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Preface

An aphorism (sutra) expresses the genus of its meaning in a few terse words. The Brahma Sutras systematically explain the basic principles of Vedanta, the science of Supreme Reality. When contemplated, they reveal the innermost metaphysical secrets.

Today, harmony is the need of the hour. The ephemeral world needs spiritual awareness, and this is what the Vedantins visualise. Vedic scriptures offer comforting counsel. They throw a kindly light.

Man has distorted vision: he dotes on apparently real and also non-real phenomena. True vision makes him cognize the universal Being in nature's creations. Realization of this awareness is liberation (moksha). The be-all and end-all of life of the human being is the realization of constant integrated awareness - of Brahman visualized both as the primary, absolute, supreme, unlimited entity and as its subsidiary cosmic creative aspect and mergence in Brahman.

In this Stream of Aphorisms (Sutra Vahini) on Brahman, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba has lighted the universal lamp of the wisdom of Atma/Brahman (Divine Self). This stream of aphorisms first appeared in serialized form in Sanathana Sarathi. Bhagavan, in His infinite love, elaborated on the "Essence of Brahma Sutras in twelve selected aphorisms". Bhagavan's sublime and profound words and spiritual wisdom are indeed highly elevating and illuminating. Bathing in this pellucid Stream of Aphorisms, a person develops correct or true vision of Reality, bestowing supreme delight.

In the words of Bhagavan Baba, "Acquisition of the higher knowledge alone can fulfill the main purpose of human life. Such knowledge makes one aware that one is not the inert insentient body, etc., but that one is consciousness itself manifesting as the embodiment of being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda). When this truth dawns and is experienced, one becomes a person liberated while alive." This is the state of realization of the innate

nature of a people - the divinity of humanity.

Stream Of Aphorisms On Brahman

All the scriptures (sastras) derive their value and validity from their source: the Vedas. They lay down modes and norms in consonance with the principles and purposes defined in the Vedas. To discriminate between good and bad, one must resort to the scriptures.

Vedas, the voice of the Divine

The Vedas have no identifiable human authors; they are not from human beings. They emerged from God Himself and were "heard" by sages attuned to the voice of the Divine. These sages taught the words to their pupils, who in turn taught them to their disciples. This process of imparting the Vedas and the wisdom enshrined in them has continued through generation after generation of gurus and disciples up to our own times.

The Upanishads are the very core of the Vedas, the very essence of their teachings. The Brahma Sutra and the Bhagavad Gita contain the very essence of the teachings of the Upanishads. Therefore, these three scriptural texts are designated as the "three fundamental texts (Prasthanas Thraya)" of the science of spirituality. Since they were learned by listening to the guru, they are, along with the Vedas, named the "heard (sruthi)".

Acquisition of the higher knowledge alone can fulfill the main purpose of human life. Such knowledge makes one aware that one is not the inert non-sentient body, etc., but that one is consciousness itself manifesting as the embodiment of being-awareness-bliss (satchidananda). When this truth dawns and is experienced, one is liberated; one is freed from the fog of ignorance (a-jnana) even while life endures till its term ends. One becomes a person liberated while alive (jivan-muktha).

Renunciation alone confers immortality

The Kaivalya Upanishad declares:

Na Karmana na prajaya dhanena
thyagena eke amrithathwam-anasuh

Not by means of works, not by means of human power, not by means of wealth,
but by renunciation alone can immortality be attained.

The works referred to are rituals like sacrifices, sacred fire rites, vows, charities, donations to holy projects, pilgrimages, and ceremonial baths in sacred rivers and the ocean. Through such activities, one cannot achieve liberation (moksha) - that is to say, one cannot get rid of the veil of ignorance.

"Not by means of human power" means the following: acquisition of positions of authority and power, of skill and intelligence, which can manipulate people and things, of fame and supremacy, of personal charm, of full health and happiness, or of a large family with many children - these cannot confer liberation on people.

"Not by means of wealth" means the following: the works and activities mentioned above and the acquisition referred to can succeed only when one has wealth at their disposal. If one is not rich, one cannot venture into sacrifices or ritual acts (karmas) or acquire authority, power, etc. But the Upanishad announces that spiritual wisdom (jnana) is not related to riches (dhana). And spiritual wisdom alone can lead to liberation. So, liberation cannot be earned by means of wealth. Wealth is not a means to attain liberation.

Then what exactly is the means? The answer is:

Thyagena eke amrithathwam anasuh.

Renunciation alone can confer immortality.

The objective world (jagath) is unreal, non-existent, and the misunderstanding that it is real has to be renounced.

The understanding that the idea of the objective world is a superimposition by our mind on the Reality is spiritual wisdom (jnana). Though the objective world appears real, one must be aware that it is deluding us. As a result, one has to give up the yearning for deriving pleasure from the objects that appear and attract, both here and hereafter. That is to say, one is liberated as soon as one renounces all attachment and all desires. The false knowledge (a-jnana) can be destroyed only when one knows the Atma (the Divine Self) principle. When the false knowledge disappears, the sorrow produced by one's involvement in the ups and downs of the world of change (samsara) also gets destroyed.

Humanity is the embodiment of bliss

Ignorance (a-jnana) and sorrow cannot be destroyed by rituals and rites (karma); this is the lesson the Upanishads teach us. In fact, what is happening now is that people have forgotten their real nature. They believe that they are the body, the senses, etc. These crave for objective pleasures, and the people convince themselves that this pleasure is wanted by themselves. And, under this mistaken notion, they seek to fulfill the cravings. They delude themselves that they can secure bliss (ananda) by catering to the body and senses. However, such attempts cannot earn bliss. Instead, they are rewarded with disillusionment, defeat, and disaster. They reap sorrow and joy.

Involvement in objective pleasure leads ultimately to grief, so one needs to be directed toward the right means to attain bliss. Wherefrom can one gain bliss? It does not inhere in external objects. The pleasure obtainable from external objects brings with it grief as well.

The Upanishads, the Brahma Sutra, and the Bhagavad Gita - the three source texts - clarify the truth that you are the very embodiment of bliss (ananda). These three sources help people attain the highest wisdom.

Methods for knowing truth

It is difficult to grasp the meanings of the aphorisms of the Brahma Sutra. Unless one has acquired the necessary qualifications, one cannot unravel and master them.

What, then, are the qualifications? The scriptures lay down four spiritual disciplines that have to be earned as preliminary for knowing the truth of oneself. When one is equipped with them, the meanings of the aphorisms become as patent as a fruit on the palm.

The Brahma Sutra is also known as Saririka Sastra and Vedanta Darsana. Sarira means the body, and saririka means all the components of the embodied Atma - ego, senses, etc. Sastra implies "examining the nature of all these to the greatest possible degree". That is to say, the scripture (sastra) establishes that Brahman (the Cosmic Self) is the basis on which all else is imposed and that one's reality is Bliss itself.

Now about the name Vedanta Darsana: Darsana means "vision"; it promotes the sight or experience of the truth. The Darsanas (six principal systems of ancient Indian philosophy) are well known. They have been propounded by vision-blessed sages. Sankhya Darsana was established by Kapila. The Nyaya Darsana was authored by Gautama, the Vaiseshika by Kanada, the Purva Mimamsa by Jaimini, and the Uttara Mimamsa by Veda Vyasa.

Among these, Kapila and Vyasa are believed by the sages to be partial embodiments of Vishnu Himself. The Brahma Sutra of Veda Vyasa confirmed and consolidated the Uttara Mimamsa or Vedanta Darsana.

The technique of exposition

The Brahma Sutra adopts the technique of objection and conclusion to expound the truth. The aphorisms discuss contrary points of view in order to remove all possible doubts about the validity and meaning of Vedantic or Upanishadic statements. The body is taken to be the encasement (upadhi) for the "person (jivatma)", and the Brahma Sutra explains its Reality. Hence, the Brahma Sutra is called the Ultimate Vision of Wisdom (Vedanta Darsana).

The aphorisms (sutras) in the text number 555; some schools count them as 449. The word sutra means "that which, through a few words only, reveals vast meanings".

The quest for Supreme Reality

The word mimamsa, as used in ancient Indian philosophy, means the conclusion arrived at after inquiry and investigation, the inference adopted as correct after deep consideration of possible doubts and alternatives.

The Vedas deal with two concepts: dharma and Brahman. The Purva Mimamsa deals with rites and rituals (karma) as dharma. The Uttara Mimamsa (Concluding Validation) deals with Brahman and emphasises experiential wisdom (jnana).

The Purva Mimamsa starts with the aphorism

Athhatho Dharma Jijnasa
Thereafter, the inquiry on righteousness (dharma)

The Uttara Mimamsa starts with

Athhatho Brahma Jijnasa
Thereafter, the inquiry into Brahman

The awareness of Brahman cannot be won by the accumulation of wealth or even by the giving away of riches. Nor can it be achieved by reading texts, rising to power, acquiring degrees and diplomas, or performing scriptural sacrifices and rituals.

The body is an anthill, with the mind inside the cavity. The mind has hidden in it the serpent named ignorance or nescience (a-jnana). The serpent cannot be killed by resorting to satisfaction-oriented works (kamyā karma).

Spiritual wisdom (jnana) is the only weapon that can kill it.

"That person alone who has faith can secure wisdom (Shraddhavan labhathe jnanam)." And faith means steady faith in the statements laid down in scriptural texts.

1. Thereafter, The Inquiry Into Brahman

Athatho Brahma jijnasa

An aphorism (sutra) enshrines, in a few words, vast expanses of meaning, vast depths of fundamental significance.

The Brahma Sutras build up the science of Vedanta. They gather multicoloured flowers from all the Upanishads and string them together to form an enchanting garland. Each aphorism can be elaborated and explained in a number of learned ways, according to one's understanding, faith, preference, experience, and pleasure.

Yearning to know

The first aphorism is atha-athah-Brahma-jijnasa. The initial atha has many literal meanings, but in this aphorism, the most appropriate sense is: "Thereafter". So, the question "after what?" arises. It is obvious that it refers to "the yearning to understand the nature of Brahman (Brahma jijnasa)". The meaning is: "After such a yearning has dawned". How can this yearning emerge? It can come into the mind only after one acquires proper qualifications. "Thereafter" means, "after equipping oneself with these qualifications".

Qualifications for inquiring into Brahman

For understanding Brahman, Vedanta has to be studied. But yearning to know (jijnasa) cannot yield fruit if the Vedas are merely studied.

Among the preliminary qualifications for yearning to know Brahman, the first is discrimination (viveka) between the transitory and the eternal - in other words, the discovery that the Atma (divine Self) alone is beyond time and that all objects perceivable by the senses of sight, etc., are only transitory. The Atma alone suffers no change. It alone is timeless truth (nithya sathya). As a

result of prolonged investigation, one has to gain this unshakable conviction and be established in it.

The second qualification is: renunciation of the desire to enjoy, here and hereafter, the fruits of one's actions.

This is also known as nonattachment (vairagya). One must reason and realise the transitoriness of joy and grief, which are pollutions that affect the mind. One will be convinced, then, that all things are caught in a flux; they are all momentary, they yield only grief. Next, the feeling of nonattachment will dawn in the mind. Nonattachment does not involve giving up hearth and home, wife and children, and taking refuge in forests. It involves only the awareness of the world as transitory and, as a consequence of this awareness, discarding the feelings "I" and "mine".

