the doer’ and ‘I am not the experiencer’.
882. G: It is Ego that prevents you from cultivating that attitude.
883. S: In what way?
884. G: Ego claims every thought. It is itself actually a superimposition by our Ignorance (*avidyA*) on the Self within.
885. S: Is this what they call ‘*adhyAsa*’?
886. G: There are actually two kinds of this superimposition.
887. S: Two kinds?
888. G: An attachment to the *BMI* and an attachment to everything one calls mine.
889. S: The first is the thinking of the Ego: ‘I am the *BMI*’; and the second makes it say: ‘This is mine’.
890. G: The first is ‘*tAdAtmya-adhyAsa*’ and the second is ‘*samsarga adhyAsa*’.
891. S: Both kinds of *adhyAsa* have to be eradicated, I would suppose.

892. G: Yes, for this eradication, an internal war has to be waged through spiritual disciplines.
893. S: Are you referring to disciplines like '*yoga*'?
894. G: I am referring to what is called '*yoga-sAdhanA*' which means 'control of the senses by spiritual regimen'.
895. S: Does Meditation come under this? You remember we postponed this discussion earlier.
896. G: Yes, *dhyAna* (Meditation) is the internal face of this *yoga-sAdhanA*.
897. S: What is the external face?
898. G: It is *tapas*, consisting of austerity of speech, of body and of mind.
899. S: I remember to have seen them defined by Krishna in chapter 17 of the Gita. Shall we talk about Meditation?.
900. G: Meditation is the art of stilling the mind so that it is motionless like a lamp placed in a windless spot.
901. S: Every time I try it I fail miserably.
902. G: Meditation to be successful has to have a parallel life-long ethical preparation called *yama* and *niyama*.
903. S: Are these not moral codes of conduct and of spiritual observances?
904. G: Yes, like non-violence, truth, non-stealing, purity, contentment, absence of desire to possess, etc.
905. S: I am told, when the mind stays still, in that silence and peace, the Light of the Self shows up.
906. G: That is only a way of saying. What happens is: The mind rests in the *Atman*.
907. S: So there is nothing to see?
908. G: It is the unusual feat of the *Atman* 'watching' itself, as it were. It is the natural state of equilibrium and bliss.
909. S: When described like this it seems not difficult.
910. G: Don't think so. Because the vibrations of the mind have to be controlled, monitored and anchored to one spot.
911. S: It certainly is a slow process.
912. G: Yes, Krishna says: 'Little by little let him attain to stillness by the intellect held firmly by the will power'.(Gita:6-25).
913. S: But what about the flow of thoughts that must be going on?

914. G: Just watch the thoughts. Do not probe into the question how or why that thought came. Do not analyse the positives and negatives of the subject matter of the thought lest that process generate new thoughts. Don't get into this chain reaction of thoughts. Don't also try to make a mental note of all the thoughts that pass through your mind now. Just watch the thoughts come and go. Just be a watcher. Don't get attached to any of the thoughts. Don't take possession of the thoughts. That is where you fall as the prey of the ego. Don't ever get into the content of any of the thoughts. Just keep watching. Think not that you are watching. Just be. One by one thoughts will come and also disappear like waves which rise and then fall. One thought after another, it will keep coming ... and going. The next thought may delay a bit to appear. Don't expect it when it delays. Don't be ready to recognise it when it comes. Automatically the thoughts will become more and more feeble. Don't think about anything. Stop thinking.
915. S: Thank you, Guruji, you have given me a blow by blow recipe of what I should practise.
916. G: But not to think about anything is, however, not a mechanical process.
917. S: Then what do we do?
918. G: Go over in the mind the meaning of a *mahAvAkya* or a spiritual statement by seers like Ramana.
919. S: You mean, repetition of a *mantra*?
920. G: No. In fact when you sit for meditation you might perhaps have started with a *japa* of a mantra.
921. S: That is very straightforward.
922. G: Then continue that *japa* until it becomes a silent *japa*, with the involvement of the total personality, heart and soul.
923. S: Should we stop the counting, now?
924. G: Nothing should be done as a stepwise effort. Each stage should slip into the next stage smoothly.
925. S: Even the stopping of counting?
926. G: Yes. Gradually the *japa* itself becomes a *nididhyAsana* – contemplation on the spiritual truths.
927. S: Does *nididhyAsana* have to be only on the *mahAvAkyas*? Can we not take some simple truths for contemplation?.
928. G: 'But for fire things cannot burn; But for the Consciousness within, can inert mind be sentient?'. Even this will do.



