

VI. THE SELF IN ADVAITA VEDĀNTA

The system of philosophy known as *Vedānta* is the apex of Indian philosophical thought. The term *Vedānta* means *the end of the Vedas*. Vedānta is an end in two senses: it is the philosophy based on the Upanishads – the last parts of the Vedic writings, and it is the goal of all Indian speculations, *i.e.*, according to its disciples. Vedāntists regard their system as the synthesis of all other systems. For them it formulates the distinctive spirit of Hinduism. Vedānta is the only Indian philosophy which *directly* plays a part in modern Indian civilization. In India today nearly all educated Indians, except insofar as they have embraced Western ideas and values, are Vedāntists. Vedāntists hold that *Brahman* is the first cause of the world, that knowledge of *Brahman* leads to final liberation, and that *Brahman* can be known through the scriptures and not through mere reasonings.

There are five schools of Vedāntic philosophy. The oldest school, the most influential, and the one to which three-fourths¹ of the Vedāntists belong is the Advaita school founded by Śaṅkara in the early part of the ninth century A.D. Since the time of Śaṅkara four schools have developed out of different conclusions concerning the unity of being, the reality of the physical world, and the relation of the human self to *Brahman*. These four are the Viśiṣṭadvaita of Rāmānuja, the Dvaita of Madhva, the Śuddhādvaita of Viṣṇunsvāmin, and the Dvaitādvaita of Nimbārka. Some scholars contend that these non-Śaṅkarite systems came into being because Śaṅkara had ignored the common people's

¹ Richard Garbe, *Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 12, p. 597.

longings for a personal god, their conviction of the reality of the physical world, and their desire for preservation of the individual soul. S. K. De, for example, has written, “Each of these schools, therefore, wrote a fresh commentary on the *Vedānta-Sūtras*, in which an attempt was made to establish a theory which would permit the individual exercise of love and piety in a world of reality.”² The chief difference among the four schools was in regard to the relationship of *Brahman*, the world, and the souls. The concept of the self in the four schools is sufficiently alike that it is unnecessary to examine the views of the self of each school in this study. Only the Viśiṣṭādvaita view of the self will be presented. Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta is the second largest Vedāntic school in India today.

The founders of the five Vedāntic schools regarded the Upanishads as divine revelations (*śruti*). They assumed therefore that all the ideas presented in the Upanishads were compatible. Non-Hindu scholars who have studied the Upanishads have not felt the pressure to create a consistent whole of the doctrines of the Upanishads. They account for differences in emphasis and contradictory statements by pointing out that the Upanishads were composed over a period of many generations by many different teachers. The Upanishads appear to non-Hindu scholars to have been designed as textbooks, or even exercise books, to take the student where he was in his spiritual development and to carry him as far as his talents and interests allowed toward the experience of identity of the human self and the Cosmic Absolute. This was known as the principle of *adhikāribheda*, the principle of leading up. Different interpretations of these writings, argue the non-Hindu scholars, were possible since an interpreter might choose to emphasize any stage of the levels of spiritual progress: dualism of God and nature, or immanence of God in nature, or identity of *Ātman* and *Brahman*. Vivekananda, the swami who awakened interest in Hinduism in the United States in the early part of the twentieth century, arrived at a strikingly similar position: “It was given to me to live with a man (Ramakrishna) who was as ardent

² Sushil Kumar De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta, Great Printers and Publishers, 1942), p. 3.

a Dualist, as ardent an Advaitist, as ardent a Bhakti, as ardent a Jnani; and living with this man first put it into my head to understand the Upanishads and the texts of the scriptures from an independent and better basis than by blindly following the commentators; and in my humble opinion, and in my researches I came to the conclusion that these texts are not at all contradictory but wonderfully harmonious, one idea leading up to the other. In all the Upanishads, they begin with Dualistic ideas, with worship and all that and end with a grand flourish of Advaitic ideas.”³ The Vedāntic philosophers living in India today generally show tolerance toward members of the different schools within the Vedānta, although the Advaitic monopoly of the teaching positions in Indian universities is a source of irritation for the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedāntists.

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* was an early attempt to make a system out of Upanishadic doctrines. It was composed in the fifth century B.C. in a form which would appeal to ordinary men, yet would contain sufficient depth to challenge the wisest philosophers. As a result, the laymen thrilled to its theism, and the scholars despaired of making sense of its metaphysics. Radhakrishnan has said, “The *Gītā* stands midway between a philosophical system and a poetic inspiration.”⁴ From the fifth to the second centuries B.C. many philosophers wrote aphorisms or *sūtras* which attempted to state the message of the Upanishads in precise language. The meaning of the word *sūtra*, i.e., a clue, indicates another reason for the writing of these documents: they were designed as memory-aids to assist students in recalling the teachings of their *gurus*. The names of Audulomi, Kāsakritsna, Bādari, Jaimini, Kārshnājini, and Asmarathya were mentioned by later writers as authors of *sūtras*. The only one of these collections which has survived is the *Vedānta-Sūtras* or *Brahma-Sūtras* of Bādarāyana. Bādarāyana’s collection is probably the last and the best.⁵ But the *Vedānta-*

³ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 8 (Mayavati, Almora, Himalayas, Advaita Ashrama, 1931), pp. 233-234.

⁴ S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1951), p. 522.

⁵ Swami Vireswarananda, *Brahma-Sūtras* (Mayavata, Almora, Himilayas, Advaita Ashrama, 1948), p. vi.

Sūtras of Bādarāyana were not clear. In fact, they were more cryptic than the Upanishads themselves. The frugality of the *sūtra* writers in their use of words was expressed in a saying which has been preserved to the present day: “An author rejoiceth in the economizing of half a short vowel as much as in the birth of a son.” Furthermore, the *sūtras* could have different meanings depending upon where the reader wished to divide the long connected Sanskrit words; there was no way of determining which *sūtras* expressed the author’s views; and the *sūtras* did not indicate which texts of the Upanishads were being discussed. Hence arose the need for commentaries to explain the treatises which had been written to explain the Upanishads! Each of the five Vedāntic schools had its own commentary on the *Vedānta-Sūtras*, and each commentator claimed that his was the one which captured the meaning of Bādarāyana.

The founders of the five Vedāntic schools based their doctrines on the Upanishads, the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, and the *Vedānta-Sūtras*. These were called “the triple foundation of the Vedānta”. This common foundation accounts for the similarity of thought in the schools.

