

# Tattva Bodha

*(Knowledge of Truth)*

## Introduction

Vedanta refers to the texts at the end of each Veda whose subject is Self knowledge. When you acquire Self knowledge you no longer have a doubt about the nature of reality. It is the desire of all people to be free of limitation and only by understanding that one is the Self can this desire be realized.

Because the mantras that make up the Upanishads are cryptic they need to be explained. A long time ago a great sage, Badarayana, commented on them and his commentaries are also considered source material. Although there is no need for additional source material people continue to realize Truth and feel inclined to speak about it. Words that appear later cannot be legitimized unless they do not contradict the fundamental premise of the Upanishads. What is that premise? That this is a non-dual reality and therefore there is only one Self. In the Eighth Century the most important 'modern' link in the Vedic tradition, Sri Adi Shankaracharya, appeared and wrote several important texts about the Self. He did not deviate from the ideas in the Upanishads but presented them with exceptional clarity. Tattva Bodha was written by Shankaracharya and is considered the definitive introductory text for the study of Self.

Why should the teachings of Vedanta be trusted? Because they are not the philosophy of an individual nor are they the contentions of a particular religion or a philosophical school of thought. Although they appeared in India, there is nothing 'Indian' about them. They are revealed truth. Revealed truth by definition is not authored by people nor does it belong to any particular religion. It comes directly from the Self. During revelation the individual's prejudices and personal views are suspended because he or she is 'ecstatic'...outside the small self. Even then the words that are used to convey the sense of the truth must be verified by many others over a long time before they can be accepted.

Revealed truth usually needs additional revelation because the people who hear it tend to interpret it according to their own tastes. The notion that there is a 'my truth' is and a 'your truth' does not wash in the Vedanta world. The Self is one and the knowledge of it can only be one. Is it possible to simply read these texts and come away enlightened? It may be possible but it is unlikely because truth, like anything else, is only as good as one's understanding of it. Therefore the teaching tradition of

Vedanta has evolved. It requires a mature qualified mind seeking to know and a teacher established in non-duality who can skillfully wield the means of knowledge. It is hoped that if your study of Tattva Bodha awakens a desire to realize the Self you will approach someone established in non-duality and request teaching.

## **Desire**

Physical and biological needs are natural; they are built into the body and shared by all members of the human species. Others needs, however, are cultivated on the basis predetermined ideas that arise from experience. The tendency of a dog to go towards a man holding a bone is a cultivated instinct. It has previously been fed by hand and remembers that the experience of chewing a bone is attractive. If its owner appears holding a stick it runs away, having developed an aversion to beatings based on past experience.

In addition to the instinctual choices which we share with animals humans have the ability to think. This allows them to consciously choose between alternatives: good and bad, pleasure and pain, right and wrong, etc. The ability to discriminate makes another powerful psychic fact possible: the desire to seek improvement and betterment.

Human beings are a work in progress. Not only are they imperfect and incomplete but, unlike animals, they are aware of it. This innate sense of incompleteness gives rise to a strong urge to seek completeness and wholeness. This urge in turn appears as the desire to be better or different from what one presently is and can be as important to them, sometimes more important, than their instincts and natural bodily urges.

## **The Irony of Desire and Action**

Common sense observation shows that attempts to fulfill desires do not permanently remove desire. On the contrary the more one satisfies one's desires, the more desires appear. In spite of romantic notions fostered by the culture about its desirability, desire is a big problem for human beings. It is an uncomfortable and often intensely painful state of mind that continually cries to be removed.

The natural response when one feels the itching of desire or the aversion of fear is to do something. When I pursue the object of my desire I believe that the attainment of the object will remove the desire and give me peace of mind. It so happens that this does happen. But alas, the sense of satisfaction and relief felt is only temporary. And to make matters worse the attainment of the desired object actually reinforces the original

desire. So instead of ending up free of desire when I act, which was my intention, I ultimately end up with more desire.

Another way to formulate this problem is to say that human beings are continually motivated to remove an innate but unnatural sense of limitation. Therefore they strive to feel limitless and free. For example, who doesn't feel limited by lack of money, time, power, or love? The thousands of things offered by the culture all promise in some way to remove a perceived sense of limitation and lack. But whether we see the problem as a quest for completeness or a search for limitlessness why, in spite of the ready availability of material objects, self improvement programs and therapies both religious and secular, does every attempt to become pure and perfect, limitless and complete fail?

### **Cause and Effect**

Because the desire to be complete can only be satisfied if it is possible to achieve completeness. Unfortunately completeness cannot be achieved because of the law of cause and effect. Completeness/limitlessness/perfection could only be achieved if it were possible to make an effort that would bring an unlimited result. But actions, which are always performed by finite entities, only produce limited results. Even the sum of tens of thousands of limited actions does not equal limitlessness. Thousandaires become millionaires and millionaires become billionaires and billionaires still strive more. Sadly, one is as far from infinite wealth with one dollar as one is with a trillion. With reference to the state of limitless bliss, ten thousand moments of emotional satisfaction are exactly the same as one moment. Even in the realm of knowledge, the more one knows the more one becomes aware of what is unknown. In spite of his great mathematical knowledge Einstein was ignorant of many other things.