The third qualification consists of the six virtues: mind control, body and sense control, withdrawal from sensory objects, forbearance, unwavering faith, and equanimity (sama, dama, uparathi, thithiksha, sraddha, and samadhana).

Six primary virtues

Mind control (sama): Mind control is very hard to attain. The mind can cause bondage, but it can also confer liberation. It is an amalgam of the passionate (rajasic) and ignorant (thamasic) attitudes. It is easily polluted. It relishes in hiding the real nature of things and casting on them the forms and values that it desires. So the activities of the mind have to be regulated.

The mind has two characteristics. First, it runs helplessly after the senses. Whichever sense the mind follows, it is inviting disaster. When a pot of water becomes empty, we need not infer that it has leaked away through ten holes; one hole is enough to empty it. So too, even if one sense is not under control, one will be thrown into bondage.

Therefore, every sense has to be mastered.

Second, the potency of the mind can be promoted by good practices like meditation, repetition of the name, devotional singing, and worship. With the strength and skill thus reinforced, the mind can help the world or harm it. So, the mental power gained by such spiritual practice has to be turned away from wrong paths and controlled by mind control. The senses have to be directed by the principle of intelligence (buddhi). They must be released from the hold that the mind has on them. Then, spiritual progress can be attained.

The mind (manas) is but a bundle of thoughts, a complex of wants and wishes. As soon as a thought, desire, or wish raises its head from the mind, the intellect (buddhi) must probe its value and validity - is it good or bad, will it help or hinder, where will it lead or end. If the mind does not submit to this probe, it will land itself on the path of ruin. If it does and obeys the intelligence, it can move along the right path.

People have three chief instruments for uplifting themselves: intelligence, mind, and senses. When the mind gets enslaved by the senses, one gets entangled and bound. The same mind, when it is regulated by the intellect, can make one aware of one's reality, the Atma. This is why the mind is reputed to cause either bondage or liberation.

Body and sense control (dama): Now for the second of the six virtues. Control of the body and senses can be achieved only by spiritual exercise and not by any other means. One has to avoid spending precious time in useless pursuits. One has to be ever vigilant. One has to engage the senses of perception and of action and the body in congenial but noble tasks to keep them busy. There should be no chance for sloth (thamas) to creep in. And, every act must promote the good of others. While confining oneself to activities that reflect one's natural duties (swa-dharma), it is possible to sublimate them into spiritual practices for the body and the senses.

Withdrawal from sensory objects (uparathi): The third virtue is withdrawal from sensory objects. This implies a state of mind that is above and beyond all dualities that agitate and affect common people, such as joy and grief, liking and disliking, good and bad, praise and blame. But these universal

experiences can be overcome or negated by means of spiritual exercises or intellectual inquiry. People can escape from these opposites and dualities and attain balance and stability.

Withdrawal from sensory objects can be achieved while engaged in day-to-day living by avoiding entanglement with and bondage to differences and distinctions. One should free oneself from identification with castes like priest (brahmin), protector (kshatriya), businessman (vaisya), and labourer (sudra); or with family clans; or with conditions like boyhood, youth, adult, and old age; or with genders like masculine and feminine. When one succeeds in discarding these and is firmly established in the Atmic Reality alone, one has really achieved withdrawal from sensory objects.

Do not look at the world with a worldly eye. Look upon it with the eye of Atma, as the projection of the Supreme Self (Paramatma). That can make one cross the horizon of dualities into the region of the One. The One is experienced as many, because of the forms and names people have imposed on it. That is the result of the mind playing its game. Withdrawal from sensory objects promotes inner exploration (nivritti), not outer inquiry and activity (pravritti). Along inner exploration lies the path of intellectual inquiry (jnana); along outer exploration lies the path of karma.

The sacred activities like rituals and sacrifices that are laid down in the Vedas cannot confer liberation (moksha) from bondage to birth and death. They help only to cleanse the consciousness. It is said that they raise people to heaven, but heaven is also only a bond. It does not promise eternal freedom.

The freedom that makes one aware of the truth, of one's own truth, can be gained only through listening to the guru, ruminating over what has been listened to, and meditating on its validity and significance. Only those who have detached their minds from desire can benefit from the guru. Others cannot profit from guidance. Those who expect and look forward to the fruits of their actions can engage in them until their consciousness is cleansed.

After that, their actions are of no value. So, one must be ever conscious of the

Atma as pervading and penetrating everything, so that attraction and repulsion, the duality complex, have no effect.

Forbearance (thithiksha): The fourth virtue, the attitude of forbearance, refuses to be affected or pained when afflicted with sorrow, loss, and the ingratitude and wickedness of others. In fact, one is happy and calm, for one knows that these are the results of one's own actions now recoiling on one, and one views those who caused the misery as friends and well wishers. One does not retaliate or wish them ill. One bears all blows patiently and gladly.

The natural reactions of people, whoever they may be, when someone injures them is to injure in return; when someone causes harm, to do harm; and when someone insults them, to insult back by some means or other.

But this is the characteristic of the worldly path (pravritti) - the path of objective involvement. Those who seek the inner path of sublimation and purification (nivritti) have to avoid such reaction.

Returning injury for injury, harm for harm, or insult for insult only adds to the karmic burden, which has to be endured and eliminated in future lives. This burden is termed "impending (agami)". One can't escape the task of undergoing the consequences of one's thought, word, and deed in due course. Paying evil for evil can never lighten the weight of karma; it will only become heavier. It might confer immediate relief and contentment, but it can only make the person suffer later. Forbearance, therefore, instructs people to do good to those who injure them.

Unshakable faith (sraddha). The fifth among the virtues to be cultivated is unshakable, unwavering faith - faith in the sacred scriptures (sastras) and the moral codes they contain, as well as in the Atma and the guru. Faith is the sign of sraddha.

The scriptures are designed to ensure the peace and prosperity of the world and the spiritual perfection of humanity. They have before them this great aim; they show the way to its realisation. So, one must place faith in such

holy scriptures, gurus, and elders.

Gurus are indeed worth worshiping, for they show us the path of ultimate fulfillment. The gurus, on their part, must instruct people only in "the knowledge of the one Atma that is immanent in all beings (sarva jivatmaikyajnana)". The one who has unwavering faith will achieve this wisdom. The gurus themselves must have full faith in it and live according to that faith without the slightest deviation.

Equanimity (sama-dhana): Equanimity is the sixth virtue. One has to be irrefutably convinced that what the scriptures (sastras) make known and what the guru teaches are one and the same. One's intellect must rest upon and draw inspiration from the Atma, at all times and under all circumstances. The aspirant for spiritual progress must be attached only to the unchanging universal Consciousness. All actions should have the joy of God as their goal. One must place implicit faith in the scriptural dictum: All living beings are facets and fractions of God. To confirm this faith and strengthen it, one must look upon all beings as equal. The above sixth virtue is the treasure of spiritual struggle.

In summary, the third qualification consists of the six virtues: mind control, body-sense control, withdrawal from sensory objects, forbearance, unwavering faith, and equanimity.

Longing for liberation

The next qualification for inquiry into Brahman to consider is the longing for liberation (moksha). This longing cannot arise from riches or the scholarship that may be won at great expense of money. Nor can it emerge from wealth, progeny, rites, and rituals recommended in the scriptures, or acts of charity. Moksha (liberation from grief and acquisition of spiritual bliss) can come only from the conquest of ignorance (a-jnana).

A person might master all the scriptures (sastras) along with all the learned commentaries written on them by experts; they might propitiate all the gods

by performing the prescribed modes of worship and ceremonies; but this cannot grant the boon of liberation. These acts are all performed to earn benefits and boons other than the supreme knowledge (jnana). Only success in the path of knowledge can confer salvation.

A person might have every article needed for cooking a meal, but if fire is not available, how can the meal be prepared? So too, if awareness of Atma (Atma-jnana) as the only reality is not won but liberation (mukthi) can still be attained by bathing in the waters of sacred rivers, what shall we say of the fish and other aquatic species that spend their lives in the rivers! If spending years in mountain caves will lead to liberation, what do mice and wild beasts attain? If liberation can be attained by ascetic practices like eating roots and tubers and chewing leaves for sustenance of the body, must goats who feed on leaves and pigs that dig out tubers also attain liberation? If plastering the entire body with ash is hailed as asceticism, can dogs and donkeys that roll on ash heaps claim liberation?

These beliefs and practices are signs of poor understanding. One must concentrate on achieving awareness of the eternal universal Atmic reality (Atma-jnana).

The word atha with which the very first aphorism begins means "thereafter". After inquiry into its implications, it has been found that it involves the acquisition of these four attainments: discrimination (viveka), renunciation (vairagya), the six virtues, and the yearning for liberation.

The reason for inquiry: futility of reason

The next word is athah (the tha being soft instead of stressed, as in the first word). Athah means "for this reason". The inquiry has therefore to be made for which reason?

For the reason that awareness of the Supreme, the Brahman, can be secured neither by the examination of the texts of the scriptures nor by the performance of rites and rituals nor through the study of material objects nor

by the process of learning from the examples of other people.

Because objects and individuals, rites and activities are transitory, they suffer from decay and destruction.

They can at best help the cleansing of the mind, that is all. Activity (karma) cannot liberate one from the basic ignorance or award the awareness of the reality as Brahman. One has to be conscious of this limitation in order to win the right of inquiry into the mystery of the Brahman, the source and core of the cosmos.

This very first aphorism stresses one lesson: The one who devotes life to earn the knowledge of the Atma that is their Self must possess holy virtues and must mould their conduct and contacts sacrosanct. For no knowledge can be higher than virtuous character. Character is power, really speaking. For the person who has dedicated their years to the acquisition of higher learning, ever good character is an indispensable qualification. Every religion emphasizes the same need, not as a special credal condition but as the basis of spiritual life and conduct itself.

Those who lead lives on these lines can never come to harm. They will be endowed with sacred merit.

The primacy of moral character

Virtues are the most effective means for purifying the inner consciousness, at all levels, for they prompt the person to discover what to do and how to do it. Only those who have earned good destiny can claim their excellence in discrimination. And, adherence to this determination is the raft that can take one across this ocean of flux and fear (bhava sagara). The person of virtues has a place in the region of the liberated. Whatever the residual activity a person has perforce to engage themselves in, the impact of that activity will not impinge if the person is one of virtue. The person can merge in Brahman, the embodiment of Supreme Bliss.

People may have performed a variety of Vedic rites and sacrifices; they might even be expounding the contents of a variety of sacred scriptures that they have mastered; they might be endowed with prosperity, owning vast wealth and heaps of grain; they might teach the Vedas and their complementary disciplines with due exposition of meanings. But without moral character, they have no place where Brahman is taught or learned. This is the lesson conveyed by this aphorism.

The stage of equanimity so essential for spiritual progress can be gained only when the intellect (buddhi) is cleansed of the blot of deluding attachments and involvements. Without that serenity, the intellect cannot proceed on the trail of Brahman. Why? "Virtue" is only another name for the "intelligence" that follows the promptings of the Atma, the Self that is Reality. Only one who has such virtue can win awareness of Atma, the truth. And, once awareness is gained, one can no longer be caught in delusion or desire: one will no longer be touched them.

Renouncing "me" and "mine" attachments

Desire and bondage to the objects desired and the plans to secure them are attributes of the individualized selves, not of the Self or Atma resident in the body. The sense of me and mine and the emotions of lust and anger originate in the body-mind complex. Only when this complex is conquered and outgrown can true virtue emanate and manifest.