Śaṅkara (788–820?) regarded himself as an accurate expounder of the doctrines taught in the “triple foundation”, but many scholars have not agreed with his self-estimation. For example, S. C. Chakravarti says, “Śaṅkara was a great intellectual of his time. He was also a past master of dialectics. He was well qualified to be the founder of a new system, and had he done so, it would have been judged on its own merits. But when he took on himself the role of a commentator, he had no right to forget his position and foist upon the Upanishads a philosophy of his own . . . As an exponent of the art of dialectics, he may be looked upon as a great success, but as an interpreter of the Upanishads, he is a huge failure.”⁶ George Thibaut in the introduction to his translation of Śaṅkara’s commentary on the *Vedānta-Sūtras* opined that Rāmānuja presented more accurately the doctrine expressed in the *Vedānta-Sūtras* than did Śaṅkara – a view shared by Sukhtankar,

⁶ Sures Chandra Chakravarti, *Human Life and Beyond* (Calcutta, University of Calcutta Press, 1947), p. 52.

Jacobi, Keith, and many others. Thibaut complained in the introduction to his translation of Rāmānuja's commentary on the *Vedānta-Sūtras* that for making this observation he had been charged by Advaitists with "philosophic incompetency" and that he was said to be "hopelessly theistic due to early training".⁷ Thibaut ought not to have been surprised by the savage manner in which he was attacked, since Advaita Vedānta in the minds of many of its followers is a religion, and religionists are not noted for fairness or moderation when defending their faith. One Advaitist has written, ["Vedānta is primarily a religion, and it is a philosophy only as the formulation of this religion. All religion makes for the realization of the self as sacred, but the religion of Advaita is the specific cult of such realization understood explicitly as self-knowledge, as sacred knowledge, and as nothing but knowledge."] ⁸ To Chakravarti, who says, "Śaṅkara had no justification whatsoever to override clear and repeated texts",⁹ the reply can be made that Śaṅkara's justification was fidelity to his own vision of the truth. A religious genius cannot be faithless to his inner experience. In defending that experience he will select, adapt, and modify supporting materials. The view expressed by S. K. Das is a more temperate one: "Commentators of the *Vedānta-sūtras*, there have been – and their number is a legion – such as Śrīnkantha, Bhāskara, Rāmānuja, Nimvārka, Madhva, Vallabha, and Baladeva among others – who have, by adopting a policy of pick-and-choose, of stressing a point here and dropping a point there, of straining and twisting the resources of logic, sought to cater to demands that are extra-philosophical and thus win the day. . . . He [Śaṅkara] overrides others by the sheer force of his greatness – by the compelling greatness, in particular, of his logic of absolutism, or what is the same thing, his logic of comprehension. The whole host of other commentators exhibit in their

⁷ *The Vedānta-Sūtras with the Commentary of Rāmānuja*. Translated by George Thibaut. *The Sacred Books of the East [SBE]*, Vol. 48 (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1904), p. ix.

⁸ Krisnachandra Bhattacharyya, *Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 2 (Calcutta, Progressive Publishers, 1958), p. 118.

⁹ Sures Chandra Chakravarti, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* (Calcutta, University of Calcutta Press, 1935), p. ix.

interpretation what may be called thoughts of arrested development; and whether of the form of qualified monism (*viśiṣṭādvaita*) or of dualism (*dvaita*), they all point by force of their unconscious logic to Advaita-Vedānta of the Śaṅkarite type as their natural culmination.”¹⁰ In this study of the Advaita Vedānta view of the self the question of the reliability of Śaṅkara as interpreter of the Upanishads and the *Vedānta-Sūtras* need not be settled. Śaṅkara’s view of the self will be considered without attempting to determine if this view is the one expressed in the Upanishads and in the *Vedānta-Sūtras*.

Śaṅkara set himself to the task of reviving Vedic culture at a time when primitive superstitions and magical practices were displacing the noble idealism and practical wisdom of the early Buddhists. In his short life he not only wrote commentaries on the principal Upanishads, the *Vedānta-Sūtras*, and the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, but he also established four monasteries at widely separated places in India and reorganized Hindu life so the *sannyasis* – those who set themselves apart for the study of spiritual lore – were re-established as the religious leaders of Indian society. The serious and practical motivations of Śaṅkara are obvious in the criteria he laid down for the study of Vedānta philosophy. He required that a prospective student of Vedānta give evidence of *viveka* (discrimination between that which is eternal and that which is non-eternal), *vairāgya* (renunciation of the hope for happiness in either this life or the next), *shatsampatti* (calmness, self-control, relinquishment, forbearance, concentration, and an affirmative attitude of mind), and *mumukshutvam* (longing to become free from all bondage).¹¹

† The aim of Vedānta according to Śaṅkara was to remove that which stood in the way of man’s salvation! Śaṅkara was not a disinterested philosopher. The truth which he sought was not scientific truth but religious truth, that is, the truth which would set men free from bondage to things which were not completely real and eternal. In other words, Śaṅkara’s philosophy was primarily

¹⁰ Saroj Kumar Das, *A Study of the Vedānta* (Calcutta, University of Calcutta Press, 1937), pp. 29-30.

¹¹ Swami Nikhilandanda, *Self-knowledge* (Madras, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1947), pp. 43-46.

a philosophy of value. It was more than a theory; it was a program for the realization of values. In the words of a modern Indian philosopher, “Śaṅkara’s philosophy concerns itself with the problem of ‘appearance and reality’ only in so far as this is necessary to bring out in bolder relief the value-side of the universe. For Śaṅkara the truth of the universe is constituted by the value it possessed. . . . value and reality are identical in his system.”¹²

The fundamental reality of the universe according to Śaṅkara is *Brahman*. In the words of the *Vedānta-Sūtras* “Brahman is that omniscient, omnipotent cause from which proceed the origin, etc. (*i.e.*, sustenance and dissolution) of this world.”¹³ From man’s experience of the external world he can infer the existence of a cause of the world, but he cannot establish what is the nature of that cause, nor can he establish that there is but one cause. Śaṅkara contended that *Brahman* cannot be known without appeal to the revelation of the Upanishads. Non-revealed writings (*smṛiti*) such as the *Bhagavad-Gītā* help in knowing the *Brahman*, since they were written as attempts to explain revelations. *Brahman* is the completely real Being. It is pure Being.¹⁴ It is being *a priori*, that is, the Being necessary in order for anything to be; it is not being *a posteriori*, that is, a being discovered by empirical experiences. It is the basis of the empirical world, although it cannot be experienced in itself.

The Upanishads, claimed Śaṅkara, described *Brahman* from two points of view: the higher knowledge (*parā vidyā*) and the lower knowledge (*aparā vidyā*). This distinction has been known in the West as the Way of Truth and the Way of Opinion, or as

¹² Ram Pratap Singh, *The Vedānta of Śaṅkara* (Jaipur, Bharat Publishing House, 1949), pp. 11-12.