What to do? Understanding the limitations of action some conclude that the way to completeness is to go limp, drop out and do nothing. But it is impossible not to act. Even non-performance of certain activities produces consequences. For instance, I don't pay my taxes and I end up in trouble. If I don't brush my teeth they rot and fall out. Furthermore, like all desire-prompted activities non-doing does not reduce craving so a person who is not pursuing his or her desires is as emotionally discontented as someone who is. At the same time simple observation leads to the conclusion that in spite of appearances this is a purposeful creation and that things here follow certain well known laws. Everything we do depends on this fact. If water one day decided to be dry and ice to be hot the whole cosmos would stop working. Because the desire to be whole

and complete, like other desires, occurs in a purposeful creation it must serve a purpose. If this is true then there is a way to satisfy it. Vedanta is such a way. But it accomplishes completion an unexpected way.

### **Accomplishment of the Accomplished**

Every act is performed to accomplish something. Three factors are involved in the process: what you want to be accomplished, the means employed to accomplish it and the person who wants the accomplishment. By appropriate, timely and adequate effort anything that is unaccomplished can be accomplished. However, no effort or action is required to accomplish that which is already accomplished. One day a man asked God to give him a head on his shoulders and the Lord was flummoxed. "I may be omnipotent but I cannot grant your request," He said, "I can give you a bigger head, a smaller head. I can twist it up like a pretzel or spread it out like a pizza but I cannot give you a head on your shoulders." "Why not?" the man asked. "Because, dummy, you already have a head on your shoulders."

**Completeness-perfection-limitlessness-freedom falls into the category of the 'already accomplished' and no action or effort is required to accomplish it.**

## **VEDANTA**

### **The Tenth Man**

A group of ten men were on a trip in the country. They came to a river that needed to be forded. To make sure they were all present and accounted for after they crossed the leader lined them up and counted...but the count revealed only nine. They became distressed and searched high and low for the missing person. When their efforts did not produce the tenth man then fell into a deep depression. At this time an old man approached and seeing their distress inquired as to its cause. The leader explained the situation and the old man smiled. "Line up with the rest," he said to the leader. Then the old man counted. "Eight, nine, ten!" he said pointing to the leader...who had forgotten to include himself.

No action produced the missing person. He was produced when the leader realized he failed to include himself in the count. In fact he was only searching for himself...all the while believing he was looking for someone else. Vedanta says freedom-perfection-wholeness-limitlessness is already

accomplished. It unequivocally states (and epiphanies confirm it) that we are whole and complete by nature and that no action on our or on the part of anyone else, including God, can complete us.

### **The Teaching, the Teacher and the Taught**

If I believe that the completeness I seek is to be found in something other than myself, a 'permanent experience of enlightenment' for example, I will be unable to realize my innate perfection because wholeness and completeness only reside in my Self, not in a particular experience. Therefore this fact needs to be made known to me. It so happens that the knowledge that the 'I' is whole and complete has been with us for as long as human beings have been on the earth. The teachings that remove Self ignorance have evolved out of successful attempts by Self realized beings to reveal it and comprise the ancient teaching tradition of Vedanta, a means of Self knowledge. Vedanta also includes the scriptures of Yoga which are essential for attaining the proper state of mind for receiving knowledge.

A teacher of Vedanta is someone who has realized his or her limitless nature and can skillfully reveal the Self by unfolding the true meaning of the teachings. It is often believed that an epiphany or the transmission of energy from a 'spiritual' master will result in Self realization but this is not true except in the exceedingly rare instance that the knowledge 'I am limitless awareness' arises during the experience and permanently remains in the mind when the experience ends destroying all subsequent thoughts of limitation. The so-called 'spiritual' world is little more than hundreds of thousands of people who have enjoyed the experience of limitlessness and completeness but who persist in seeing themselves as limited wanting creatures. Therefore someone seeking Self knowledge needs to be prepared. The preparation essentially consists of gaining a mind immune to the pull of fear and desire, one in which the Self can be clearly apprehended and one that can retain the knowledge 'I am the Self.'

### **Knowledge**

Two factors are required to gain the knowledge of an object: the object itself and a valid means of knowledge. To gain dog knowledge a dog should be present within the scope of perception and the eyes, backed by the attention of the mind (because all knowledge takes place in the mind) should be functioning. If the eyes alone are functioning but the mind is not present knowledge cannot take place. In this case the eyes and the mind are the means of knowledge.

Knowledge is either direct or indirect. The knowledge of the dog gained by looking at it is direct knowledge. However, if the dog is not present within the sight of the individual the knowledge obtained by listening to its description is indirect knowledge. Even if the dog is present but the eyes are not functioning, the knowledge gained through other senses is also indirect. For direct knowledge a valid means of knowledge must be available. For example, ears are not a valid means to gain the direct knowledge of the color of an object. If the means of knowledge and the object to be known are present knowledge takes place on its own. No action is involved in the process of knowledge. Only the operation of the means of knowledge is required.

Ignorance deprives us of a means of Self knowledge. We may have heard a great deal about a person but have not seen her. Even if we happen to be in her presence by chance we do not gain the knowledge of who she is until someone informs us that the person we are looking for is in front of us. When this happens knowledge instantly takes place. In this case the words of the one who informed us constitute the means of knowledge.

Only direct knowledge is complete and error free. The knowledge obtained through reading or hearing about an object is subject to question because the picture formed in the mind depends upon our past impressions and our beliefs and opinions. The picture formed in different minds from the same object or description of an object is generally different.