The sense of "doer" and "enjoyer", of "agentship", might appear to affect the Atma, but they are not part of the genuine nature of the Atma. Things get mirrored and produce images, but the mirror is not tarnished or even affected thereby. It remains as clear as it was. So, too, the person of virtue might be subjected to some contaminating activities due to a backlog of acts in previous lives, but they cannot mar or obstruct the person's present nature or activities. The individual (jivi) has these as genuine, basic attributes: purity, serenity, and joy. The individual is ebullient with these qualities.

A bird in flight in the sky needs two wings; a person moving on the earth

below needs two legs to carry the person forward; an aspirant eager to attain the mansion of liberation (moksha), the abode of freedom, needs renunciation and wisdom - renunciation of worldly desires and wisdom to become aware of the Atma. When a bird has only one wing, it can't rise up into the sky, can it? In the same manner, if one has only renunciation or only wisdom, one cannot attain the supreme Self, Brahman. The sense of "mine" is the bond of deluding attachment.

How long can one cling to what one fondles as mine? Some day, one has to give up everything and leave, alone and empty handed. This is the inescapable destiny.

One has to give up such assumed relationships and artificial attachments through rigorous analysis of their nature and - give them up as quickly as possible. This is what the world teaches as the lesson of renunciation. Attachment breeds fear and egotism; only the unwise would yield to such worldly fancies. The wise can never bow to the blandishments of objective desire. All is momentary, only momentary. All is transient, very transient. So, the wise seek to identify the everlasting truth and adhere to the immortal virtues that the Atma represents. These are the real people of virtue, the candidates worthy of attaining Brahman.

2. Brahman Is The Cosmic Source, Force, And Support

Janmadyasya yathah

This aphorism means: Brahman is the source from which the origination, maintenance, and disintegration of the universe emanates. In the aphorism, "That from which (yathah)" refers to Brahman; "of this (asya)" refers to the visible universe (the composite of the five elements, prapancha); and "birth, etc. (janmadi)" refers to the origination, maintenance, and disintegration of the universe.

One has to know "That" as Brahman, the source of origination, maintenance, and disintegration of this perceptible cosmos. Brahman is the entity from whom this creation, this apparently concrete, ever-changing product of the tendency of the mind to visualize, has originated. This creation is maintained as an organization by Brahman, in spite of the ever-present flux, and it ultimately subsides or merges in Brahman itself. Shouldn't there be One who designs and decides on some sort of control and regulation of this creation? Underlying the three phases of creation mentioned above, one can cognize not only interpenetrating order (niyathi) and comprehensive knowledge but also obscuring or deluding power (a-jnana-avrithi).

Brahman, the one eternal truth

We can know a great deal about the nature of the cosmos. But our instrument of knowledge is the human eye, right? Physical sciences have discovered much, but it has all been discovered by the human mind, right? The eye and mind describe and analyze things as they are. But how long do the things exist as now? They are subject to modification each moment. However, in spite of the inescapable change that affects all things, one is aware of a truth or fact that is not affected in the least. That unchanging principle is the basis on which the three phases are manifested. That principle is Brahman, the Eternal Base, the Unmoving, the One, the Truth (Sathya).

One may hesitate to accept this fact and be involved in doubt, since the basic Brahman is not perceived - what is actually perceived are forms with attached names, which are in perpetual change.

Consider what happens when a person sees the dry stump of a tree at night: they are afraid it is a ghost or a bizarre human being. It is neither, though it is perceived as either. The reason for this misperception is "darkness".

Darkness imposes on something another thing that is not there. In the same manner, the darkness that is spread through false perception (maya) veils and renders unnoticeable the Primal Cause, Brahman, and imposes the cosmos on It, as a perceptible reality. This deceptive vision is corrected by the awakened consciousness and transmuted into the vision of universal love (prema). The cosmos of which the Earth is a part and with which we are embroiled has Brahman Itself as its basic cause, just as the stump is the basic cause of the ghost.

Some others declare as the cause or origin of the cosmos such factors as innate nature, order, accident, time, etc. But none of these alone nor all of them together can be the cause, for they are inert, incapable of will or initiative.

Even individual selves are bound by the manacles of joy-grief, growth-decay, and birth-death. Each of these alleged origins is dependent and contingent, so they cannot be accepted as the cause or origin of the manifest world.

Brahman, the cause of all causes

This aphorism is intended to lead us to the discovery of the genuine basis for all that "is", "was", and "will be". It announces the Supreme Principle as the cause of nature, existence, and the orderly behavior of the universe as well as for its fulfillment. Physics can probe into matter and explain how it is formed, but it cannot probe and discover why it is so formed.

Surely, there should be a cause for each effect or happening. Neither the

atom nor the self nor their absence can be reckoned as that cause. The Being (Sat) must be beyond both subject and object, cognizer and cognized.

But when we have to delineate the unlimited Being or Brahman, it becomes necessary to use words in current usage, such as Creator, Lord, Providence, God, and Brahman.

When the inquiry into cause and effect is made from the point of view of the cosmos, we reach the conclusion that God is the cause and the cosmos (jagath) is the effect. When the distinction between subject and object is transcended, we become aware that it is all pure Consciousness or Brahman, visualized both as the primary absolute unlimited entity and as its subsidiary creative aspect. The word "That" invokes Brahman as well as the cosmos and the mergence in Brahman. It is illusion (maya) that causes the delusion that one originates from the other.

Some contend that the two - illusion and Brahman - are the twin causes of the cosmos. Still others assert that illusion is solely responsible. Others assert that the universe is a manifestation of Vishnu and that it has its being in Vishnu Himself. They declare that the emergence, subsistence, and merging of the universe are all caused by Vishnu.

Five natural or derived features

Of course, nothing in the universe can be made without a maker. What, then, must be the nature of the maker of the cosmos? The maker must have limitless power, unbounded glory, and perfect omniscience. It is not possible for everyone to visualize such a phenomenon, though it is the very fulfillment of the purpose of each one's life!

However, it can be conceived and confirmed by two characteristics: derivative (thatastha) and true nature (swarupa).

The derivative is the temporary time-bounded indication. It cannot confer a correct picture or view but can only reveal signs and glimpses, off and on.

True nature means the very reality of the illumination of intuitive wisdom. It reveals the immanent and the transcendent, the limitless source of all.

Every entity, article, or thing in the universe has five qualities: Is-ness, luminescence or recognisability, dearness or utility, form, and name. First, "is-ness" is the feature of all that is. Second, the thing that is known to us is capable of being known to us because it shines; it is luminescent; it has the power to enter our consciousness.

Third, everything is capable of being used or benefitted from and therefore becomes dear and attractive.

The other two features, name and form, do change and can be modified. All things seem to undergo some transformation or other and often assume again the original form. They are apparent alterations of the basic entities, which always have the first three features. Name and form are superimpositions on the basic reality of "isness", "illumination", and "joy".

He who realises Brahman is Brahman Itself

The Divine is the base - and is also the superstructure. The beads are many, but the interconnecting, integrating string of the rosary is one. So also for the entire world of living beings; God, the permanent, omnipresent Parabrahman, the Supreme Divine Consciousness, is the base. "I am God (soham)", "He is I", "I am that", all these axioms indicate that even those that differentiate themselves under names and forms are in fact God Himself.

This is why the Vedas proclaim, "He who realises Brahman is verily Brahman Itself (Brahmavith Brahmaiva Bhavathi)". This awareness is the awareness of the reality.

The bubble born of water floats in it and bursts to become one with it. All the visible objective worlds are like the bubbles emanating from the vast ocean of Divinity, Brahman. They are on the water and are sustained by water. How else can they arise and exist? Finally, they merge and disappear in water

itself. For their origination, subsistence, and mergence, they depend only on water. Water is one; bubbles are plentiful. Water is real; bubbles are appearances. Water is the basis; bubbles are delusive forms of the same imposed on it.

The mystery of the universe

One is struck with wonder at this wonderful manifestation. In the ancient eras of time and in the far corners of space, the mystery of life emerged from the inert unconscious tangle of nature and proliferated into people and God-people. This fact is known to all and cognizable by all. But can the low be posited as the cause of the high?

The low can be the cause only of the low. We can say that the inert can at best be the cause of the mind, which also is part of the body complex, but only the Divine Will can be the cause of all creation, which has the five features already mentioned. No one can explain otherwise how the complex mind arose and got established .

The theory is that all events in the universe follow certain laws and norms. It is not always self-evident, but physics tends to prove that it is quite feasible.

The first aphorism indicates the Universal Supreme called Brahman. This second describes the same Brahman in another form through another facet. The first aphorism lays down truth, spiritual wisdom, and freedom (sathya, jnana, and swa-tantra). The second lays down the creative aspect of Brahman and declares that the aspect cannot be limited to this particular cosmos.

The path of righteousness

Each has its own dharma or innate specialty, individuality, or love characteristics. This rule applies equally to blades of grass and the stars. The cosmos is not one continuous flux. It progresses persistently toward achieving a totality in the qualities and circumstances. One can also transform oneself from the present status through self effort and discrimination. The moral

forces permeating the cosmos will certainly promote our achievement. But people are too immersed in the all-pervasive delusion to take advantage of these and elevate themselves. They are not aware of the path of peace and harmony in the world. They are not able to hold on to the good and avoid the bad. They can't establish themselves in the dharmic path.

"That" from which the birth, etc. of "this"; "That" from which the manifested cosmos emanated, with its moving and unmoving entities; "That" which prompts, promotes and fosters their progress; "That" in which they ultimately merge - know "That" as Brahman.

The Taithiriya Upanishad announces:

Yatho va imani bhoothani jayanthe, yena jathani jeevanthi,
yath prayanthiyabhi samvishanthi, Thad viji-jnasasva Thad Brahmethi.

From which they are born, by which they live,
and into which they dissolve - that is Brahman.

Contending theories of the cosmos

Among the monists (a-dwaitins) who posit Brahman thus, there are vast differences and deep conflicts of opinion regarding the causation of the cosmos. Some hold that Brahman is the cause. Others assert that it is caused by the play of delusion (maya). Others ascribe it to the operation of both Brahman and delusion. A few others declare that it originated from, merges in, and is protected by Vishnu alone. Some declare that the statement about Brahman is only indicative, a clue to realise the principle behind the cosmos, so to say. Brahman has endless facets and faculties, and causing creation, preserving the created, and subsuming it into Itself are clues to glimpse It.

Others believe that the mind is the cause of creation, since matter and all the five elements are mere structures projected by the mind, and that the mind itself is a transmutation of the inert nature (prakriti). The working of the mind defies explanation. There is a Supreme Consciousness, and it has caused this creation. These are all guesses or theories framed through their intellectual sharpness by various thinkers.

Scientists have investigated in their own ways and reached diverse conclusions. They explain that time was the cause of the origin of the cosmos and that time sustains and subsumes it through integration and disintegration.

So, all is the effect and is controlled by time. A few ascribe the entire process to the inner nature of things and its urge toward unfolding. Each thing manifests its genuine nature in its own manner and time. For example, a mango seed when planted results only in a mango tree. From the womb of a tiger, only a tiger cub can emerge, not a baby goat.

Thus, we find that from very ancient times, varieties of contending theories were propounded on the origin of creation. Nevertheless, everyone has failed to define and declare exactly what the cause is.