929. S: Is this how we are expected to be convinced of the Upanishadic truths of non-duality?
930. G: For the understanding of the Upanishadic truths, there is nothing like *nididhyAsana*.
931. S: I never realised that meditation could involve such contemplation.
932. G: Slowly the *nididhyasana* will come to be done without any effort or thought, with the mind resting in the *Atman*.
933. S: But I have heard it said that the culmination of meditation is *samAdhi*.
934. G: Don't worry about it. When your mind is still, you are already enjoying the bliss of the *Atman*.
935. S: Where does this bliss come from?
936. G: It comes from the Infinite reservoir of Bliss which is the *Atman*.
937. S: This is the Bliss that great seers like Ramana talk about?
938. G: For such sages like Ramana or a Sadashiva-Brahmendra, they are naturally in that state ever.
939. S: Great souls!
940. G: They are called *jIvan-muktas* -- (Liberated even while living).
941. S: So advaita envisages liberation even before the demise of the body?
942. G: It does. That is one of the distinguishing marks of advaita.
943. S: But then by what reason do such people also suffer?
944. G: That is because of the remnant of *prArabdha* that is yet to be experienced.
945. S: But I thought *jIvan-muktas* have no experience that the *BMI* usually has.
946. G: You are right. Whatever experience they seem to go through is only by their *BMI*.
947. S: Oh Yes, they must be already in identification with their Inner Self.
948. G: So in that sense they may be said to have no experience of *prArabdha*.
949. S: What about their experience of this universe?
950. G: For them what they see is all *Brahman*. They see the screen, not the movie!

951. S: But Sages like Ramana have talked to individuals in their individual capacity.
952. G: This only means that if they want, they can hold back their *Brahma-bhAva* and descend down to our plane.
953. S: What is this *Brahma-bhAva* (being in *Brahman*)?
954. G: I can tell you only what such sages have said about it. “It is a divine perception of equanimity – an equanimous view of every being in the world as the same self as the one that dwells in them. It is a blissful experience, called *Brahma-Ananda*. Therein there is no more knowledge, no more ignorance, no perceiver, nothing perceived, no perception. It is something devoid of the triple – knower, knowledge and the known. Such enlightened persons do not see this world, they do not see anything. All they see is the godliness of Infinite Love and the loveliness of Omnipresent God. In their world, there is no self, no non-self; everywhere only grace and love. They have no limitations of time, none of action, no merit, no demerit, no happiness, no sorrow, no darkness. It is a permanent unalloyed illumination. It is the massive Light of Consciousness. No up, no down, no high, no low, no peak, no valley. It is a state transcending all speech and thought.” – Quote from a lecture by Shri Kripananda Varrier, in Tamil.
955. S: Oh God, what an elevating experience just to hear about it!
956. G: Now let us come down to terra firma and start winding up.
957. S: One loose end still. You have not said anything about those two good channels: *ShraddhA* and *Bhakti*.
958. G: Thanks for reminding me. Without these two channels of the mind, none could hope to rise spiritually.
959. S: But all the while we have been talking only of the need to realise the One *Brahman* which is omnipresent.
960. G: That is right. But how is that realisation ever to be achieved?
961. S: Does not advaita hold the view that you need only to remove your ignorance in order for the Realisation to spark?
962. G: Yes, like the story of the ‘tenth man’ thought as lost, but it is actually yourself; for you missed to count yourself !
963. S: Is it therefore a question of sparking of the Truth from within?
964. G: True. But that sparking needs a crystal clear mind with no spots – and, the Grace of God!