Most of us are ignorant of the fact that we are complete and perfect beings. Just as the eyes cannot see themselves, the sense organs and the mind cannot see the Self. Vedanta is a direct and immediate means of Self knowledge. It can deliver Self knowledge because the Self is always present. It is not hidden away in the spiritual Heart or a transcendental state nor is it covered by the physical body. If you exist you are the Self. Therefore you are always within the scope of your perception. When do you not experience yourself? That you think that the world you are experiencing is something other than you is due to lack of understanding. That you don't realize who you are is due to a belief that you are something or someone other than who you are. When this belief is investigated and subsequently dismissed in light of the teachings of Vedanta your sense of limitation dissolves... because the Self is limitless. Therefore if you want to realize your God given freedom you need to expose yourself to a valid means of Self knowledge.

## **The Text**

Tattva Bodha was written in Sanskrit in the Eighth Century by Shankaracharya and means 'knowledge of truth.' It is an introductory text

outlining the fundamentals of Vedanta. After explaining the qualifications necessary to realize the Self it deals with the relationship between the individual, the world and the Self. It explains the technical terms that form the basis of Vedanta. Without understanding the meaning of these words the means of knowledge will not operate.

## INVOCATION

***Salutations to the Self, the bestower  
of knowledge in the form of my teacher. This treatise,  
'The Knowledge of Truth' is for the benefit  
of qualified seekers of liberation.***

At the beginning of most Vedantic texts one usually finds a verse that tells the purpose of the text, who it is intended for and the benefit to be derived from understanding it. In this case it is for a qualified seeker and its purpose is to explain the nature of reality. The benefit to be derived is freedom from existential suffering. A teacher is someone who helps remove Self ignorance.

Modern society is a veritable supermarket of identities. But all its identities are based on ignorance of our true identity. Though limited identities offer to solve our existential problems they only offer limited relief. If I am gay I can't be straight. If I'm a man I can't be a woman. If I'm a Republican I can't be a Democrat. The teachings of Vedanta reveal an identity that encompasses all identities and is not in conflict with any.

*To realize our true identity the process of discrimination (viveka) should be employed. The knowledge of the Self is mixed with Self ignorance. Therefore a discriminative inquiry is needed. This inquiry will only yield successful results if the student is qualified. A qualified person possesses the following qualities.*

### **(1) Discrimination (viveka)**

***What is meant by the discrimination  
between the impermanent and the permanent?  
It is the conviction that the Self alone  
is permanent and that everything  
experienced is impermanent.***

People attracted to Self inquiry have usually had experiences that convince them that there is a 'spiritual' something other than what they perceive with the senses, emotions and the mind. But they are always uncertain what it is. The fundamental method for Self realization is the discrimination between what is permanent...the Self...and what isn't...the mind and the world. Although this is a non-dual reality and everything that changes is also the Self, this fact is not known to the beginner. Even if it were known intellectually he or she must go through the long and sometimes difficult introspective process of separating the 'I,' the Self, from all its changing forms.

## **(2) Dispassion (*viragya*)**

***Dispassion is the absence of desire  
for the enjoyment of the fruits of  
one's actions in this world.***

This qualification basically excludes ninety nine point nine percent of the human race from Self realization. Why? Because it is precisely the desire for the results of one's actions that people undertake action. A seeker of liberation, however, has understood and accepted the painful fact that the results of action do not permanently erase his or her sense of inadequacy, incompleteness and limitation. Why? Because they are conditioned by time. Dispassion should arise from this understanding, not from despair. It is common for people to become negative when they realize that getting what they want and avoiding what they don't does not solve the happiness issue. A discriminating person will be pleased to discover that the results of actions (what happens in his or her life) are not permanently satisfying. Why? Because it frees him or her from the compulsion to act and allows spontaneous creative non-goal oriented activity. And it frees the mind to seek happiness in the Self.

## **(3) Control of mind and the senses (*sama* and *dama*)**

Will power is helpful but not enough to control a restless mind. Control of mind means that a person does not pander to the fears and desires arising in the mind but lives according to a higher principle. By subordinating oneself to a higher principle the mind becomes calm.



#### **(4) Strict observance of one's duty (*uparama*)**

Duty is a higher principle than desire prompted action based on a belief in rights. When one fulfills one's duty toward oneself, one's family, community, and religion the mind becomes controlled.

#### **(5) Forebearance (*titiksha*)**

Sticking to one's chosen path with a happy frame of mind no matter what obstacles are encountered is called titiksha.

#### **(6) Faith (*shraddha*)**

***Faith is the belief that what the scripture and the teacher say is true.***

Faith is not blind belief. On the contrary one should independently reflect and analyze what is being taught to see if it jibes with common sense and reason. Faith is the belief that an honest attempt to enquire will lead to understanding.

#### **(7) Single Pointedness of Mind (*samadhana*)**

***Single pointedness of mind is the ability to keep the mind absorbed in a particular train of thought on a given topic.***

Everyone has the ability to concentrate on things that particularly interest them. The student of reality keeps his or her mind constantly at work reflecting on the teachings of Vedanta.

#### **(8) Burning desire for liberation (*mumukshutva*)**

A burning desire for liberation means that the person has completely ruled out the possibility that anything that could happen in life would make him or her permanently happy. As a result all the desire that formerly went into making the world work now goes into the search for the Self. If this factor is operating intensely all the other qualities develop quickly. And conversely a discriminating, dispassionate person with a clear mind will not realize the Self unless he or she develops an abiding interest in it.