God, the Supreme Maker, Master of the Universe

The cosmos is a magnificent wonder, a source of continuous amazement. It cannot but impress one as a supreme marvel, whoever one may be. When an object has to be made, we know we need someone with the skill, intelligence, and power to make it. Without a maker, nothing can be made. Therefore, how could these visible objects - the sun, moon, stars, and constellations - move and behave as they do without a designer, a maker, a master?

Can they yield to any ordinary power? No. After observing the objects designed and made with such mighty capabilities, intelligent people can easily infer how immeasurable the power of the Maker Himself must be.

Look at the marvelous variety in creation. No one thing is the same as another; no one person resembles another. This can only be the sport (leela) of the phenomenon with limitless glory: God. Anyone can understand that no lesser power could be the source. On the basis of the mystery that inheres in creation, one can easily infer the Almighty Power that created it. Those who are incapable of unraveling the mystery of the created can never unravel the nature of the Creator.

The cosmos, a manifestation of Divine Will

Creation or the cosmos is the manifestation of the will latent in Brahman. All this is God's will (sankalpa) or plan. The theorists who frame and propagate the other explanations mentioned above are only wasting their time; arguments, and counter-arguments are mere barren exercises. Or they can be pronounced as exhibitions of the scholarship of pundits or intellectual gymnastics of the learned. They cannot satisfy the yearnings of those whose minds are pure and whose consciousness is clarified.

Everything is caused by the Divine Will - this is the firm belief of theists. Each one decides this issue from their own level of awareness, and the aphorisms mention these varied points of view and consider their validity.

Birds fly to heights proportional to the power of their wings. So too, these thinkers gave their explanations on the creation, continuance, and collapse of the cosmos on the basis of their faith and intelligence.

Indicative signs inadequate to describe Godhead

But as evidence or proof in this inquiry, at best, one can depend only upon indicative characteristics, which cannot take us far. Only the genuine characteristics can reveal the truth. They are: truth, spiritual wisdom, unlimitedness (sathya, jnana, an-antha). The genuine nature of Brahman is truth, the Eternal IS. It is the Universal Consciousness (jnana). It is everlasting, beyond time and space. Moreover, these characteristics are immanent in every entity, living or non-living, in the universe.

Indicative proofs are temporary signs by which one can identify some other thing or person one desires to know. For example, when the moon is just a little arc in the sky and one desires to see it, a person indicates it by pointing a finger toward it. Or, when one desires to look at a particular star, a person says, "There, just above that branch of this tree." The moon is far away, and the star is much farther. At the moment one expressed this yearning, it could be seen just above the branch, but that is only a temporary location. Soon, the location changes. The finger can no longer be correct, for the star or moon moves across the sky.

Never-changing quality of Godhead

The genuine characteristic never undergoes change. It abides in all. The form may suffer change; the name may change; times may change; the space it occupies may change. But the core of truth will not change. That core is denoted as existence, luminescence, attractiveness (asthi, bhathi, priyam) in Vedanta texts. The thing is, it exists. Existence is the unchanging truth. It may change its form and name, in time and space, but the "is-ness" is genuine. It makes itself known as existing, through the native characteristic of luminosity or capacity to attract our awareness and confer knowledge. We can know it because it has luminescence; all things we know have this innate characteristic. Each thing also has the characteristic of likability, the capacity to invoke attachment and love as a result of usability.

The above three together are the nature of God. On these three as the basis, forms are constructed by the mind, and names for the forms follow. But the forms and names undergo change. They are therefore designated as relative realities (maya), temporary superimpositions on the basic Truth. The Supreme Atma, the one Omniself, is the basis on which everything with form and name is imposed. The appearance of form and name on the Real is due to the operation of the illusion (maya) principle.

Name and form, which are structures raised by the mind on the basis of Brahman, are to be considered as indicative proofs for the Truth on which they arise and disappear. Brahman can be known only when the basic

characteristics are known. Once Brahman is known, the awareness makes the person who is aware Brahman itself (Brahmaavid Brahmaiva bhavathi). This assurance is given by the sacred ancient wisdom (sruthi), the Vedas.

In truth, the basis as well as the entities resting on it, the appearance and the Real, are both divine and caused by Brahman. So, if this is established in one's knowledge by inquiry into Brahman, life fulfills itself.

God is first, humans last

Being, spiritual wisdom, eternity (sathyam, jnanam, an-antham) - Brahman rests on this tripod. Awareness of Brahman is awareness of Truth; knowledge of Brahman is the supreme knowledge; it is unlimited, endless.

From Brahman emanated space (akasa), the sky; from sky, air (vayu); from air, fire (agni); from fire, water (jala); from water, earth (prithvi). From the earth grew life-giving plants; from plants, food; and from food, people, humans. The process of projection happened in this sequence. Brahman first, people last. So, human beings and Brahman are closely related.

3. Brahman Is The Source Of All Knowledge

Sastra yonithwath

The scriptures are expressions of the truth acquired by sages while delving into the Reality. The words emanated from the inhalations and exhalations of the divine Breath. They were heard from no embodied entity; they did not arise out of anyone's imagination. Hence, they are described as impersonal (a-pourusheya) and eternal.

From whom did they originate? From Brahman alone.

Veda means knowledge; it always "is". It has no beginning, no end. It is referred to as "without end (anantha)", for it is sound - sacred, sustaining, salutary sound. It is experienceable only; it cannot be limited or communicated. So, it is a marvel, an unprecedented phase of personal experience for each one. Since Brahman is the source of such knowledge, it is extolled as All-knowing, All-mighty, and All-pervading.

The Vedas, originating in Brahman, reveal It

"Brahman is the source of the scriptures and is therefore all-knowing." This aphorism conveys the meaning that the Vedic scriptures have to be resorted to in order to know Brahman, that only they can reveal Brahman, and that all Vedas lead people to the same knowledge. Also, the scriptures derive their validity through Brahman and their value from Brahman, for Brahman is the very source of the illumination they contain and confer. Only the Omniscient One can be the source of the Vedas. Only the scriptures can liberate people, through the illumination named knowledge. They regulate one's life and foster it, guarding it from grief. The Vedas offer comforting counsel; they deal with people affectionately and lead them forward, for they are received through venerable personages who attained the highest knowledge, Brahman.

Brahman can't be comprehended by means of proofs or arguments. It is beyond reason and calculation, unmeasurable, indefinable. It cannot be pronounced as being such or so, for this reason or that. It is immeasurable by time and space. The scriptures are the proof.

The usual proofs for truth are direct perception (pratyaksha) and inferential perception (anumana). But Brahman cannot be cognized by these two means. The sages experienced it and expressed it in the scriptures. The Word (sabda) is the firmest proof.

The Vedas teach constant thought of God

"Sastra (scripture)" means that which brings to memory what has been forgotten. Brahman is the very selfness of every person. The scriptural directives or counselors direct and counsel everyone. People yield to delusion and become one with the darkness caused by false values and attachment to the unreal, the "me" and "mine". But scripture is the mother; she does not give up. She persists and pursues; she reminds people of their goal in order to ensure that they will be saved.

Hence, the above aphorism declares that the scriptures are to be considered as the cause of the awareness of the incomprehensible, immeasurable, inexpressible Brahman. The scriptures are numberless, and a lifetime is too short. Aspirants are plenty; doubts and hesitations are numerous; steadfastness is meager. As a result, no one can claim full mastery.

Of course, one need not drink the entire ocean to know its taste; one drop on the tongue is enough. Similarly, it is impossible to understand all the contents of the scriptures. But it is enough to grasp the important lesson that is elaborated and put it into practice. This lesson is: constant thought of God.

Prahlada's unflinching faith in God

When Prahlada's father, Hiranyakasipu, drew him near and fondly asked the boy to repeat what he had learned from his teacher. Prahlada replied, "I

learned the secret essence of all learning." The father was glad and asked him, "Tell me the essential thing that you have mastered." Prahlada said, "Father! He who illumines everything, He who finally absorbs everything with Himself, is the ONE, Narayana. Having Him always in mind and experiencing the bliss thereof awards fulfillment to all." The boy uttered the name Narayana, which the father abhorred!

He didn't stop with that. "Father! You conquered the entire world, but you failed to conquer your senses.

How then can you receive grace from Narayana? These material skills and worldly achievements are hollow possessions. The knowledge and experience of the ONE (Brahma-vidya), that alone is to be pursued."

Bliss is the core of five vital sheaths

It is an arduous process for people to become aware of the ONE that is their core. People are of the essence of food. The gross body is the product of the food consumed. But in people there is a subtler force, an inner vibration named vital air (prana). The mind (manas) within is subtler still, and deeper and subtlet than the mind is the intellect (vijnana). Beyond the intellect, people have in them the subtlest sheath of spiritual bliss (ananda). When people delve into this spiritual bliss region, they can experience the reality, the Brahman, the ONE. That awareness is indeed the most desirable.

In the Brighu section of the Taithiriya Upanishad, which comes after the Bliss-of-Brahman section, is the story of Brighu, son of Varuna. While teaching Brighu the Brahman phenomenon, Varuna says, "Son! Brahman cannot be seen through the eyes. Know that Brahman is that which enables the eyes to see and the ears to hear.

He can be known only through extreme yearning in a cleansed mind and concentrated thought. No other means can help." He added, "Dear Brighu! Know that everything in the universe originates from Brahman, exists in Brahman, unfolds through Brahman, and merges in Brahman alone. Discover

it yourself through concentrated spiritual practice." The father gave him only these indications, before directing him to enter upon spiritual exercises that would ultimately reveal the truth.

With full faith in the words of his father, Brighu engaged in concentrated spiritual practice. The process of self-control and self-inquiry raised his consciousness, and he believed what he understood at that stage as Brahman and decided that food was Brahman! When he declared what he had come to know, his father, Varuna, told him that his answer was not right.

So, Brighu continued the spiritual practices and found out that vital air (prana) was Brahman, since without vital air, other things are vain. Vital air causes life, promotes life, and puts an end to life. But his father also pronounced this inference wrong and sent him again for further spiritual practice.

In this manner, Brighu had a third period of austerity when he came upon mind (manas) as Brahman, and later a fourth, when he revised that conclusion and believed that it was spiritual wisdom (vijnana). At last, after undergoing a fifth course of spiritual practices, he became aware that spiritual bliss (ananda) was Brahman. He stayed in the bliss of that awareness and never more proceeded to his father. The father sought Brighu and congratulated him, who had cast the world away from his memory. He said "Son! You have merged in that vision." Spiritual bliss is Brahman signified by Om One starts life as a creature of food (anna), but one has to march on to the goal of an embodiment of spiritual bliss (ananda). Not humanity alone, but every living being starts on food and yearns to reach the peak of spiritual bliss. All efforts, all undertakings are directed to the acquisition of spiritual bliss. All are born in spiritual bliss, will live for it, and will die in order to attain it. The Taithiriya Upanishad elucidates spiritual bliss as the urge for birth, growth, decay, and death.

However, how can Brahman be spiritual bliss (ananda)? It is said, "Om, the one imperishable letter, is Brahman (Om ithyekaksharam Brahman)." The cosmos is composed fully of the Om (pranava). It is also said, "This Atma is

Brahman." Therefore, Atma, Brahman, and Om are all indistinguishably the same. Knowledge of Brahman teaches that the Self in each living being, the Atma, is Brahman itself, and no less. The Brahma Sutras reveal that the outer universe (which has Brahman as the base) and the inner universe are identical and cannot be differentiated.