¹³ *Vedānta-Sūtras*, I. 1. 2. Vireswarananda translation, p. 26. Throughout the rest of this chapter *Vedānta-Sūtras* will denote the *Vedānta-Sūtras* or *Brahma-Sūtras* with the commentary of Śaṅkara. The quotations will be taken either from George Thibaut (translator), *The Vedānta-Sūtras with the Commentary of Śaṅkarakarya* (= *The Sacred Books of the East* [SBE], Vols. 34, 38) (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, Vol. 34, 1890, Vol. 38, 1896) or from Swami Vireswarananda, *Brahma-Sūtras* (Mayavata, Almora, Himalayas, Advaita Ashrama, 1948).

¹⁴ *Brahman* is designated by the neuter *it* to avoid any implications of personality.

the world viewed under the aspect of eternality and the world viewed under the aspect of time. *Parā vidyā* and *aparā vidyā* can be traced throughout the Advaita Vedānta system. Much of the confusion in the interpretation of Śaṅkara has stemmed from forgetting that the Absolute, the world, and the soul can be considered from either point of view. To fail to detect the centrality of the two-fold knowledge in Advaita Vedānta is to miss the plan by which Śaṅkara was able to form a consistent system from the rich variety of the Upanishadic writings.

The *Brahman* of the higher form of knowing is the *Brahman* without attributes (*Nirguṇa Brahman*); the *Brahman* of the lower form of knowing is the *Brahman* with attributes (*Saguṇa Brahman*). *Nirguṇa Brahman* is so devoid of attributes that the correct response to any statement which applies attributes to it is “*Nēti! Nēti!*” (Not this! Not this!, or Inadequate! Inadequate!).¹⁵ *Nirguṇa Brahman* therefore cannot be described as good or evil, as just or unjust, or as loving or non-loving. All attributes are inadequate, for they denote an order of reality less than Absolute Reality. *Brahman*¹⁶ is sometimes described as *satchitānanda* (Being-Consciousness-Bliss). This may seem to be a violation of the doctrine of *Nēti*, but such is not the case, for to say that Brahman is Being-Consciousness-Bliss is not to say that Brahman exists, is conscious, or is happy. *Nēti! Nēti!* still holds.

Brahman does not exist as a tree exists, but *Brahman* is that which makes it possible for the tree to exist in the way in which a tree exists. The same word cannot be used to denote both Absolute Being and empirical existence. As Deussen has said, “Existence [of Brahman] . . . is opposed to all empirical Existence, so that, in comparison with this it can just as well be indicated as Non-Existence.”¹⁷ The existence of *Brahman* is an absolute existence, a really Real, a Being that could not not be. *Brahman*’s

¹⁵ Cf. Spinoza’s *Omnis determinatio negatio est* (All determining is negating). Also Eckhart’s “God is unlike to anything and like to nothing. He is above all being. He is the naught.”

¹⁶ The word *Brahman* unless otherwise specified will hereafter mean *Nirguṇa Brahman*.

¹⁷ Paul Deussen, *The System of the Vedānta*, translated by Charles Johnston (Chicago, Open Court Publishing Co., 1912), pp. 211-212.

existence can be contrasted both to non-existence or false existence, a form of existence which can be spoken about and thought about but cannot be, *e.g.*, the non-existence of the son of a barren woman, and also to illusory existence or phenomenal existence, a form of existence in which a thing is taken to be one thing although it is really another, *e.g.*, a rope mistaken at twilight for a snake. *Brahman* must not be regarded as a remote being, hiding in some distant corner of the universe. *Brahman* is the foundation of all existence, the ultimate basis of all things, the material and efficient cause of the world, {the transcendent unity behind all plurality} the permanence that makes change possible. *Brahman* acts upon itself and causes the phenomenal world to be. Śaṅkara recognized the problem of *Brahman*'s creativity: "If it be said that *Brahman* without extraneous aids cannot be the cause of the world because an agent is seen to collect materials for any construction, we say no, since it is like milk turning to curds."¹⁸ *Brahman* is present in all its manifestations, and, since the entire universe is a manifestation of *Brahman*, {*Brahman* is experienced indirectly in all experiences of the macrocosmos and the microcosmos, of the world without and the world within.} *Brahman*, like space, makes possible spatial experiences, yet it is not experienced directly.

Brahman is the essence of Consciousness. *Brahman* is not conscious as minds can be conscious. It is the foundation of knowledge. It is self-knowing in a direct manner. It knows without separating subject and object. *Brahman* is above all duality, both metaphysical duality and epistemological duality. *Brahman* is the Knower of knowing. It is self-sufficient, and hence is spiritual, for no material thing can be self-sufficient. Consciousness, Thought, or Knowledge is the substance, not an attribute, of *Brahman*. In the words of Keith "... it is consciousness without any object or subject, and therefore differs so entirely from the very nature of consciousness as not in our view to deserve the name at all."¹⁹ *Nēti! Nēti!*

¹⁸ *Vedānta-Sūtras*, II. 1. 24. Vireswarananda translation, p. 188.

¹⁹ Arthur Berriedale Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, *Harvard Oriental Series*, Vol. 32 (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1925), p. 507.

Brahman is the essence of Happiness. *Brahman* is not happy as men may be happy, but *Brahman* is the foundation of Happiness. Its Happiness, like its Being and its Knowledge, is not to be identified with man's experiences. "The bliss also is that of being which has no consciousness of any kind and no feeling, and therefore is merely a metaphorical expression."²⁰ *Nēti! Nēti!*

The uniqueness of *satchitānanda* stems from *Brahman's* lack of all limitations. A tree that exists does not non-exist; a mind that is conscious is not unconscious; and a person that is happy is not unhappy. Ordinary existence, consciousness, and happiness are limitations. *Brahman's* Existence, Consciousness, and Happiness are not limitations. Hence from the view of *aparā* knowledge *Brahman* is and is not, is conscious and is unconscious, and is happy and is unhappy. From the view of *parā* knowledge *Brahman* is the ground of all Reality, of all Truth, and of all Happiness. According to Advaita Vedānta knowledge and values are not extraneities grafted by man upon the world; they are integrants of reality.