965. S: Which means, without *bhakti*, we'll never see the end of *samsAra*?
966. G: Certainly. It is by *bhakti*, says the Lord, you come to know Me as I am, what I am and Who I am.
967. S: Yes, I know how it ends: And knowing Me in real terms, you straightaway enter into Me.
968. G:Yes. However one may contemplate into His mystery, His greatness and true nature are known only by His Grace.
969. S: But then, there is this great debate about what is the correct route – *Bhakti* or *jnAna*?
970. G: That is not the great debate about. The debate is about whether the path of *jnAna* admits or needs *bhakti*.
971. S: I don't see the point of the debate. How can a divine goal admit of a path which denies faith in that divinity?
972. G: You have understood rightly. Nor can faith in that divinity deny a path that seeks a knowledge of the goal.
973. S: In other words, whether it is the *Bhakti* path or the *jnAna* path, both needs the other.
974. G: The debate arises because Shankara has said many times: *Moksha* is only by Realisation of the Ultimate.
975. S: Shankara himself was a great devotee, with temple worship, *stotras* and all!
976. G: Great advaita preceptors like Madhusudana Saraswati and Appayya Dikshidar have also been ardent devotees.
977. S: There is not a single propagator of advaita who is not also a strong devotee of God.
978. G: So let us wind up now with a famous *shAnti-mantra*. “*saha nau avatu*” - Let us be protected together.
979. S: This certainly is an expression of total surrender to the Supreme.
980. G: “*saha nau bhunaktu*” –Let us enjoy together. What would you interpret this as?
981. S: I am not clear, Guruji, please help me!
982. G: Well, remember the last *shloka* of the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gita?
983. S: The Lord says there: Be engaged in works for Me, Have Me as your refuge and so on; then you shall reach Me.

984. G: Why not say the rest : “*mad-bhaktas-sanga-varjitaH; nirvairas-sarva-bhUteshhu ...*”
985. S: Be My devotee; Be clear of all attachments; Have no hate of any being.
986. G: I reminded you of this *shloka* because this one *shloka* is the summum bonum of all spiritual teaching.
987. S: And therefore of the entire Gita. Right?
988. G: Yes. There are five advices here. Each is a major teaching of the Gita. And they exhaust the Gita.
989. S: I understand four of them. But how does the “No hate” advice get classified as a major teaching of the Gita?
990. G: Because total absence of hate can come only by an equanimous view of things.
991. S: And is that the *brahma-bhAva* of the Gita?
992. G: Yes, of course.
993. S: Why did you bring this up when we were on the “*sahanAvavatu*” *shAnti mantra*?
994. G: Good question. There are five sentences in that *shAntimantra* also. And there is a beautiful correspondence!
995. S: Let me see. “*sa ha nAvavatu*”: This talks of protection and so corresponds to “Have Me as refuge” in the *shloka*.
996. G: “*sa ha nau bhunaktu*” talks of enjoyment. Enjoyment is only in the Worship of the Lord. So ...
997. S: It corresponds to “Be My devotee” in the *shloka* of the Gita.
998. G: Now let us come to “*saha vIryaM karavAvahai*”.
999. S: Let us share our power together, Let us work together.
1000. G: This is Working one’s *svadharma* without any self-interest.
1001. S: So it corresponds to “Be engaged in Works for Me” of the *shloka*.
1002. G: “*tejasvina-avadhItamastu*”. This is about education. Let our experience be bright.
1003. S: This must correspond to the *Yoga-sAdhanA* part of the *shloka*, namely “Be clear of all attachments”.
1004. G: You said it right. Unless we do our works in a detached fashion productivity would not be optimal.
1005. S: Finally “*mA vidvishAvahai*” : Let us not hate.
1006. G: Clearly this corresponds to “Have no hate of any being” of the *shloka*.

1007. S: Wonderful, Guruji, My *PraNAms*. *Om Shri Gurubhyo  
namaH*.

1008. Guru and Shishhya (together): *Om shAntiH sHAntiH shAntiH*.

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