4. All Vedantic Axioms Posit Only Brahman

Thath thu samanvayath

It is clearly demonstrable that all Vedantic axioms posit only Brahman. The statements in the sacred scriptures, when studied in a spirit of reconciliation, reveal the Brahman and make known its reality.

There is the question whether the scriptures hold forth the supremacy of works (karma) or of wisdom.

Though the profound mystery of Brahman is incommunicable to others, it has to be denoted by some categories of knowledge, however unsatisfactory they are. Or else, it might remain beyond perception.

Scriptures are not only world-oriented

One school of thought believes that the Vedas lay down works as a means of liberation and that the Vedanta (the Upanishads) does not. But the scriptures (sastras) are concerned with guidance and counsel, and not with exclusive adherence to some system or other. Advocacy of works is not the chief goal of the scriptures. When one is active through works, one has to do many merit-yielding tasks, and these promote purity of mind. Since work cleanses the consciousness, many argue that the scriptures teach this as the sole path, ignoring the fact that work is only a means to the end.

In this connection, we have to pay attention to another fact. One's desires - one's wants, longings, resolutions, and wishes - are multiplied and prompted by works (karma). And, the initial impulse for desire is unawareness of the reality (a-jnana). The doubt arises, naturally, how the consciousness that is unaware can transform itself into the consciousness that is aware (jnana). Darkness can never remove darkness, can it? So too, ignorance can never destroy ignorance. It can be accomplished only by spiritual wisdom (jnana), awareness of the truth.

This is the dictum promulgated by Sankara. The world needs harmony very much. It also needs awareness, to an equal extent. How very difficult it may be to convey the knowledge of Brahman to others!

It has been said that there is a vast difference between the impact of knowledge of Brahman and the impact of works (karma). Merit and demerit, happiness and misery are the consequences of activity. The happiness attainable through work ranges from the region of humans up to the highest stage of the region of the Divine. So too, below the level of the human region there are regions where misery becomes deeper and deeper, more and more agonizing. They are relatively unreal and not absolutely real.

Awareness, not attachment to works, is the key

Therefore, awareness and bliss is innate, existing in its own right. It is eternally present. It is the one unchanging, unaffected truth. It cannot be acquired by practicing prescriptions and exercises. The state of liberation (moksha) transcends the body-mind-ego complex. Therefore, transcendence is beyond one's physical, mental, or intellectual effort. When awareness dawns, the darkness of ignorance disappears. When the lamp is lit, darkness is no more.

Some argue that it is not quite fair to declare that knowledge of Brahman, as the only truth, cannot be gained by personal effort. Sankara reconciles this point of view with his main thesis, mentioned already. The spiritual wisdom (jnana) that one is actually Brahman and nothing else is latent in the consciousness of everyone, but one cannot recognise it and establish oneself firmly in it by means of activity (karma), or even by scholastic inquiry.

Activity can only bind one further, for it deals with diversity as if it is real; it cannot loosen bonds and liberate.

It can at best purify the passions and emotions. Inquiry can at best clarify the intellect and indicate the criteria of spiritual wisdom. Only knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya) can liberate people from bondage. Hence, one is

warned not to develop too much attachment to activity.

Transform work into dedication

However, once in a while, we find the scriptures (sastras) dwelling on the value of activity. The scriptures are as affectionate to us as a mother. They teach lessons as a mother to her children, in conformity with the level of intelligence and according to the needs of time and circumstance. A mother with two children gives the strong and healthy one every item of food for which it clamours, but she takes great care not to overfeed the unwell child and gives it only items that can restore it soon to health. Can we, on that account, accuse her of being partial to one and prejudiced against the other in conferring love? The scriptures also draw the attention of those who know the secret of work (karma) to the value of work. For work can improve life and set its ideals aright. Everyone has to be instructed on how to transform work into beneficial activity. Yet, work is not all.

Human life lasts but a moment; it is a bubble on the waters. Upon this ephemeral bubble of life, people build for themselves a structure of desires and attachments. Wisdom warns that it might collapse or crumble any moment. Spiritual inquiry begins with the physical sheath and ends in the bliss stage. The supreme Atma (Paramatma), which is unattached and free from embodiment, has taken up a body and becomes a person. Viewed in gross terms, the body is a material encasement formed out of the food consumed (anna-maya kosa). Within this sheath, there lies the subtle sheath of vital airs (prana), the mental sheath, the sheath of the intellect, and the innermost sheath of all, the sheath of bliss (ananda-maya kosa).

This aphorism, "Brahman is the main purport of the Vedanta texts (Thath Thu Samanvayath)", makes known that spiritual inquiry involves the journey from the food sheath as the basis to the bliss-composed stage.

However, the gross has two aspects: the dependent structure and the independent base.

Harmony of all religions

In the current spiritual beliefs of mankind, one cannot discern anywhere a harmonizing factor. The principles of coordination and reconciliation have to be expanded and expounded. Though religions have separate names and the doctrines are distinct from each other, in essence, all are one. The aphorism endeavors to emphasize the common core.

Unfortunately, the apparent differences among the religions have subverted the amity of all men and the feeling of international brotherhood. Today, the experience and wisdom of great seers who have unveiled the mystery of the cosmos and their feelings of universal love are not appreciated, accepted, and respected. All religious dogmas, except a few, can easily be harmonized and reconciled. The same God is extolled and adored under various names through varied ceremonial rituals in the many religions. In every age, for every race or community of peoples, God has sent prophets to establish peace and goodwill. Since many separate religions have spread worldwide, they have lost fraternal feelings and thereby have suffered in validity.

There is an urgent need for harmony. All great people are images of God. They form one single caste in the realm of God; they belong to one nation, the divine Fellowship. Each must interest themselves in understanding the practices and beliefs of the others. Then only can everyone, with cleansed mind and loving heart, attain the divine Presence with others. The principle of harmonizing is the very heart of all religions and faiths.

5. Consciousness, Not Matter, Is The Primal Cause Of The Cosmos

Eekshather na asabdam

The Vedas assert that Brahman is the primal cause of the cosmos (jagath). They do not posit any non-conscious (a-chetana) entity as the cause. The voice of God (the Veda) does not support the view of the non-conscious as being the origin of creation. On the other hand, the Being (Sat) is asserted to have resolved upon becoming, to have entertained a decision (sankalpa). Resolution, decision, design - these are acts of consciousness; nonconscious entities are incapable of such exercises of will. Brahman, which is all-conscious, has therefore to be accepted as the Primal Cause.

The Vedas declare creation to be the result of God's will

The non-conscious is called the source of primordial matter (pradhana). The Vedas do not speak about it. This is what this aphorism reveals very clearly. Primordial matter is the designation by which the "name-formflux", namely the cosmos, is denoted by some schools of thought. Other schools refer to it as "atom composed" or "the made (prakriti)". Others say, in terms of praise, "You are the Omniwill, the Absolute Self, the highest Atma (Paramatma). Because of you, all this diversity is protected." Others argue that the three qualities (gunas) are the fundamental constituents that, through the preponderance of one or the other, cause diversity in nature.

These views are not supported by the Vedic authority. The Vedas maintain that Brahman willed and creation emerged. That will is the prologue, the preliminary act. The sankhya school posits the insentient source of primordial matter (pradhana) and bases creation on the three qualities of nature: serenity, activity, passivity (sathwa, rajas, thamas). When these qualities are well balanced and in equipoise, no conscious decision can arise, the sankhyans said. That state has to receive the impact of a supreme Lord, who is the Witness and who is awareness or consciousness, in other words, the

impact of God's will. That makes primordial matter knowing and knowable.

Cosmos, the body assumed by God

Considering each of these theories, the most correct conclusion is that Brahman is the Prime Cause. Of course, the highest accessible truth is not the attributeless, qualityless, intangible, inexplicable Brahman. It is the Brahman cognizable through the qualities that It has imposed on Itself. It has assumed this cosmos, which is composed of consciousness and non-consciousness, as Its body.

Individuals have to be endowed with consciousness (chaithanya), so that they can either commit or omit, do or desist from actions that they feel should be carried out. What has to be done today or put off till tomorrow, which crops are to be grown in the coming year - such thoughts, plans, and projects arise only in the field of consciousness, and not in non-conscious stone and wood, hill and dale. Willing is the sign of consciousness: that which does not have it cannot will at all.

When the will emerged, Brahman became God (Iswara). And by that will alone, God created the cosmos.

From the superficial view, God and cosmos strike one as distinct. But examination with subtle insight finds no fundamental distinction between the material and the Maker, the living unit (prani) and the Life Principle (Prana).

The Life Principle assumes a body on Itself and appears as the living unit, and the life force emerges from the living unit.

All is Brahman and nothing else

The Vedic scriptures deal with the Brahman principle and its manifestations. They give the treasure of spiritual wisdom (jnana) and intuitive experience of that wealth (vijana). But with passage of time, the hymns, verses, and mantras were interpreted ritualistically. They were extolled as useful for

attaining worldly and otherworldly objectives. Rites performed with the recital of these were considered as beneficial karmas. In fact, there is nothing in the cosmos apart from or distinct from Brahman. All of it emanated from Brahman, all of it is absorbed (laya) in Brahman, and all of it moves and has its being only in Brahman.

This truth is made clear by the following aphorism.

Thajjallath: From That (Thath) ... born (ja) ... absorbed (la) ... grows (ath).
From that [came] birth, absorption, and growth.

These are the four feet on which the proposition stands and is established. Birth, growth, and death form a sacrifice of the Divine Person.

Love for the Self is the source of all other love

The cosmos (prapancha, jagath), the five-element composite, emanated from the Omniself, Brahman. There is no spot anywhere where its manifestation is not. The cosmos is ever in movement; the Lord of the cosmos is the mover. Worldly love is not genuine love; love of the Atma is the source of all such love.

The Upanishad announces that this was the teaching imparted by Yajnavalkya to Maitreyi (in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad):

It is for love of one's Atma that all is dear.
(Atmanastu kamaya sarvam priyam bhavati.)

Love for the Self is primary; love for other objects is secondary. Love for another cannot be termed love. The self craves spiritual bliss (ananda) and

loves because of the spiritual bliss derivable therefrom. Affection or love flows from self toward Self. So, when the Atmic Reality is understood as the source, we can know that everything happens through the Supreme consciousness.

Divine Will, not matter, is the root of everything

The apparently moving (chara) and unmoving, the active and inert, are both willed by the divine. That will is a conscious (chetana) act; it is not a form of inertness (a-chetana). This truth is revealed by this aphorism:

Because of knowing [being attributed to the first cause by the scriptures],
[matter] not
being founded on scripture, [is not the primal cause of the universe].
(Eekshather na asabdam.)

Whatever arguments and counter-arguments are advanced by any person, the truth that Divine Will is the root of everything stands unshakable. People who argue about this either are deluded by appearances or are only trying to bolster up their pet fancies, avoiding deeper probes.

The core of the individual is Atma, or Brahman

The human body is first of all a cover, a receptacle for the Atma. Elements like water and wind are intimately bound up with the body. Therefore, the Atma Principle, the Brahman Principle, which is the core, is not cognized.

People have lost awareness of this Principle (Thathwa), which is their Truth. The Atma is in the body, but not of it. The Atma Principle, though active in the body, does not belong to the body.