Saguṇa Brahman, the lower *Brahman*, is the same Reality seen from another point of view. This lower point of view seems to be a false point of view, but the falsity is only a falsity when contrasted with the higher point of view. The tree down the street appears to be shorter than the tree under which one is standing, yet when both trees are measured they are discovered to be about the same size. Likewise when *Nirguṇa Brahman* is regarded as an object of man's awareness, it takes on characteristics which are only appearances, although these characteristics are not appearances to those who are aware from the lower point of view. A dream world seems real to the dreamer. *Saguṇa Brahman* is a personal being designated by the pronoun *He*. The Being without attributes now is seen to possess infinite attributes. The unfathomable First Cause becomes an object of worship. *Saguṇa Brahman* is called *Īśvara* (Lord) and is worshipped by the devout as *Brahmā* the Creator, Viśnu the Preserver, and Śiva the Destroyer. But *Īśvara* and his appearances as *Brahmā*, Viśnu, and Śiva are real only from the lower point of view. The man who has attained the

²⁰ *Ibid.*

higher point of view knows that fundamentally and ultimately only *Nirguṇa Brahman* exists.

When the Advaita Vedāntists insisted that *Brahman* could not be known, they meant that *Brahman* could not be known *as things are known*. In knowing the knower stands outside the object. *Brahman* cannot be an object, since an object is an object only when there is a subject removed from the object, and there is nothing other than *Brahman*. Neither can *Brahman* be a subject, since a subject is a subject only in relation to an object, and, once again, there is nothing outside *Brahman*. One who tries to know *Brahman* in the subject-object form of knowing is like one who tries to see the eye with the eye.

The world is a self-manifestation of *Brahman*. Creation is co-eval with the being of *Brahman*. *Brahman* reveals itself in a world for no other reason than motiveless sport or pastime (*līlā*). “Even as kings without any motive behind are seen to engage in acts for mere pastime, or even as men breathe without a purpose, for it is their very nature, or even as children play out of mere fun, so also Brahman without any purpose engages itself in creating this world of diversity.”²¹ The *how* of *Brahman*’s creation is equally puzzling, for *Brahman* cannot act upon anything other than itself since the reality of anything other than *Brahman* would be a limitation of *Brahman*. The Advaitic conception of creation is unlike the usual Western conception since it is not something done once and for all, but rather it is a periodic emergence from and return to *Brahman*. Creation is the revelation of *Brahman*’s own nature, and, since *Brahman* is inexhaustible, no act of creation and no collection of creative acts can fully express *Brahman*. The formation of the world is never completed. There is an eternal process of evolution and involution.

If *Brahman* is the only reality, what sort of reality does the world have? In dealing with this problem Śaṅkara seized upon an Upanishadic expression *iva* (as it were)²² and developed the doctrine of *māyā*. The term *māyā* first appeared in the *Rig Veda* to denote a kind of magical power. Later in the Upanishads – at

²¹ *Vedānta-Sūtras*, II. 1. 33. Vireswarananda translation, p. 195.

²² E.g., *Bṛihad-Āraṇyaka Upanishad*, 2. 4. 14; 4. 3. 8; 4. 3. 13.

least as they are interpreted by Śaṅkara – it became the power of *Brahman* to manifest itself in a world which has *iva* reality. The world itself is then said to be *māyā*, and *māyā* is often translated as *illusion* or *unreality* both by Indian and Western scholars. Müller once wrote, “If we ask for the fundamental doctrines of the Vedānta, the Hindus themselves have helped us and given us in a few words what they themselves consider as the quintessence of that system of thought. I quoted these words at the end of my ‘Three Lectures on the Vedānta’ (1894): – ‘In one half verse I shall tell you what has been taught in thousands of volumes: Brahman is true, the world is false, the soul is Brahman and nothing else.’ . . . This *résumé* of the Vedānta is very true, and very helpful as a *résumé* of that system of philosophy.”²³ Müller believed that both the Upanishads and Śaṅkara taught the unreality of the world. Gough shared this opinion. Gough said that *māyā* was “part and parcel of the primitive cosmological conception”.²⁴ Schopenhauer read the Upanishads in similar fashion and thereby found support for his own view of the world as will and idea. Chakravarti believed that the Upanishads taught that the world was unreal, but he denied that Śaṅkara taught this doctrine. He said in rebuttal to Müller, “In one half verse I shall tell my reader what has been clearly taught in the Upanishads: Brahman is true, the world is true, the world, like everything else, is Brahman and nothing else.”²⁵ Chakravarti added, “If it is once admitted that Brahman is the one ultimate reality, I fail to understand how there can be room left for developing the idea that something *exists*, but yet is not true There is no such thing as unreal; everything is real, since all are movement in the all-comprehensive reality of Brahman.”²⁶ Chakravarti suggested that Śaṅkara borrowed the idea of *māyā* from the Buddhists, although, unlike the Buddhists, Śaṅkara retained *Brahman*. He wrote, “Far from being the main basis of the Upanishad philosophy, the doc-

²³ F. Max Müller, *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy* (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1912), pp. 121-122.

²⁴ A. E. Gough, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads and Ancient Indian Metaphysics* (London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1891), p. xi.

²⁵ Sures Chandra Chakravarti, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 129.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 130, 146.

trine of *Māyā* is foreign to it It is Śaṅkara alone who says that it should be concluded that everything except Brahman is illusion, because Brahman is the one reality.”²⁷ Thibaut thought that the majority of Western scholars agreed that the doctrine of *māyā* was introduced after the writing of the Upanishads: “From Colebrook downwards the majority of European writers have inclined towards the opinion that the doctrine of *Māyā*, *i.e.*, of the unreal illusory character of the sensible world, does not constitute a feature of the primitive philosophy of the Upanishads, but was introduced into the system at some later period, whether by Bādarāyana or Śaṅkara or somebody else.”²⁸

Others deny that Śaṅkara taught that the world is unreal. For example, R. P. Singh said, “Śaṅkara’s intention is not to preach any variety of subjective idealism or to lay the foundations of mentalism.”²⁹ He argued that the example of the rope and the snake was not intended to prove the illusoriness or utter non-existence of the world, but rather it was used to warn against assigning the first principle of reality to the wrong things, *i.e.*, to the spatial-temporal world rather than to *Brahman*: “It is not the thing that is false; it is the consciousness of an alien reality, of a foreign substance, of otherness, which is believed to constitute the essence of things, that is false and is to be given up.”³⁰ Kokileswar Sastri said, “A charge has often been brought against the Advaita system of philosophy to the effect that in this school the world has been treated merely as an appearance and as an illusion. . . . The current belief in this respect is that Śaṅkara’s theory of Advaita-vada unmistakably teaches us the falsity of the world, – that Brahman being considered to be the only Reality, everything else we find in the world must needs be unreal and false.”³¹ This Advaitist pointed out that Śaṅkara mentioned three kinds of objects of

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 203, 202.

²⁸ *The Vedānta-Sūtras with the Commentary by Śaṅkarakarya*. SBE, Vol. 34, p. cxvi.