***These are the qualifications for making  
the discriminative inquiry into the Self.  
No other factors are necessary.***

### **Inquiry into the Self**

The text now discusses the nature of the inquiry (discrimination) that leads to the truth of one's Self.

***The Self alone is real.  
Everything else is unreal.  
This is the firm conviction  
of the inquirer  
and is called inquiry.***

### **THE SELF**

***is that which remains unchanged  
in the past, present and future.  
It exists before and after time.  
It pervades and transcends all  
states of consciousness.  
It is called satyam, what is.***

***That which does not exist,  
like the antlers of a fish,  
is called asat, unreality.***

***That which exists but undergoes change  
is called mithya, apparent reality.  
All things in the subjective and  
objective worlds change.***

***The whole of existence can be divided into two categories:  
(1) the 'I' which is called aham and  
(2) the rest of the world which is called 'This' (idam).***

Due to ignorance of the nature of the Self a human being is always identified with what is changing and apparent: the body, emotions or intellect. Belief that I am my body, feelings or thoughts constitutes a false notion of the Self. It is called ego.

If a person can clearly distinguish the Self from the apparent and changing 'not Self,' the 'not Self' can be negated as the primary identity and the real Self be recognized and appreciated.

Inquiry into one's real nature by first identifying what is 'not I' (*anatma*) and subsequently asserting that one is the unchanging Self is called inquiry (*tattva viveka*). The way to do this is to understand that what one knows about oneself is different from the one who knows.

**The following analysis shows how the 'I', the knower, is different from the body with which it is falsely identified.**

## ***THE INDIVIDUAL***

### **What are the three bodies (*sharira traya*)?**

The Self is apparently clothed in three bodies and enjoys three corresponding states. The food body is called the Gross Body (*sthula sharira*). The physiological systems, the emotions, the intellect and the self image (ego) are called the Subtle Body. The seeds of one's past experience are called the Causal Body because they cause one to think, feel and act.

The Gross, Subtle and Causal bodies are witnessed by the *atman*, the Self. If the Self identifies with the Gross Body it seems to be a waking entity. When it identifies with the Subtle Body it seems to be a dreamer or thinker. When it identifies with the Causal Body it appears to be a sleeper. This process is similar to an actor playing different characters in a drama or a clear crystal that assumes the color of an object near it. But like an actor the Self is distinct from the roles it appears to assume. The Self is therefore called the witness (*sakshi*) of the three bodies and their respective states. The Self is 'I' and the bodies are 'this.'

### **What is the Gross Body?**

***It is that which is composed of the five elements (mahabhutas) ...space, air, fire, water, and earth... after they have undergone the process of splitting and combining (panchikarana).***

***It is born as a result of meritorious actions of the past and is the vehicle by which one gains experience in the world. It is born, grows, sustains itself, decays and finally dies.***

## What is the Subtle Body?

***It is composed of the subtle aspect of the five elements (tanmatras) before they undergo the process of splitting and recombining. It is a result of good actions in the past and is an instrument for subtle experience. It is comprised of seventeen parts: the five perceptive senses (jnanendriyas), the five organs of action (karmendriyas), the five vital airs: respiration (prana), evacuation (apana), circulation (vyana), digestion and assimilation (samana) and the power in the body to reject unwanted objects (udana). Udana is also active at the time of death and is responsible for expelling the Subtle Body from the gross body. The Subtle Body also contains the mind and intellect.***

The mind (*manas*) is the psychic location of one's feelings, moods, and emotions. The intellect (*buddhi*) is the deciding faculty and the source of the sense of doership (*ahamkara*). The Self identified with the intellect results in the feeling that "I am a doer. I am a knower." The mind and the intellect are really two functional aspects the Subtle Body. When the Subtle Body is feeling volitional, emotional or vascillating it is called the mind. When it is involved in the cognitive process of determining, deciding and discriminating it is called intellect.

***The Gross Body, the external material sheath, is kept alive by the Subtle Body which operates the organs of perception and action and the pranas, the physiological systems. When the Gross body dies the Subtle Body departs. The Subtle Body varies from one person to the next. The identification of the Self with the emotional aspect of the Subtle Body results in the feelings like "I am happy. I am unhappy. I am angry." Etc.***

***The organs of perception are called the jnana indriyas, knowledge organs. They are eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin. The elements that give rise to the perceptive organs are as follows: Space for the ear. Air for the skin. Fire (light) for the eyes. Water for taste and earth for the nose.***

***The field of experience for the ear is space  
which makes sound possible.  
The field of experience for the skin  
is air which makes touch possible.  
Fire (light) makes the perception of forms possible.  
Perception of forms is the function of the eyes.  
The tongue operates because water makes taste possible.  
The purpose of the nose is to cognize earth elements.***

***The organs of action are called karma indriyas.  
They are: speech, hands, legs, anus, and the genitals.  
The element responsible for speech is fire.  
For the hands, air. For the feet, space.  
For the anus, earth and for the genitals, water.***

### **What is the mind? (antahkarana)**

***The mind receives the stimuli from the perceptive senses and unifies  
or assimilates the information into one experience. The mind is  
thoughts. Thoughts can be divided into four categories based on  
their functions.***