The capacity of the eyes to see and the ears to hear are given by the Atma. How, then, can the eyes see the Atma or the ears hear It? The eyes and ears

are sustained; the Omni-Consciousness, the Brahman Principle, the Atma, is the Sustainer. That is the real "You", the Will (Sankalpa).

All is the ever-conscious Brahman

The elements (ether, wind, fire, water, and earth) that constitute the cosmos operate only as prompted by the supreme wisdom. The gods (devas) or the shining ones are luminous only through that wisdom, which energizes them. The entire world of living beings is sustained by that same supreme wisdom. The fixed and the moving are both firmly based on supreme wisdom. The supreme wisdom is Atma; the supreme wisdom is Brahman. It is also the visible, objective world. The cosmos is supreme wisdom through and through; the supreme wisdom is the consciousness (chaithanya) that fills the cosmos (prapancha).

The Vedas assert that Brahman is the cause of the cosmos by using the word "Being (sat)" to denote it.

Being is the "Ever-Conscious Is". The Vedas do not speak of anything that is "not-conscious". All is conscious (chetana), all is, all is Brahman.

6. Supreme Self Is The Primal Entity, Not Primordial Matter

Gounascheth na, Atma sabdath

Since the word (sabda) Atma is used (Atma sabdath), the "thinking (eekshathe)" or projection mentioned in the previous aphorism has to be a function of the Atma. Fire or water is the product, the effect of the will. The words "projection" and "manifestation" cannot be interpreted in a secondary or figurative sense. The Atma alone is indicated as the Primal Entity in the revealed texts (sruthi) or Veda. The urge or resolution is a happening in the Atma itself, not in any other entity. The entire cognizable cosmos is just Being (sat) or Is. Whatever form it has assumed in the process of time and in the perimeter of space, all of it is, in reality, only Being, that is to say, Atma! This is the lesson of the Veda.

Nothing is inert, inactive (jada). Thus, we find the word Atma used once in a while to denote even primordial matter (pradhana or mula-prakriti). Primordial matter is the instrument that fulfills the will of the sovereign Consciousness, the Overself. Being operated by the supreme Self, who is the cause, nature (pradhana or prakriti) also has consciousness ascribed to it.

Atmic awareness is the key to liberation

The individual (jivi), believing that it is divided from the whole, the universal, is subject to desire and despair, love and hate, grief and joy. The person is attracted by the world of name and form. Such a person is characterized as "bound". Hence the need for liberation is urgent. And to be liberated, the person must give up dependence on and attachment to the creation (prakriti).

The blind cannot be saved by the blind. The destitute cannot be helped out by the destitute. How can a person who is destitute and helpless remove the poverty, suffering, and pain of another? The poor must approach the affluent, the wealthy. The blind must seek the guidance of a person who can see. One

who is bound and blinded by the dualities of creation has to take refuge in the inexhaustible treasure of compassion, power, and wisdom, namely, the divine Atma. Then, one can get rid of the destitution of grief, revel in the wealth of spiritual bliss (ananda), and attain the goal of human existence. This consummation is reached and Atmic awareness is won through the grace of Brahman.

Wherein is the Atma to be sought? Where does the Atma reside? How can one know the Atma? Adoring the apparently consciousnessless things as manifestations of the sovereign Consciousness or Atma helps the process.

The Atma principle can be genuinely understood only by seekers who are grounded in the formless, attributeless Brahman. But even the embodiment with form has the Atmic reality in full measure. There are many examples to illustrate this truth. Knowledge of Brahman (Brahma-vidya) is another name for understanding and experiencing the Atma as the Brahman, the individual as the Universal.

The four stages of cognition

Everyone has the right to knowledge of Brahman. And, everyone passes through four stages in the search for this knowledge every day of their life. They are, according to the Veda, the waking stage, the dream stage, the deep sleep stage, and the liberated stage (thuriya). These are demarcated as states, or even steps. In the first stage, one is awake to the objective world and is oriented outward. Objects in the universe are seen by the eye; sounds are heard; the senses are able to smell and taste and touch. Life is lived to the fullest in contact with society. The nineteen means of contact are the five sense organs of perception, the five organs of action, the five vital airs (prana), and the four internal instruments (anthah-karana):

- (1) The mind (manas),
- (2) The faculty of discrimination (buddhi),

- (3) The storehouse of memory, of consciousness (chittha), and
- (4) The ego-sense (ahamkara).

During the waking stage, these nineteen means of contact and impact provide a person with the experience of grief and joy, gain and loss, success and failure in their gross forms. Since one identifies with the gross body complex at this stage, the experiences are also gross.

The region of dream is different. There, the self is in-faced. Reactions, responses, and experiences are all self-contained. They do not belong to the area outside of oneself. There may be ten others sleeping in the same room, but each has their own dream. One's dream experience has no relation to that of anyone else. Each is disturbed or delighted only by their own dream. The dreamer is unaffected by outer circumstances. In fact, the external world is beyond one's consciousness.

During the dream stage, one creates a world out of one's mind and dwells in the experiences it provides.

Though the objects perceived are imaginary, the feelings and emotions like joy and grief, love and fear are as real as in the waking stage. The nineteen instruments of contact and impact are present even during the dream. They do not act materially or physically; they operate only through the mind, for the mind has a luminosity that produces the pictures. This is why it is designated as light-filled (taijas - from spiritual splendour, tejas). The light enables one to formulate and design any form, sound, taste, etc. that one decides upon. The dream state is the second step or stage in the acquisition by the self of its own awareness.

Next, deep sleep (sushupti). This stage is free from even dreams. One is lost in undisturbed sleep. The person will not be conscious of their limbs, or of sounds, the smells, forms, the tastes and the sensations of touch. All activity is subsumed by the mind and is latent in it. All experience is absorbed into

the higher levels of consciousness.

There is no feeling of either separation or identity, the particular or the universal, the part or the whole. There is no experiencer or experience. There is only the Atma, in which one has temporarily merged.

Then, the fourth step (thuriya). Here, the individual is no more so. It has attained the basic truth of life and of creation - the all-pervading, all-inclusive Atma, the peace and power of the one and only Atmic empire. Those who have reached this step no longer have concern with the individual self. One cannot assert either that these people possess knowledge or that they don't have it, for they are ever immersed in the Highest Bliss.

All is Atma - Atma is all

The Atma in which they have merged is invisible to the eye. It cannot be grasped or held by the hand. One can know only that it exists and that it is Goodness and nothing else. All urges that draw one toward the objective world have to be exterminated before faith in the Atma can take root.

The four steps of Atmic awareness are very much akin to the four steps in the recital of Om or Aum. The Aum and the ultimate mantra are on a par with the waking, dreaming, sleeping, and merging steps already dwelt upon.

The Atma is evident in the mind; in deep sleep, it reposes in the heart; in the fourth stage, it is all of oneself.

To sum up, it can be laid down that the Atma exists in all beings in all stages of daily life, in all circumstances and conditions, and in all activities and experiences. All is Atma, Atma is All - the cosmos is manifested as One by the One. This is what the aphorism reveals. Without the awareness of this unity, there can be no joy and peace.

Without joy and peace, truth is an empty concept. Therefore, one should know the cosmos as full (purna). It is not a void or vacuum. It is Atma Itself.

7. Divine Will Is The Cause Of All Causes

Heyathwa-avachanath-cha

When the cause is known, one can know all consequences. The entire universe, that is, the moving and the unmoving, everything formed from the five primordial elements and hence named composite of the five elements (prapancha), was projected by the divine Will. It is a consequence of the will of God, which is the cause.

No consequence can happen without a precedent cause. However, the cause has two aspects, the material cause (upadana karana) and the efficient cause (nimitta karana).

God, both the material and the efficient cause of cosmos

The material cause is primary, earlier than the product. It is the entire basis, the total basis on which the product rests. Consider a silver cup, for example. The cup has no existence apart from silver. When the silver, which can be shaped into a cup, is absent, the product is also absent. Silver is the material cause. In other words, before the form "becomes", the "Being" is and has to be.

The cup is the form imposed on silver by the efficient cause. It is the consequence of art, artificial. Silver is the pre-existent cause. A silversmith prepares the cup. Once the cup is ready, the smith has no affinity with it, but the cup and silver have close affinity forever.

God is the material cause of creation, of the cosmos, of the universe. He is the substance, the basis, the material cause. God is also the efficient cause. He is both transcendental and phenomenal, both Being and Becoming.

Like silver in the cup, the cosmos is all God. He has been manifesting Himself as all this. He has willed to become all this. In every thing (padartha), He, the

highest Truth (Param-artha), is immanent. In the absence of this highest Truth, no thing can exist. Each one is sustained by the all-comprehensive Reality.

Correct vision reveals unity in diversity

This wondrous mystery is beyond one's grasp. The intelligence cannot unravel it. With distorted vision, one sees only the name-form, the appearance. One is deluded into confusion. One is tossed by likes and dislikes, pleasure and pain, elation and depression. One is aware only of the unreal many, parading diverse names and forms.

Correct vision makes one see the One in the many. It reveals unity in diversity and confers supreme delight, for one becomes aware of the One immanent in the multiplicity, the supreme Truth. Liberation is the realisation of this awareness, this achievement of Brahmahood. Each and every living being has to attain this consummation, this goal, the Brahman. That is its true destination. Some day or other, the urge to win release from the shackles of grief and joy and the bonds of "I" and "mine" will awaken and emerge. The path that is taken then inevitably leads to freedom (moksha). Seeking that path is the sign of the intelligent person.

Instead of this search, when one considers the objective world as all-important and feels drawn toward its charm, life is barren and of no consequence. Nature is the embodiment of matter. One must be drawn to the Person who designed the principle that underlies nature, the embodying process. What benefit can a destitute gain if he seeks another destitute? How can a bound person be released from bonds by another who is also bound? The bound person who relies on one who is not bound can get rid of the bonds and move about freely.

Gain eternity through divine Grace

The person who is deep in grief must seek refuge in one who is floating on spiritual bliss (ananda), filled with joy. Bondage plunges one into sorrow,

while the Lord is total Bliss personified. Therefore, one can be completely cured of grief only by resorting to the inexhaustible spring of delight, the Lord. And what exactly is liberation (moksha)? It is release from grief, the absence of grief, and attainment of spiritual bliss. The supreme Self, the sovereign Lord, is the embodiment of indivisible sweetness (rasa), the treasure house of bliss. Hence, those who seek and secure His grace gain eternity itself.

The eternity thus gained has no place for the sense perceptions of sound, touch, form, taste, and smell. It has neither beginning nor end. One must gradually and steadily endeavor to acquire that victory. One must proceed progressively from the gross to the subtle, from the subtle to the causal, and, from the causal level, one must finally merge in the Prime Cause. That is to say, the spiritual journey has to be from gross (sthula) to subtle (sukshma) to causal (karana) to mergence in the supreme Cause. This is the regular route.

Look inward, not merely outward

However, ordinary humans struggle to win material happiness and exterior pleasures. They do not seek the spiritual bliss (ananda) that the Atma, their inner reality, can grant. They lose the great opportunity of experiencing it, and they don't take any steps appropriate for the purpose. All the time, their attention is directed only to the external world. It does not turn inward.

Pasu (animal) is so named because it looks outward (pashathi)
(Pasyathi ithi pasuh).