²⁹ Ram Pratap Singh, *The Vedānta of Śaṅkara* (Jaipur, Bharat Publishing House, 1949), p. 333.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

³¹ Vidyaratna Kokileswar Sastri, *An Introduction to Advaita Philosophy* (Calcutta, University of Calcutta Press, 1926), p. 123.

mentation. There are objects such as a barren woman's son or a rabbit's horn which Śaṅkara said were false (*alīka*) and unreal (*asat*) because they do not serve any practical purpose in the world. Secondly, there are objects such as a rope which appears to be a snake. These objects have a ground to sustain them as long as they appear. They do serve practical purposes of man. These objects Śaṅkara said were unreal but not false. The third class of objects are those of our common experience which seem to be neither unreal nor false. Trees, flowers, desks, etc. belong to this class. These objects, like those of the second class, have an underlying sustaining ground. Because of their substrata, objects of both the second and the third classes are said to be real when contrasted with the objects of the first class, although the objects of both the second and the third classes were regarded as unreal by Śaṅkara when he compared them with the Reality of *Brahman*. Perhaps the objects of the second and third classes ought to be described as "relatively unreal". Other Advaitists have reached the same conclusion, although they have often not expressed themselves as clearly as did Sastri. For example, K. C. Bhattacharyya has said that *māyā* "cannot be characterized as either real or as unreal".³² K. A. Krishnaswami Iyer has noted that "the world is not a mere phantasy, it is not a summer dream, it is but the disguise worn by Reality to the time-bound intellect".³³ Radhakrishnan said that for Śaṅkara "unreal the world is, illusory it is not".³⁴ A. C. Mukerji has given one of the clearest formulations of this solution of the problem of *māyā*: "The world of plurality is perfectly real from the standpoint of finite experience; but when looked at from that of the Infinite experience, it is even less than a dream or illusion, and, as such, it has never existed in the past, does not exist at present, and will never exist in the future."³⁵

It may be that the later Advaitists have made more of this doctrine than Śaṅkara himself did. The only passage in the *Vedānta-*

³² Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya, *Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 2, p. 115.

³³ K. A. Krishnaswami Iyer, *Vedānta, or the Science of Reality* (Madras, Ganesh and Co., 1930), p. 91.

³⁴ Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 2, p. 583.

³⁵ A. C. Mukerji, *The Nature of the Self* (Allahabad, The Indian Press, 1943), p. 287, footnote 29.

Sūtras in which the term *māyā* appears states merely that the dream world is illusory: “But the dream world is mere illusion, on account of its nature not being manifest with the totality of attributes of the waking states.”³⁶ Śaṅkara’s comment on this *sūtra* is: “The nature of the dream world does not agree *in toto* with that of the waking world with respect to time, place, cause, and non-contradiction, and as such that world is not real like the waking world.”³⁷ The difficulty to be noted in the works of later Advaitists is dual: the Advaitists have sometimes taken as completely fictitious what for Śaṅkara was merely phenomenal, and the Advaitists have sometimes forgotten that the reality or unreality of the world of empirical experiences depends upon the point of view of the knower – objects which are real to the ordinary man may be unreal to the enlightened man. The truth and reality of *aparā* knowledge may be the falsity and unreality of *parā* knowledge. Another way of stating the situation would be to note that the principle which accounts for the seeming derivatives from *Brahman* may be examined from two points of view: From the higher or cosmic point of view *māyā* is the source of the physical world – here it is like *prakṛti* in Sāṅkhya, save that *prakṛti* is thought to be real, whereas *māyā* is not thought to be real. From the lower or individual point of view *māyā* is the cause of the delusion under which man exists in his unenlightened state.

Thus far in this analysis of Advaita Vedānta two of the three entities in a complete metaphysical system have been considered: God and the world. The role of “God” in Advaita Vedānta is played by *Brahman* – the Being of all existence, the Knower of all knowledge, and the Foundation of all bliss. *Brahman* is beyond space, time, and causality, yet manifests itself in a physical world which from the empirical point of view is a spatial, temporal, and causal world, although from a higher point of view the world possesses none of these characteristics. The third entity in a metaphysical system is the self. Much that Śaṅkara wrote about *Brahman* as the First Principle of Objective Reality and about the phenomenal status of the experienced world was arresting; but it

³⁶ *Vedānta-Sūtras*, III. 2. 3. Vireswarananda translation, p. 320.

³⁷ *Vedānta-Sūtras*, III. 2. 3. Vireswarananda translation, p. 320.

was his view of the individual self which was most striking, for he was the only one of the commentators on Bādarāyana's *Vedānta-Sūtras* who did not interpret the individual self to be in reality an atom, an agent, and a part of God.

Any attempt to prove the existence of the self in one sense cannot fail, argued Śaṅkara, since the existence of the self is a presupposition of all reasoning. Even the effort to disprove the existence of the self establishes the self, because the transcendent condition of knowledge is presupposed in the very act of refutation. "Just because it is the Self, it is impossible for us to entertain the idea even of its being capable of refutation. For the knowledge of the Self is not, in any person's case, adventitious, not established through the so-called means of right knowledge: it rather is self-established."³⁸ The doubter cannot doubt that he as doubter exists. The search for the self was often likened by the Advaitists to a man looking for a necklace which he was wearing around his neck. A better analogy would be to compare the search for the self to a person who looked for his spectacles unaware that he was wearing the very spectacles for which he was searching. As Bradley has said about the self, ". . . either in endeavouring to deny it, or even in attempting to doubt it, we tacitly assume its validity".³⁹ *Vedāntic Ātmavidyā* started with *sum*, not with a Cartesian *cogito*. For the Vedāntist, both Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita, it is better to postulate "I am" and to conclude "Therefore I think" than to postulate "I think" and to conclude "Therefore I am". The Vedāntic philosophers believed that it was the nature of the self, not the reality of the self, which needed to be proved. The self must seek itself in order to find *what* it is, not *that* it is.

The self according to Śaṅkara is the unchanging substratum which underlies the changes in the life history of a person. In his argument against the Buddhist concept of momentariness, Śaṅkara contended that the common experience of memory indicates that there is something in man which does not change. What one self has sensed is not remembered by another self, but by the same

³⁸ *Vedānta-Sūtras*, II. 3. 7. Thibaut translation, *SBE*, Vol. 38, p. 14.

³⁹ Francis Herbert Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1893), p. 120.

self. A man upon awakening from sleep recalls where he left off his past work.