***When the mind is in a state of volition, vascillation or doubt it is called  
manas, emotion. When the mind is involved in the analysis of a  
situation with the idea of making a determination, discrimination or  
judgement it is called buddhi, intellect. When the mind considers  
itself to be the author of action or the enjoyer of pleasure and pain it  
is called ego or ahamkara. The part of the mind that recalls memories  
and stores subconscious impressions is called chitta. The mind  
responds in the mode that is appropriate to the situations that occur  
in life. It is another way of conceiving of the Subtle Body.***

### **What is the Causal Body?**

***That which is inexplicable (anirvachaniya)  
and beginningless (anaadi).  
It is free of division and the  
source of Self ignorance.  
It is cause of the Subtle and Gross Bodies.  
It is called the karana sharira.***

If we are whole and complete, pure and perfect by nature there is no reason to enter a body to experience the world since the world is simply a place to garner experience that is aimed at removing the universal feeling of incompleteness. The verse says that the ignorance that causes us to be born is inexplicable. This means that it is prior to the formation of the Subtle Body (the mind) and therefore cannot be rationally explained.

Sleep is identification with the Causal Body. In deep sleep everyone experiences a limitless happiness or bliss (*ananda*) that results from an absence of identification with the body and the mind. During this state, one is free from the dualities created by the Gross and the Subtle Bodies and therefore this state is devoid of qualifications (*nirvikalpa*). During this state, we are completely ignorant of everything; we experience nothing in particular. The Causal Body is inexplicable because the state of ignorance is neither real, that is to say existent, nor unreal, meaning it cannot be said not to exist. The ignorance that makes it up is opposed to Self knowledge and is called *avidyarupam*. Ignorance of the real Self results in identification with the Gross and Subtle Bodies and the erroneous notion that one is incomplete and inadequate...since the bodies are limited.

### **The Experience of Bliss**

The Causal Body is responsible for the bliss an individual feels in the waking state. There are three subtle energies (*vrittis*) that operate in it. The first is *priya vritti*. It is the joy felt at the thought of an object that one likes. *Moda vritti* is the joy felt when the object of one's desire is about to be possessed. *Pramoda vritti* is the joy of experiencing the desired object.

### **What are the five Sheaths? (*pancha koshas*)**

The word 'sheath' (*kosha*) does not indicate an actual covering because the all pervading ever-present Self cannot be hidden by gross or subtle matter. A 'sheath' is to be understood as a universal error that stems from Self ignorance and results in identification with some aspect of one of the three bodies. The five sheaths are just a different way of describing the Gross, Subtle and Causal bodies.

***The first sheath or covering of the Self is the body.  
It is composed of food and is called  
the food sheath (annamaya kosha).***

***The second sheath is comprised of the  
body's physiological functions:***

***digestion, respiration, absorption, circulation and excretion.  
This is called the energy sheath (pranamaya kosha).***

***The third sheath is made up of emotional projections, moods and feelings. It is called the mind sheath (manomaya kosha).***

***Intellect, the faculty by which one is conscious of one's knowledge and accomplishments is the fourth sheath and is known as the vijnanamaya kosa.***

***In the waking state an individual knows certain things and is ignorant of others. In the deep sleep state every individual experiences the state of bliss. Because the mind and intellect are not functioning in deep sleep there are no problems. The deep sleep state is called anandamaya kosha.***

***The fact that the 'I' is aware of the five sheaths means that it cannot be any one of them.***

Just as one's material possessions are distinguished from one's self, the Self has no connection with the three bodies or the five sheaths. The knower is always different from the known. Therefore the Self, the knower, is said to be 'beyond the bodies and sheaths.' (*panchakoshatita*)

### **The Three States (*avasha traya*)**

The three states of experience are the waking, dream and deep-sleep states and correspond to the three bodies.

#### **What is the waking state? (*jagat avastha*)**

***The state of experience in which the sense objects are perceived through the sense organs is the waking state. When the Self identifies with the gross body it is called vishwa, the waker. The subtle and causal bodies are also functioning in the waking state.***

#### **What is the dream state? (*swapna avastha*)**

***The dream state is the world projected by the Subtle Body in the sleep state from impressions (*vasanas*) garnered in the waking state. When the Self identifies with***

***the Subtle Body it is called taijasa, the shining one.  
It is a state luminous with thought and feeling  
but it has no objective reality.***

**What is the deep sleep state? (sushupti avastha)**

***That state about which one says later "I did not know anything.  
I enjoyed limitlessness." is the deep sleep state.  
The Self identified with the causal body is called prajna.***

Prajna means 'almost ignorant.' Even though the Subtle Body is absent and therefore no knowledge is available in the sleep state, the Self, awareness, is present and therefore it is 'almost ignorant.'

In the waking and dream states we gain discrete experiences but the experience in deep sleep is universal. We know nothing because the mind, the instrument of knowledge is absent. We are also free of limitation in deep sleep. Freedom from limitation is bliss. This is why people cherish sleep. The Self, awareness, however is present in deep sleep so that when the sleeper becomes the waker the memory of the experience of sleep does not disappear.