Looking outward is the characteristic of animals, not of people. The important organs of sense perception in the human body - the eye, the nose, the tongue, etc. - all open outward in order to contact external objects, so one has to conclude that the physical urge, the body's vision, is all external.

The inner world is not as easily accessible as the outer world is. Perhaps only one among many, one in a million, does contact and win this inner Atmic reality through inward vision. That person is the wise one (jnani).

The person born with a sense of the true mission of human life has to gain the goal, the goal of spiritual bliss, the fundamental eternal spiritual bliss. That supreme attainment renders life valid, meaningful, and worthwhile.

Unitary or Atmic vision is both inner and outer

In fact, the external world and the inner world are not distinct and distant. They are indissolubly knit together.

The belief of the common person is that the body is the medium through which one sees, hears, experiences, and delights. No, another force rules and regulates the senses, mind, and intellect. That force is the Atma. The aphorism under study directs one to be aware of this and, with that awareness constant, to contact the world through the senses, the mind, and the intellect.

The rain falling on the mountain range slides down the sides into many valleys and flows as turbid streams.

The same rain falling on fresh water lakes or limpid rivers remains pure and clear. The sages who are cognizant of their Atmic reality are transformed into the purity, equanimity, and charity that it represents. They are ever in the full awareness of the Atma, their inner core. In the purified consciousness of these persons, there is the experience of identification. Likes and dislikes, sense of "I" and "mine", anxiety and calmness, elation when praised and depression when blamed - these cannot contaminate or agitate a person who has attained that state. These opposites become balanced and are accepted with equanimity as waves on the Atmic consciousness. This is the authentic Atmic attitude, the Brahman in-look, the unitary vision.

8. Individual Merges In The Universal Brahman

Swapyayath

"Swa" means "in oneself", that is to say, "in Brahman". "Apyayath" means "since it merges". The two words tell us, "since it is said that the individual soul (jivi) merges in Brahman", during deep, dreamless sleep, the individual resumes its real nature, being (sat). Since the self attains the Self, which is Itself, it is then the Atma and nothing else. The Atma, which appeared as if enclosed in name and form, discards the name and form and merges in the Universal Atma. The wave has merged in the ocean. It had become, so now it is just being (sat).

Brahman: both eternal Being and total Awareness

The core of all Vedantic texts and teachings is the truths:

1. Brahman is both the efficient and material cause of the cosmos (jagath), which merges and emerges (ga and ja).
2. Brahman is one and one only, so there is nothing in the cosmos apart from Brahman without (jagath) and insentient. Brahman is, according to the scriptures and the Vedanta texts, not only Being (sat) but also awareness (chit).

The five vital airs fuel the five fires in the body

Sleep is very necessary for every living being. Without sleep, people as well as other beings cannot live. Of all the joys that the world provides, sleep is the most rewarding. All the rest are arid, dry, trivial, and wasteful.

When a living being sleeps, the five vital airs - life breath, downward air, diffused air, upward breath, digestive air (prana, apana, vyana, udana, samana) - do function, along with the five fires in the body, conferring warmth.

During sleep, inhalation and exhalation of the breath proceed serenely and evenly. The life breath acts like the consecrated fire, perpetually burning in the household of a Vedic rite. It energizes us in the same steady manner.

The diffused air is as the fire lit on the southern side of the altar in the Vedic rite. The upward breath helps the mind reach the world of Brahman, which the person has earned the right to attain by their karma. In other words, it enables the person to experience the taste of mergence with the Supreme. For the embodied Atma (jivi) rests in sleep, is happy during sleep, is refreshed by sleep, and derives bliss while sleeping.

Body is the temple of Atma (God)

The embodied Atma is the deity enshrined in the body, its temple. The individual soul experiences all that is seen, heard, and contacted by the mind in the outer world, as well as the impact of all that it cannot see, hear, or contact by the mind. Besides these, the individual soul might construct and experience in dreams and witness experiences undergone during previous lives. It depends on the activities stamped on the mind of each one. Or, it might happen sometimes that the person gives up at one stroke the association with the body and the senses and gets immersed and lost in their basic principle: the Omniself (Paramatma). The bliss that fills the individual soul is the manifestation of the supreme Self (Paramatma).

During dreamless sleep, the individual soul (jivi) enters and revels in the region of bliss, led thereto by the splendour of the upward breath, the vital air that elevates. The region of bliss is known also as the region of Brahma. During sleep, one effortlessly gets this splendid chance to enjoy the proximity of the supreme Atma, which is the prime source and substance of the five basic elements, the five senses, and the inner instrument of awareness (the

five bhuthas, the five indriyas, and the anthah-karana). But this experience is quite temporary and doesn't last.

Unchanging Bliss means Supreme Consciousness

The person who has gained awareness through the purification of the mind and the clarification of the intellect (buddhi) will have the unchanging bliss of mergence in the supreme Atma. Only that person can become omniscient who is ever in the region of the undecaying (akshaya) and merged in the imperishable (akshara) supreme Vastness (Parabrahma), the highest Atma. When one is aware that all is He, that there is nothing without or outside, one becomes all or Brahman.

In deep sleep, the individual soul (jivi) is in dull ignorance (in the thamoguna). To the realised person, however, even dreams will award as much bliss as does the consciousness while awake. Even when awake, the realised person gets rid of the impact of the body-sense-reason complex and is saturated with the bliss of his authentic reality. The particularized self shares the consciousness (chaithanya) of the Universal, and it can merge only in that supreme Atma (Paramatma), the supreme Consciousness. Therefore, this aphorism emphasizes for us the truth that the "Is-ness (Sat)", which "becomes" and "subsumes" all creation, refers only to the highest Brahman (Parabrahman), the supreme Consciousness, and not to any entity derived from it and dependent on it.

9. Omniscient Brahman, The Cause Of The Cosmos

Sruthathwath cha

Since the all-knowing Brahman is declared by the Vedas to be the cause of the cosmos, a description and under standing of this sublime phenomenon has been made. The very expression "Brahman" conveys the meaning that It has the power of willing, etc. The Vedas that speak of Brahman as unconditioned and devoid of attributes also declare that It has, as its very nature, total beneficence. For, from the standpoint of the cosmos, Brahman is with out qualifications.

Cosmos, the projection of Supreme Consciousness

The Upanishad texts, which form a section of the revealed texts (sruthi) or Vedic scripture, do not convey any distinction between the Absolute and the Almighty (Brahman and Iswara). What has to be understood from all these Vedantic texts is that the cosmos is the manifestation or projection of supreme Consciousness.

If the cosmos is considered inert and devoid of consciousness, some might ask how it could be so invitingly attractive - it could not be irresponsive and dull, for it would then be ever the same. No. This view is incorrect.

God is the efficient cause as well as the material cause of the cosmos. He has Himself become all this. He is the inner and the outer truth, and therefore He is the Light that illumines and reveals, that draws and discloses.

"Flour, etc. is mixed with sugar (Pishtadhi guda samparkath)" it is said. Pishta means flour - any flour, rice, wheat, or pulse. Mixing the flour with sugar sweetens it (guda samparkath). By itself, flour is not welcomed by the tongue; sugar makes it tasty. Similarly, wherever charm, attraction, or splendour is manifest in the cosmos, it is the cosmic Spirit (Paramatma) that is evident

and nothing else. The Vedas make this very clear. As the Veda texts assert, the cosmic Spirit creates, fondles, fosters, and sustains the cosmos and finally induces it to merge in Him. The cosmic Spirit is the sole Creator, the sole Enjoyer, and the sole Protector and Master. This is the proclamation contained in the Vedas.

Brahman is inherently spiritual Bliss

The Vedas declare that Brahman is of the nature of supreme Bliss. Elaborating on the Atma, they mention the sheaths that treasure it: the food sheath (anna-maya kosa), the vital-air sheath (prana-maya kosa), the mental sheath (manomaya kosa), and the intellectual sheath (vijñana-maya kosa), in that sequence. After these four comes the innermost, spiritual-bliss sheath (ananda-maya kosa). All these are in Brahman, so it is proper to conclude that Brahman is inherently spiritual bliss. Each sheath is subtler than the next, the subtlest being the fifth, the bliss sheath. Therefore, all these can be taken to be the "body (upadhi)" of Brahman.

The food sheath or coat is a gross covering, which protects the coating that is less gross, namely, the vital-air sheath. The vital airs are nurtured and directed by the less gross mental sheath. The mental sheath controls the vital airs (pranas), which regulate and operate the physical and sensory instruments, so the mental sheath is much more powerful than the breath. Subtler than this sheath is the intellectual sheath. It is ever engaged in discriminating between the temporary and the permanent. It is very close to the experience of spiritual bliss (ananda). In fact, it helps to evoke that experience, which is the awareness of Brahman itself.

In order to guard the body against disease, we wear different varieties of clothes - an undershirt, then a shirt, then a coat, and over the coat a shawl. When the heart is to be examined, the shawl, then the coat, shirt, and finally the undershirt must be removed. Only then can the heart be examined. Similarly, one has to eliminate the food, mental, vital air, intellectual, and mental sheaths in order to be intimately aware of the supreme Atma or Brahman, which is spiritual bliss itself. The journey known as "life" is but a

pilgrimage from the food plane of matter to the blissful spiritual plane. This is the goal, the end. The aphorism conveys this truth to us. The supreme Soul (Paramatma) is essentially of the blissful nature.

Some don't agree with this conclusion. They posit the individualized soul (jivatma) not as spiritual bliss (ananda) but as the discriminating faculty of the intellect (vijnana). That is to say, Brahman is effulgence in Its own right; It needs no external source of light. It is established in Its own splendour. Others declare that supreme energy is the entity known as spiritual bliss, the supreme Atma (Paramatma), and also as supreme space. These theories arise out of different thought processes of people in different planes.

Atma is also spiritual bliss

Brahman encompasses all, and awareness of every entity is awareness of Brahman Itself. It cannot be differentiated or divided. Spiritual bliss (ananda) is all; Brahman, the bliss sheath, is also the individual Atma (jivatma), appearing as individualized. The quality cannot be identified and considered apart from the thing possessing it.

The Atma is spiritual bliss, whether universalized as the highest Atma (Paramatma) or particularized as the individual Atma. Spiritual bliss cannot be measured out as less or more. Full of spiritual bliss means spiritual bliss itself, not something having bliss. So the individual Atma is not less and the highest Atma is not more spiritual bliss. They are both the same spiritual bliss.

In the ordinary worldly sense, too, spiritual bliss is the characteristic of every living being. As a consequence, every human being seeks to express and develop it. Living beings are found renouncing various desires and lines of conduct in order to attain spiritual bliss. But belief that spiritual bliss can be secured from external objects is a sign of ignorance:

Sarvam para-vasham dukham;

Sarvam Atma vasham sukham.

From all outside you, grief;
From all within you, happiness.

According to this axiom, when one feels that one's spiritual bliss (ananda) is dependent on external objects, one is moving beyond oneself and courting grief. One plunges into needless grief by the enslavement to objects that, according to one's fancy, can make one happy. One becomes the target for anxiety and worry. One has to suffer much, just as a person afflicted with thirst running toward a mirage gets nothing to quench the thirst and has a miserable end. Therefore, the attempt to derive spiritual bliss through external objects and external activities is not commendable at all. Those who long for genuine spiritual bliss have to turn their attempts inward, bound to the Atma.