Even though man often refers to the physical body as part of his self – and the Cārvāka philosophers regarded the body as the whole of the self – Advaita Vedāntists insisted that a careful distinction must be made between the physical body and the real self. *Adhyāsa*, the false identification of the self and the body, is one of the chief impedimenta to the process of liberation. In the words of a living Advaitist, “There is only one original sin. It is the sin of primal ignorance, – the ignorance that I am embodied, that the body is mine. Having confused our real, transcendent, pure and untainted Self with the body, both physical and mental, we act as though the body was an essential part of our Self. We perceive with the body. We think with the body. We use methods of knowledge immanent in the body. We have created the whole illusion of a world with the body. If we could dissolve the confusion and the error through discriminative thought and see the truth of the Self, the illusion would disappear.”⁴⁰ In the embodied state in which the self exists from physical birth to physical death the self has certain characteristics which do not pertain to the essential nature of the self. Layer after layer of the non-self covers the self and produces nescience of the real self. These coverings are called *koṣas* (sheaths). There are five of these sheaths. They are divided into three bodies: the gross body, the subtle body, and the causal body. The gross body, the body with physical organs made of the simple elements, is the non-migrating body. This body is called the *annamaya koṣa*, i.e., the sheath formed by food. The subtle body is that which is carried over into the next incarnation of the soul. This migrating body is formed of three sheaths: the *prāṇamaya koṣa*, the motor functions or the principle of vitality; the *manomaya koṣa*, the volitional factors or sources of desire which direct man to the performance of ego-centric acts; and the *vijñānamaya koṣa*, the active agent which motivates man to the seeking of *aparā* knowledge. The subtle body is the psychological body as distinguished from the physical body; it is the body of life, sense,

⁴⁰ Ghanshamdas Rattanmal Malkani, *Vedāntic Epistemology* (Amalner, The Indian Institute of Philosophy, 1953), p. 30.

and mind. The third body is called the causal body because it is thought to be the origin of the other two. It is the *karma* body, the residue of actions which accompanies the soul in its migrations. It is composed of but one sheath, the *ānadamaya koṣa*, the sheath of bliss, which tempts man to seek the happiness of bodily existence rather than the liberation of the self from the body. The self because of long attachment to the body has lost a true awareness of its own nature and associates itself with bodily interests. The body is a block to liberation, although the person who has reached true knowledge is free from the body even while embodied. To have or not to have a body is irrelevant from the *parā* point of view.

Śaṅkara said that the *jīva* or individual self is a subject. The significance of this observation can be revealed in noting three rejections which are implied in the statement. In the first place, if the *jīva* is a subject it cannot be an object. The knower as knower cannot be known. The *I* that is known is not *I* but *me*. The self cannot be known in the usual subject-object form of knowing. Secondly, the self as subject cannot be a creator of the world. Śaṅkara says that the self is a witness (*sākṣin*). It reveals objects of knowledge; it does not fashion them. Things of the empirical world are discovered by the self; they are not dependent on the self for their existence, although they do owe their meaning and significance to the self. These things however do not become known except as they are witnessed by the self. The self is a necessary condition for *objects of knowledge*, not for the *existence of things*, just as light is necessary for *objects of sight*, not for things themselves. Things exist apart from the knowing relationship. To be conscious of, or to know, is to witness, not to create. The *māyā* world depends upon *Brahman*, but not upon being in the awareness of *jīvas*. As Mukerji has said, "It is, therefore, important to dissociate the assertion of the priority of consciousness from the idealistic contention, and realize clearly that the doctrine of the priority of consciousness is equally compatible with the realistic belief in an independent world."⁴¹ Śaṅkara was an ontological idealist and an epistemological realist. In the third place, the self

⁴¹ A. C. Mukerji, *The Nature of the Self*, p. 122.

as subject cannot be unconscious. Consciousness is not an adventitious quality of the self as it was for the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers, nor is the self essentially unconscious as it was for the Sāṅkhya philosophers; rather consciousness is the essence of the self. The self is intelligence itself. The apparent unconsciousness of the self in deep sleep or in a swoon is due to the absence of an object, or at least to the inability to recall what was the object of knowledge. Śaṅkara argued that the man who recalls “I slept soundly; I had no awareness” contradicts himself for he obviously recalls that he slept soundly. For Śaṅkara waking, dreaming, and sleeping without dreams were states of consciousness. Consciousness does not lapse even in the deepest sleep, although in this state the dualism of I and not-I vanishes. To be able to say, “I slept well; I knew nothing” implies that there was a awareness during the sleeping experience, yet it was an unusual sort of experience – an experience of knowing in which there was no awareness of an object. This kind of knowing was described by Advaitists as blissful consciousness. It is the soul’s essential being.

To argue that knowing in dreamless sleep is a form of knowing which does not require an object may seem to be inconsistent with another Advaitist argument, *viz.*, that *Brahman* cannot be a subject because a subject must have an object in order to be a subject. But once again the dichotomy of higher and lower knowledge is applied. Knowing in the waking experience is the lower form of knowing in which there is a separation of subject and object, whereas knowing in the dreamless sleep experience is the higher form of knowing in which subject and object become identified.

Although *jīvas* appear to be numberless, according to Śaṅkara, when the *jīva* is in its true state it is not aware of its individuality. Then the self does not differentiate between ego and non-ego. Only when the self is associated with the body in the empirical world of waking and of dreaming does the self imagine that it is distinct from other selves, from the world, and from God. The spiritual unity which underlies the plurality of *jīvas* is called *Ātman*. The *Ātman* is sometimes called the *all-eating self* because in it that which differentiates the *jīvas* is eliminated. The *jīva* is the *Ātman* endowed with a psycho-physical organism. It is con-

sciousness which appears in the form of an internal organ (*antaḥ-karana*). The individual self is an appearance of the highest Self. In the words of Śaṅkara, “And that individual soul is to be considered a mere appearance of the highest Self, like the reflection of the sun in the water; it is neither directly that (*i.e.*, the highest Self), nor a different thing. Hence just as, when one reflected image of the sun trembles, another reflected image does not on that account tremble also; so, when one soul is connected with actions and results of actions, another soul is not on that account connected likewise.”⁴² The difference between the *jīva* and the *Ātman* is an unreal difference since the difference is apparent only in the *māyā* world. Śaṅkara states this opinion bluntly in the following passage: “As therefore the individual self and the highest Self differ in name only, it being a settled matter that perfect knowledge has for its object the absolute oneness of the two; it is senseless to insist (as some do) on a plurality of Selves, and to maintain that the individual soul is different from the highest Self, and the highest Self from the individual soul. For the Self is indeed called by many different names, but it is one only.”⁴³

The individual self in the world suffers from the illusion that its apparent individuality is a real individuality, and suffers also from a blind craving for individual existence without recognizing that this craving is the source of its misery. This craving produces action which creates results (*karma*), and *karma* causes another incarnation with attendant illusions and miseries. The *jīva* is the migrating soul (*samsārin*) which passes from one incarnation to the next until liberation.