**THE SELF (ATMA)**

***The three states of consciousness  
Pertaining to the individual have been described.  
From the description it is clear that the Self  
is given a different name in each state  
because it is identified with a different 'body.'  
However, the Self is always the same  
and ever present in each state.  
It is the knower of the states and is  
therefore called sakshi or the witness.***

It is not enough to know what the Self isn't. To realize it directly and retain the knowledge the seeker needs to know what it is. The text now explains what the Self is. Although one commonly hears that the Self cannot be known, only the Self can be known with certainty since it is the only thing that is always existent, always present and never changes. The objects, subtle and gross, that one knows enjoy a peculiar ontological status: they are neither real nor are they unreal. Any knowledge of them is subject to error and correction because they never remain the same.



**The Nature of the Self (satchitananda swarupa).**

***If the Self is neither the five sheaths  
nor the three bodies, then what is it?***

***It is the awareness of them.***

***This awareness is called chit.***

***Because of chit things are known.***

***Therefore it is called the knower.***

***The Self does not change when the three bodies  
and their respective states change.***

***It is beyond time and therefore is called  
'that which always exists (sat).'***

***The limitations suffered by the bodies  
do not affect the Self. It is limitless.***

***It is self effulgent, sees space as an object***

***within it and pervades every atom of the cosmos.***

***It is limitless and complete (purna). It is a partless whole.***

It is the nature of every living and non-living thing but is not known because all our attention is caught up (1) trying to ward off death. Death, however, is a non-issue for the Self. Attempts to prevent it show lack of discrimination. (2) attempting to gain freedom from a perceived sense of limitation. This endeavor is futile because the Self is already complete. The apparent problems humans suffer stem from an unnecessary identification with what changes. (3) attempting to erase ignorance by the pursuit of objective knowledge. The Self, however, is beyond knowledge and ignorance. It is that because of which I know what I know and know what I don't know.

Time is a projection of the mind, a relative, not an absolute concept. Identification with time causes worry about birth and death. That it is relative is proved by the common experience that when one is enjoying oneself time seems to move very quickly but when one is suffering time seems to move very slowly. Or the fact that what makes a child happy loses its value in adulthood. The Self is timeless or eternal. Happiness as human beings define it is merely a temporary state of mind.

**Real happiness happens when knows one is the Self. Objects cannot supply happiness. In the deep sleep state there are no objects, no body or mind, yet one experiences limitless bliss, the Self.**

## The Universe (*jagat*)

### What is the cosmos and how did it evolve?

*We shall now explain the cosmos  
and the evolution of the cosmic principles.*

The universe which is born of *Maya*  
depends on the Self, awareness, for its existence.  
This awareness is called *Brahman* and  
is identical with *Atman*, the Self.  
The word '*Brahman*' means infinite or limitless.

The question then arises: how does the objective world, which is finite, come from the infinite? Because the infinite cannot change into the finite the presence of a temporal reality poses a problem.

### MAYA

*A created object can come about either  
as a change or modification of the substance  
from which it is made or by an error  
that mistakes the real substance for something else.*

An example of the first type of creation would be a pot that is created from a lump of clay.

To understand creation from an error in perception consider this situation. In the twilight a thirsty traveler approached a village well. Reaching down, she recoiled in fear when she saw a big snake coiled next to the bucket. Unable to move for fear of being bitten, she imagined terrible things, including her own death. At that time an old man coming to the well noticed her standing there petrified with fear.

"What's the problem?" he asked kindly.

"Snake! Snake! Get a stick before it strikes!" she whispered frantically.

The old man burst out laughing. "Hey!" he said, "Take it easy. That's no snake. It's the well rope coiled up. It just looks like a snake in the darkness."

In this case the snake was created by the woman's ignorance of the rope. This power of projection is universal and applies moment to moment to almost everything experienced. It is the cause of most social conflict.

The process of Self inquiry basically involves becoming aware of one's projections and dismissing the part of the Self, the mind, that makes them.

### **Who or What is God?**

The power by which the Self appears to be the body and mind is called *maya*. Because this is a non-dual reality composed only of limitless awareness...the Self...this power resides in the Self. When the Self operates this power and produces the apparent experiencable reality we call the world it is called God, the creator. (*ishwara*) When it identifies with the three bodies it is called the individual. (*jiva*) Essentially the individual and God are the same but there is also a difference. The individual is under the control of *maya* and can only create a personal world out of its thoughts but God controls *maya* and creates the material world.

As long as one feels separate from everything one suffers. How can one realize his or her identity with God, the total? The individual possess both a subtle and a gross body. While the gross body absorbs awareness like a brick wall absorbs light the Subtle Body is reflective and the Self can be apprehended in it.

Or by contemplating on the location of objects. A man stands in front of tree. Where does he experience the tree? Does the experience take place outside his body in the tree itself? It does not. It takes place in his awareness. How far is the tree from awareness? Is there a gap between them? There is not. Awareness takes the form of the tree and experiences it. Therefore everything experienced is nothing but awareness. If God is the universe and the universe is experienced in awareness then God is in awareness and not separate from awareness. If the 'I' is awareness then the 'I' is not separate from God.

*Maya* is the cause (*karana*) of the effect (*karya*) known as the creation. The creation of any object always involves three aspects: knowledge (*jnana*) which comes from the light principle, *sattva*, activity (*kriya*) which comes from active or energetic principle, *rajas* and inert matter (*jada*) which comes from the principle of inertia, *tamas*. *Sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* are called the *gunas*. *Gunas* means ropes. They are called ropes because identification with them binds the individual to the world. *Maya* and the creation depend on the Self but the Self is always free of them.