One point at this juncture: When it is said that Rama made Bhima a wealthy person or a well-informed person, does it not follow that at the beginning Rama was wealthier or more knowledgeable than Bhima? If Rama was indigent and ignorant, how could he transform Bhima into a wealthy or knowledgeable person? Obviously, it would not be possible.

Supreme Self is Being-Awareness-Bliss

Brahman is the embodiment of bliss (ananda-swarupa) - is bliss itself. So every living thing receives spiritual bliss from Brahman. He is All-knowledge, so He awards, arouses, and advances knowledge in all. God is the grantor, the promoter of spiritual bliss. This is confirmed in the aphorism "The Blissful One is the Supreme Self, since the statement is repeated many times (anandamayo-bhya-sath)." Moreover, that very [Brahman] that is described in mantra is sung.

Mantra Varnikam eva cha

Sathya Jnanam Anantham Brahma
"Brahman is being, awareness, bliss"

This sacred axiomatic formula (mantra) also refers to the same Brahman that is spiritual bliss. Brahman is Truth (sathya); Brahman is Knowledge (jnana); Brahman is Infinity (an-antha). Truth is a synonym for bliss; it does not mean anything else.

Truth implies indivisible, immeasurable bliss. It cannot be affected by limitations of space, the passage of time, or the varying moods of the experiencers. Spiritual bliss will itself purify time, space, and the individual.

These three are subdued by spiritual bliss; spiritual bliss is not subservient to or bound to time, space, or the individual.

Therefore, God, who is designated and described by the mantra, can be known only partially through the mantra: He does not limit the mantra; the mantra may limit Him. Spiritual bliss is the bond that binds both.

10. Divine "light" And Divine "feet"

Jyothish charana-abhidhanath

The word light (jyothi) in the Upanishads does not connote the physical light of the material world. When material limits or qualifications like feet are specified, how can the immanent, all-pervasive entity be indicated?

Such a limited or qualified phenomenon cannot become the object of adoration and meditation. When the word light is understood to mean the light having certain natural characteristics, it cannot signify Brahman, the Universal Absolute.

Divine light shines everywhere

The hymn in praise of the cosmic Person declares:

Padosya vishwa bhuthani.

The entire cosmos, with all its component elements,
is but one quarter of His glory.

Therefore, the cosmic Person is beyond bounds, measures, or degrees. The divine light (jyothi) illumines Heaven and beyond and reveals even Brahman. That which makes known by its splendour the era preceding the origin of living beings and the regions beyond even the farthest and the highest, "That" is indicated by the word jyothi. It shines in that supremest among supreme regions.

Note also that the same divine light shines everywhere, at all times, and in all beings. It comprises existence (asthi or sat), illumination-knowledge (bhati or chit), and joy-bliss (priya or ananda). All things seen in the universe have

the unseen as their base. All things that move have the unmoving as their base. So, too, for every living being, why, for the very cosmos itself, the invisible Brahman, the Supra-Truth, is the basis. It is this Parabrahman, the Omni-Self, that causes the cosmos to shine. "Divine light (jyothi)" is appropriate only for this light and not the limited, inferior, physical light. Divine light has neither beginning nor end. It is the supreme Light (Param-jyothi), the light without a second (A-dwaita-jyothi), the eternal, unbroken Light (Akhanda-jyothi). In other words, it is the supreme Brahman Itself, for all this is revealed only in and through It.

Unlimited divine light versus worldly light

The divine light referred to above cannot be interpreted otherwise. The Upanishads do speak of Brahman as having "feet", but that does not restrict or reduce Its vastness in any way.

"Divine light (jyothi)", therefore, conveys "Brahman" as its meaning. When Brahman is imagined as having four "feet", or quarters, all that is projected from Brahman comprises but one quarter. The Upanishads assert that the other three are "undying, undiminshable, changeless" in "heaven (divi)".

A point to be remembered is that such immortal light cannot be equated with the common light we deal with.

The Upanishadic light is said to "illumine". How can this process be limited and tied down to the effect of ordinary worldly light? Divine light is embodied in Brahman; it operates in and through Brahman only. Brahman is immanent in all, so divine light reveals and shines in all.

Divine light is total illumination

The base, the root, the cover of the ever-vibrating, ever-moving cosmos is Brahman, the stable, the fixed, the immovable, the ever-steady divine light. When Brahman also starts to vibrate, change, and move, total mergence, submergence (pralaya), happens. For example, when the train moves, if the

rails on which it moves also move along, what about the fate of the passengers? When we walk, the road is stationary, so we are able to proceed safely along.

The light that shines individually is called the flame in the lamp; the light that illumines and reveals all is called divine light (jyothi). Divine light brings to light the fire that pervades the regions, that warms the body and resides in the stomach, the gleam in the eye. The moon is lit by the sun and thereby made bright. All these activities are prompted and promoted by Brahman, which is divine light itself. Divine light is the principle, the phenomenon of illumination in all its aspects.

11. Brahman As Cosmic Breath Or Life

Pranas-thatha-anugamath

The vital breath or air (prana) refers not to the ordinary sense of the word but to Brahman only. That word is also often taken to mean the deities presiding over the breath and vital airs, like Rudra or Vayu, but even that meaning is inapplicable.

Subtle meaning of vital air is Brahman only

Once, a seeker named Pratardana approached Indra, the Lord of the abode of Gods, and prayed to be instructed about how he could be endowed with that which is most beneficial to him. Indra directed him to know Him as Life and meditate on Him as "vital air".

Defining vital air (prana) and elaborating on its glory, Indra told him, "This vital air is identified with consciousness (Sa esha prana-prajnatma)." It is "bliss, ageless, deathless". That is to say, vital air is the very embodiment of bliss. It has no decline or diminution; it is immortal. That is the teaching. These characteristics belong to Brahman alone, not to vital air as commonly understood. Vital air is only a symbol to bring Brahman to mind and not any other entity.

Pratardana's question was about the most beneficial, the most essential entity that one has to know and possess.

Brahman alone is the source, substance, and sustenance, so "vital air", the word used by Indra, can mean only Brahman and nothing else. The gross meaning of the word has to be discarded and the subtle meaning accepted.

Generally, people consider wealth, power, and fame as most essential and pursue them through every possible means. In this struggle, people waste invaluable human qualities with which they are endowed. Besides this waste

of allotted years of life, they plunge deeper and deeper into the darkness of ignorance (a-jnana). They ignore and lose awareness of their real nature (swarupa).

On another occasion, Indra instructed, "Know Me alone (Mam eva vijaneehi)." That is to say, "Understand Me well; be aware of Me in full." The Indra referred to here cannot be a particular deity, with a body and limbs. We cannot infer that the word "vital air (prana)" indicated the speaker Indra himself. One may argue that the entity who has to be meditated upon is either "vital air" or Indra, for Indra is vital air and vital air is Indra: it cannot be Brahman. This inference is not correct. Vital air means Brahman and nothing else. Some interpret the statement "Know Me alone" as a direction to the listener to "Know the Brahman that is My reality, My truth, My core", so Brahman alone is denoted by the word used by Indra while instructing Pratardana.

Meditate on Brahman alone

In common usage, in worldly parlance, vital air and Indra are associated with each other. In the vocabulary of spiritual inquiry, the vast (bhuma) is descriptive of Brahman, which also means "the limitless, beyond even the cosmos". Commentators have investigated the superficial and deeper meanings of these expressions and attempted to reconcile them as denoting one principle. Vital air (prana) and Brahman, they laid down, are two faces of one coin; they are inextricably interpenetrative (avina bhava sambandha). Therefore, Brahman and nothing else has to be meditated upon.

The instruction is in consonance with the point of view of the scripture, as in the case of Vamadeva: Sastra drishtya thu upadheeha Vamadheva thu.

The four great declarations

The sage Vamadeva adhered to the teachings of the scriptures,

I am Brahman (Aham Brahmasmi);
That thou art (Thathwamasi);
Brahman is Constant Integrated Awareness (Prajna-nam Brahma);
This Self is Brahman (Ayam Atma Brahma).

He listened and thereby attained direct awareness of Brahman. He meditated on the truth "I am Brahman."

So, when Indra instructs, "Know Me alone" - the real Me - Brahman is meant, not the vital force (prana). Before the awareness dawned on him, Vamadeva could also well have understood by vital air the deity Indra. His announcement after realisation was, "I was Manu (Aham Manurabhavam)"; "I am All (Sarvatma)". In the same manner, since the deity Indra possessed total wisdom, he could declare Brahman as equivalent to the vital force in all. There is no inconsistency in this.

All entities are only Brahman

In fact, Brahman can be indicated as any entity. All is Brahman (Sarvam Brahmam). Supreme Truth, Total Wisdom, Vast Eternity is Brahman (Sathyam Jnanam Anantham Brahma). In accordance with these expressions of intuitional experience, each and every thing can symbolize and denote Brahman. All things have emanated from Brahman, all things are projections of Brahman. Gold does not lose its nature, however many names and forms it may assume as jewelry. No one should be misled by the multiplicity of names and forms in the objective world, the variety of sights and sounds. When the truth behind the diverse is identified, one is aware of Brahman as the Prime Cause, the Basis, the Goal. Indra the deity is none of these.

The aphorism with which the inquiry started - "That from which the birth of the universe is derived (Janmadi yasya yathaha)" - laid down that Brahman is the cause of the entire cosmos, space, and all the vital forces.

12. Brahman Is The Universal Teaching

Sarvathra-prasiddhopadesath

In all statements in the Vedantic texts, the Upanishads, the familiar and easily recognisable expression "Brahman" is the one that is mentioned and elaborated. In the direction "One should meditate by becoming serene", the object of meditation is therefore the entity indicated by "All this is verily Brahman" and not the individualized I. Commentators also upheld this interpretation.

"All this is verily Brahman (Sarvam khalvidam Brahma)" is the axiom with which the Upanishadic exhortation to meditate starts. The Vedic revelation is that the cosmos or creation is Brahman, for it originates in, is sustained by, and merges into Brahman. It is not distinct or separable from Brahman.

Non-dual vision reveals Brahman

When viewed without the twin distortions of like and dislike, love and hate, all forms, all effects, all causes are experienced as Brahman only. But when the vision is affected by love or hate, each form, each effect and cause, appears different from the rest. Hence the advice to meditate after attaining serenity. When feelings are calm and balanced, the many are experienced as the one. An agitated mind can never have a single vision. It runs along contrary lines, so it experiences the world, nature, and the cosmos as separate from Brahman. Such vision creates division. Serene vision reveals unity. As the vision, so the impression, the view of the world.

The head of the family is only one person, but each member of the family views him from a different point of view. So he is addressed differently, as "father" by the son, "husband" by the wife, "father-in-law" by the daughter-in-law, "grandfather" by the grandson, and "elder brother" by his younger brother. The One is thought of in many forms, because of the variety of relationships assumed.

So too, seekers and thinkers who are in various levels of awareness and attainment express and experience the One in different forms and ways. The attitudes of approach and adoration also cause differences in the experience of the One. Some identify and posit the individualized Atma (jivi); some adore the active, all-knowing almighty God (Iswara); some concretize the all-pervasive energy (sakthi); and others have as their goal the cosmic Person (Purusha). But the individual or embodied Atma cannot claim omniscience and omnipotence. As long as it is bound by its self-imposed ignorance and egotism, it cannot know and experience the all-pervasive, all-comprehensive Brahman.