The individual self is unreal, according to Śaṅkara, and the world is also unreal. But the two are not unreal in the same manner. If the *jīva* were unreal as the world is unreal, the process of liberation would be play-acting. The world is an entity which depends for its being upon another Being. When a man sees the world as the manifestation of Brahman, he negates the world. He then sees from the higher point of view that the order of reality

⁴² *Vedānta-Sūtras*, II. 3. 50. Thibaut translation, *SBE*, Vol. 38, p. 68.

⁴³ *Vedānta-Sūtras*, I. 4. 22. Thibaut translation, *SBE*, Vol. 34, pp. 282-283.

which he attributed to the world was illusion. Now he looks at the rope and he does not see the snake. The individual self, on the other hand, is not negated when one sees the self from the higher point of view, for the self is not found to be completely unreal. Only certain aspects of the self are unreal, that is, its finitude and its separation from other selves. The error in affirming the reality of the world is an error regarding substance; the error in affirming the finitude and separateness of the self is an error regarding attributes. The world was thought to be what it was not; the self was thought to possess attributes which it did not possess. He who regards the world as real is like a man who mistakes a rope for a snake; but he who regards the individual self as real is like a man who looks at an object unaware that he is wearing colored glasses. When the first man recognizes that what he sees is a rope, the snake which he saw no longer exists; but when the second man becomes aware that he is wearing colored glasses and removes the glasses, the object which he saw remains, although the color of the object is changed. When *jīva* is known as *Ātman* it is still a spiritual substance, but as *Ātman* it is known as infinite in time (with no beginning and no end), infinite in space (not confined to the body), and infinite in substance (not circumscribed by the existence of anything else). In other words the *Ātman* is one.

Liberation or salvation in Advaita Vedānta is self-realization. The process of liberation will usually begin when a person becomes disgusted with worldly life. At last there dawns upon a person the conviction that in his egoistic restlessness and clinging passions he is not moving in the direction of his highest values. He follows the path of self-knowledge until he attains a direct grasp of the unreality of the qualities of finitude and separation of the *jīva* and of the reality of infinitude and unity of *Ātman*. Liberation is like breaking a jar and thus releasing the air captive in the jar. Liberation is becoming aware of what one actually is; it is an intellectual possession of an eternal reality: the non-difference of the individual self and Brahman. Salvation is becoming what one really is. Union had existed all the time but in ignorance the person had missed discovering that unity. In salvation nothing is changed other than the loss of ignorance; the self becomes aware

that it has lost itself by identifying itself with what it is not. “Thus the difference between the individual soul and the highest Lord is owing to wrong knowledge only, not to any reality.”⁴⁴ Liberation is a process of intellectual discovery of a timeless fact. The person at last understands “I am *Ātman*”. And with this knowledge comes complete knowledge and the end of *samsāra*. When the Self is known, all is known for the Self is the center of the world. Liberation is the state in which the self has no consciousness of external objects, for it is consciously identified with the totality of being. The state was described by Kālidāsa as “owing the whole world while disowning oneself”.⁴⁵ According to the Upanishads

He who has found and has awakened to the Soul (*Ātman*)
That has entered this conglomerate abode –
He is the maker of everything, for he is the creator of all;
The world is his: indeed, he is the world itself.⁴⁶

Swami Vivekananda put this even more poetically when he said that the liberated self is “like an infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose center is everywhere”.⁴⁷

“That art thou” (*tat tvam asi*) is the apex of the Advaita Vedānta philosophy. This sentence expresses the highest teachings of the Upanishads, the most audacious idea in Indian philosophy, and the greatest synthesis ever conceived by man. *Tat tvam asi* was the esoteric teaching which an ancient Indian *guru* revealed to his pupil after the *guru* was convinced the pupil was ready to receive this idea and to incorporate it into his thought and life. This doctrine must have appeared as dreadful blasphemy to the uninitiated and as sacred truth to the enlightened. It was based upon the following four Upanishadic passages which were referred to by Advaita Vedāntists as “the four great aphorisms”:

“That art thou.”⁴⁸

“I am Brahman.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ *Vedānta-Sūtras*, I. 3. 19. Thibaut translation, *SBE*, Vol. 34, p. 187.

⁴⁵ *Mālavikāgnimatra*, 1. 1.

⁴⁶ *Bṛihad-Āraṇyaka Upanishad*, 4. 4. 13. Hume translation.

⁴⁷ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 2, p. 33.

⁴⁸ *Chāndogya Upanishad*, 6. 10. 3. Hume translation.

⁴⁹ *Bṛihad-Āraṇyaka Upanishad*, 1. 4. 10. Radhakrishnan translation.

“This Brahman is the self.”⁵⁰

“Consciousness is Brahman.”⁵¹

“That art thou” is open to serious misunderstandings. The caution of the *gurus* in teaching this secret doctrine only to well-qualified students was fully justified. In the first place the formula seems to identify two entities, but the Advaitists insisted that the formula is not an affirmation of identity; it is a denial of duality. The word *advaita* means *non-dual*. That is, Advaita Vedāntism is not a forthright metaphysical monism, for this would assume more positive knowledge than man has a right to claim. Instead it is a denial of twoness. The meaning of the statement as understood by Advaita Vedāntic philosophers is this: although from our ordinary point of view we are aware of many dualities, such as subject-object, spirit-matter, and man-God, we believe that these dualities are not found in reality as it is in itself.

In the second place the word *That* may be understood by some people to denote God. Indeed some Advaitists have so interpreted the term. For example, S. K. Das in one of his works tried to make “That art Thou” palatable to Christians by noting that Jesus the Christ according to the Gospel records stated “I and the Father are one”. Das argued that this experience of Jesus was supposed to be the experience of all man: “Why not extend the same privilege to all men who are admittedly the sons of God that they may equally say with the ideal Man: ‘I am one with the Supreme Being?’”⁵² Swami Vivekananda in his talks in the West sometimes referred to a passage from the Old Testament – “Ye are gods and all of you are children of the Most High”⁵³ – to show that the doctrine of “That art thou” is not foreign to Judaic-Christianity. But this is an inexcusable confusion of universes of discourse. *God* in Judaism and in Christianity is a theological term for a personal being sufficiently separate from man to allow the two entities to enjoy the external relation of worshipper-worshipped. When the Jew or the Christian emphasizes the unity of God and

⁵⁰ *Bṛihad-Āraṇyaka Upanishad*, 2. 5. 10. Radhakrishnan translation.

⁵¹ *Aitareya Upanishad*, 3. 1. 3. Nikhilananda translation.

⁵² Saroj Kumar Das, *A Study of the Vedānta*, p. 163.