### **Creation**

Two causes are required for any purposeful creation, an efficient cause (*nimitta karana*) and a material substance (*upadana karana*). When

a pot is created the mind of the potter and the idea in it is the efficient cause and the clay is the material cause. The efficient cause must have the requisite knowledge, intelligence and power to create.

Concerning the creation of the universe it may seem that the creator created the world from matter. But who created matter? It is similar to a spider that is both the substance of its web and the intelligence that shapes it.

## The Elements

The next section of the text describes the process of evolution of both the subtle and gross elements that make up the universe. The subtle objects are evolved from the elements before their division and recombination. The elements have evolved from *Maya* which in turn is the power of *Brahman*, the Self. Thus the Self is the fundamental substance from which the universe of gross and subtle matter (energy) is made.

The long and complicated description in the text describing the creation of the elements does not directly relate to the subject of Self inquiry in so far as the knowledge of the way objects are formed is not useful in the practicing of inquiry. Therefore I have chosen not to include it. Creation is always present in the form of the body and mind of the individual and he or she need only remove his or her identification with the sensations, thoughts and feelings arising in the mind to realize the Self. Vedanta does not counsel the removal of thought...only the identification of the Self with thought.

Space transcends everything standing in it. Therefore when one moves an object from one place to another one need not move the space it occupies. Similarly, consciousness or Atman is everywhere. The Subtle Body is always bathed in awareness. It glows with awareness when it is free of agitation and dullness. If one meditates on the mind in this condition one can easily see the perfect reflection of the Self. As one meditates on the Self in the mind one should think clearly about what it is and how it relates to the subtle and gross body all the while keeping in mind that what one is experiencing is not other than one's own Self...although it may seem so. The purpose of all Vedantic teachings is to help the individual realize its identity as the Self. This identity is contained in the mantra, 'tat tvam asi' which means 'that (awareness) is you.'

Reading scripture will not result in Self realization because scripture, like life, is full of paradoxes. The subtle paradox of the individual and the total can be removed with the help of

a teacher who has the proper understanding and the ability to communicate it according to the basic methodology of teaching. Unlike Yoga, Vedanta is not a system of practices for doers. It is revelation through paradoxes.

### **What is a Self realized person? (jivanmukta)**

**Someone who has  
(1) realized that the Self is limitless,  
(2) that the Self and the world are not different and  
(3) that the one who has this vision is the Self,  
not a separate individual.**

The very idea of a Self realized person is actually contrary to the highest teachings of Vedanta. Why? Because this is a non-dual reality. In a non-dual reality there are not two (or many) selves. 'Person' is a concept that means the limitless Self is limited to a specific body and mind. Self realization comes about when the Self, which has been suffering under an apparent sense of limitation, removes the notion that it is a person.

However, this text is written for those who are caught up in the web of duality and think of themselves as 'people' so the text explains Self realization in terms of a limited identity. A 'jivanmukta' is someone who is 'liberated while alive.' One can't actually 'be liberated' (because one is already free) unless liberation or enlightenment is seen as a removal of Self ignorance.

*Liberation, enlightenment, Self realization is the unshakable conviction that one is formless (nirvikalpa) and pure like the sky. It is the hard and fast understanding that one is free of everything (asanga) and self luminous (prakasa svarupa). The liberated one is like a wave that has realized that it is not separate from the ocean. He or she does not appear to be different from other human beings. He or she does not feel inclined to develop an identity as an enlightened being for the sake of impressing others. His or her physical body goes on as long as the momentum of past actions is still in force (prarabdha karma). He or she does not perform actions with a sense of doership and is unconcerned with the results of actions.*

### **What kind of knowledge is Self knowledge?**

***The knowledge of the Self is immediate knowledge (aparoksha jnana).***

Knowledge is gained in three ways: (1) by direct perception of the sense organs (*pratyaksha*); (2) indirectly through inference when the object

of knowledge is away from the perceiver (*anumana*); (3) It is immediate (*aparoksha*). Immediate knowledge is knowledge of something that is present but unknown. The Self is always present. Without it nothing can be experienced or known. Self knowledge is 'I am limitless' not 'I know/experience the Self.' If one's knowledge amounts to the statement "I am experiencing the Self" one should continue to inquire.

### **What is Karma?**

The individual (*jiva*) is beginningless because he is born of ignorance which is beginningless. During its existence it assumes different forms and goes through countless births and deaths. When in human form it performs good and bad actions (*karmas*) with a sense of doership.

Whether an action is good or bad is determined by the motive, rather than the action itself. The law of *karma* is the law of cause and effect. Every action produces an effect. Every action produces a subtle or unseen effect depending on the motive. When the motives are noble the *karma* is called *punya*. *Punya karma* results in happy experience in this life and the next. When the motive is selfish and harmful the karma is called *papa*. *Papa karma* results in misery both in this life and the next.

### **How many kinds of *karma* are there?**

#### **(1) *agami karma***

The actions an individual performs willfully with a sense of doership during its existence in human form that leave positive (*punya*) and negative (*papa*) impressions in the causal body and fructify in the future are called *agami karmas*. Animals do not have *karmas* because there is no sense of doership in their actions. *Agami karma* is destroyed by the Knowledge 'I am limitless awareness'.

#### **(2) *sanchita karma***

The store of *punyas* and *papas* accumulated over time and standing in an individual's karmic account waiting to fructify is called *sanchita karma*. *Sanchita Karma* is destroyed by the Knowledge 'I am limitless awareness.'

### **(3) *prarabdha karma***

Having been born in a body, the results of previous actions that fructify in this life which can be exhausted only by suffering and enjoying them are called *prarabdha*.

The *prarabdha karma* determines the form of body one takes in this life and the type of environment that is most suitable for it to work out. Whether the environment is pleasant or unpleasant is determined by the type of karmas working out. When the *prarabdha karma* is exhausted the body dies.

The Law of Karma and the three types of *karmas* explain the variety and diversity found in human life as well as nature in general. Some people are happy and some are not. Even in animal and plant life, these diversities are evident. The cause is the many varieties of *karmas*.

Just as the dreamer becomes free of all actions he or she performed in the dream on waking up, the realized soul is freed of *sanchita* and *agami karma* when he or she wakes up to the knowledge "I am whole and complete actionless awareness." Even the *prarabhdha karmas* that will fructify in his life will not affect him.

Just as a man who views himself in a distorted or a concave mirror knows that he is free from the limitations of the distorted image, a Self realized soul also knows that he is not bound by the limitations of the body and mind.

Knowledge is the only means of realizing the Self, just as fire is the only means of cooking the food. Just as fuel, etc. are required to set up the fire, methods and techniques are required to prepare oneself for the knowledge. The techniques of Self-purification that result in the development of the qualifications described above are called Yoga and are explained in the scriptures on Yoga. The techniques used to gain Self knowledge are hearing, (sravana) reflection (manana) and assimilation (nididhasana) and constitute Vedanta practice (sadhana).

For knowledge to be gained one must first hear what it is. After hearing one must reflect and inquire to see if what one has heard is true. Once one is convinced he or she needs live according to the truth. If a person believes that he or she is limited, inadequate and incomplete his or her life will never be a source of joy. However, if after long contemplation one completely accepts the fact that one is whole and complete life will be a great pleasure.

**The End**

## **A Confession**

Should the reader compare the text above with the Sanskrit original he or she will find several instances where this version is not an exact replica of the original. This is not due to a mistake. The copy that I was working from, a publication by the Chinmaya Mission written some forty years ago, contained all the original verses, but the presentation was uninspiring. Therefore I chose to render the text in a more appealing user friendly format and as a result have combined and condensed some verses. I have largely stuck with the original commentary by one of the Swaminis of the Mission but occasionally have added other relevant examples and explanations that are well within the tradition of Vedanta.

## **A Justification**

How can I justify a few changes in the original format? Aren't these ancient texts sacrosanct? Yes and no. In the first place I have nothing to gain personally from making the changes. Vedanta is the love of my life precisely because its impersonal wisdom has passed the test of time. Unfortunately there is no official body enjoying legal status, staffed by sages and funded anonymously in perpetuity that can control the publication and distribution of Vedantic literature with the idea of maintaining its purity. The continuous publication of Vedanta over the centuries has been carried out by dedicated pundits who recognize its historical and spiritual importance and Self realized souls who have been transformed by it and who out of enthusiasm and compassion are motivated to keep it alive. Unfortunately, there are many who have been awakened outside the tradition who do not understand its significance but recognize its genius and who feel that its wisdom can be improved or 'adapted' to modern times. It can't. Human beings are human beings. What they are they will always be. A long time ago some great spiritual pioneers in India found the way out of the problem of being a human being and this wisdom became Vedanta. There is no need to reinvent it. Unfortunately, the worldwide explosion in spiritual seeking that has been going on for the last thirty five years has produced many 'awakened' people of whom many have not taken the time to purify their understanding up to the high standard of traditional Vedanta. Therefore a degree of corruption has taken place recently, the most glaring example being a hard and fast confusion between the teachings of Yoga and those of Vedanta. Yoga is secondary discipline under the general umbrella of traditional Vedanta teaching. It is for doers and people pursuing it believe, until experience



proves them wrong, that enlightenment is some sort of unique experience of nirvana or nirvikalpa samadhi. However, because people are so experience oriented they are easily seduced by the Yogic view and easily dismiss the real import of Vedanta which is: it is ignorance, not the lack of a permanent experience of the Self, that is responsible for the sense of limitation that bedevils the human mind.

Tattva Bodha, however, does not suffer from this problem. It is just a text that sets the stage for traditional teaching by introducing the language that is used to remove Self ignorance and reveal the Self. Its problem is less obvious; language has moved on...as it does...so that the translations that served previous generations do not work so well today. It turns out that Vedantic texts have been published in English for well over one hundred years. The Victorian English that the first wave of translations is couched in has served its purpose and no longer appeals to the public. So I have made it my mission to update the English of some of the translations of important texts. I feel especially qualified to do this first because, as mentioned above, my love of Vedanta is pure. Second, I learned it from the 'inside,' in India from Indian sages who were still connected to the ancient tradition. Third, because my understanding of the teachings is 'UNDERstanding'; who I am and how I live is not separate from them. And finally, I love words and have kept up with the ever-changing nature of English. It turns out that I'm onto something because other works that I've updated have had a deep impact on people's lives. If you are a purist and want to make sure that I've not cut any corners you can dig up a Sanskrit original and compare it with the copy above. I predict you will not find any serious discrepancies and that in spirit it is equal to the original.