⁵³ Psalm 82 : 6.

man, as he sometimes does, he certainly does not have non-duality in mind; rather he is pointing to his confidence that the highest values of man and divine values are compatible. “I am God” is nonsense and blasphemy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The term *That* in the formula does not mean God nor Īśvara, but Brahman.

A third possible misunderstanding would be the identification of the individual self in its individuality with *Brahman*. To make such an identification would confuse the order of *māyā* and the order of reality. “It is true that if we take the word ‘thou’ in the sense of the empirical individual limited and conditioned by its body, and the word ‘that’ as the reality beyond the world, there cannot be an identity between the ‘thou’ and ‘that’. We have to understand, therefore, the word ‘thou’ to imply pure consciousness underlying man and ‘that’ to imply also pure consciousness which forms the essence of God.”⁵⁴ It is not the individualizing, migrating self that is declared to be inseparable from Brahman, but the essential spiritual foundation of all subjective reality. “I am *Brahman*” does not mean “I as *jīva*, living in the *māyā* world, being limited by the adjuncts, and understanding from the *aparā* point of view, am *Brahman*”, but “I as *Ātman*, the subjective foundation of all reality, am *Brahman*”. The ultimate reality of the inner world of spirit and the ultimate reality of the outer world of matter are non-dual. The essential reality of man cannot be different from the essential reality of Totality. From the *aparā* point of view *Brahman* appears to be broken into the multiplicity of sentient principles, but from the *parā* point of view these manifestations are unreal. There is only *Ātman*, and *Ātman* is non-different from *Brahman*. *Ātman* is the subjective foundation of all reality; *Brahman* is the objective foundation of all reality. But in Ultimate Reality there is no difference between subject and object. There is really but One Being, One Consciousness. One Bliss. *Ātman* is *Brahman*.

Tat tvam asi, the fundamental Advaita Vedānta doctrine, is also a prescription for the good life on earth. An Advaitist does

⁵⁴ Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* (Calcutta, University of Calcutta Press, 1948), p. 453.

not escape moral responsibilities. S. K. Das has observed, “Critics conveniently ignore the fact that the doctrine of oneness to which Advaita Vedānta stands pledged . . . is a task as well as a fact, is a problem as it is a possession.”⁵⁵ The principal moral implication of this system of philosophy is that no discrimination can be made among human beings since all men are in reality identical with each other and with Brahman. The self in each person, taken as Self, is quite without limit. In itself the Self is pure being without any qualification. This is its real nature. It is the same Self in all persons. The body is that which divides person from person, and the body is not the Self, nor a part of the Self. The differences which are noted among people are but finite guises which vanish when a person sees from the higher point of view. To the rule that one should treat others as himself, the Advaitist adds an excellent reason: because the others are his Self! The extension of the self to include all men is one of the firmest foundations for moral behavior. This would end egoism and selfishness and man’s unfeeling inhumanity to his fellows. “In one that is awakened to a knowledge of the self, virtues like kindness imply no conscious effort whatsoever. They are second nature with him.”⁵⁶ Each would love his neighbor as himself, for his neighbor is his Self.

This Selfhood is a state, but it is also a process. The whole man is to be regenerated. “I am *Brahman*” is more than a hopeful anticipation of blessed unification with the Absolute. It is a process which may extend over many incarnations. Death of the body marks the passage of the soul into other stages of spiritual discipline so the soul will eventually realize its divine nature. Advaitists believe that ultimately all men will be liberated.

Another significant practical aspect of Advaita Vedānta is its attitude toward religious worship. Śaṅkara was aware that for most people worship is an important part of *sādhana* (spiritual discipline), while an inherent part of his *sādhana* was the breaking down of the gulf between worshipper and worshipped. This was another area in which Śaṅkara was a radical non-dualist. He regarded worship as part of the normal life of man in his state of igno-

⁵⁵ Saroj Kumar Das, *A Study of the Vedānta*, p. 339.

⁵⁶ *Naiṣkarmya-siddhi*, IV, 69.

rance, but for the enlightened man there are no such dualisms, and hence there can be no worship. Nevertheless, he realized that ceremonies, hymns, and prayers were frequently an important aspect of the spiritual progress of the individual. According to Swami Nikhilananda, “Only a highly qualified spiritual aspirant can conceive of the Impersonal Absolute and meditate on It. He alone can seek Brahman and realize It directly by meditation. For the rest the approach to Impersonal Reality lies through the Personal God. Therefore the worship of Īśvara, or the Personal God, is recommended at the beginning of spiritual life.”⁵⁷ The Advaitists composed hymns such as the following one for those who were neophytes in the path of liberation:

I bow to Thee, the Everlasting Cause of the World;
 I bow to Thee, Pure Consciousness, the Soul that sustains
 the whole universe;
 I bow to Thee, who art One without duality, who does
 bestow Liberation;
 I bow to Thee, Brahman, the all-pervading Attributeless
 Reality.⁵⁸

Those who were more advanced in spiritual discipline were advised to consider a hymn such as the following which raises doubts about the worth of any worship:

How can one ever invoke the All-pervading Absolute?
 How give a seat to That which is the one Support of all?
 How can one bring offerings to That whose nature is
 Pure Awareness,
 Or purify That which is ever pure?

How can one circumambulate Him who is boundless in
 all directions?
 How contrive to salute Him who is One without a second?
 How can hymns be pleasing to That which the Vedas
 cannot reveal?
 How can one wave lights before the Self-luminous Lord,
 the All-pervading Reality,
 And how, as an image, can He be installed who stands
 complete within and without?

⁵⁷ Nikhilananda, *Self-knowledge*, pp. 49-50.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

Therefore it is that perfect knowers of Brahman, always
and under all conditions,
Commune with the Lord through contemplating their
total identity with Him.⁵⁹

The intellectual discovery of the non-difference of the essential nature of man and the essential nature of *Brahman* is a joyous experience. Even the life of the common man may be filled with the radiance of universal divinity. The Advaita Vedāntist rejoices that he is a man, for only at the human level does a *jīva* have the chance of becoming free from bondage. He rejoices in his knowledge that the purpose of human life is the speeding up of the transformation of *jīvas* into their full potentiality. Life on earth is a glorious opportunity for the cosmic expansion of the self. And finally, he rejoices in the anticipation of enlightenment, for he believes that enlightenment brings the purest of joys. He looks forward until it can be said of him as was said of an enlightened man in the Upanishads: “Dear, your face shines like that of one who knows Brahman.”⁶⁰ *Śānti! Śānti! Śānti!* (Peace! Peace! Peace!).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

⁶⁰ *Chāndogya Upanishad*, 4. 14. 3. Radhakrishnan translation.

THE SELF IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

by

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