

MESSAGE OF THE LORD

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Chapter 1

The Nature of the Atma

A word to the reader

Everyone takes life so much for granted; but what precisely is life? What is the difference between a living body and a corpse? Religious texts often talk about "Spirit" or "Soul". What exactly are they? Are they material or non-material in nature? Are they in any way related to the Atma? Is there a life after death? Is there any rebirth? If there is rebirth, why does it occur? Is there any end to the cycle of births and deaths?

These undoubtedly are questions that must have, at one time or the other, passed through the minds of many readers, especially while perusing Bhagavan Baba's Divine Discourses. This chapter offers a comprehensive discussion on the Atma, based largely on Swami's teachings. While it might not answer all the doubts of the reader, it would, it is hoped, enable her/him to have a good feel for what the Atma is all about, as also the answers to at least some of the questions posed above.

The subject dealt with here is not an easy one. But, being important, it should not be dismissed. On the contrary, it requires much contemplation as well as supplementary reading. As far as the latter is concerned, the storehouse of Sai literature is particularly recommended.

If there is one theme that recurs again and again in Swami's Divine Discourses, it is the *Atma*. In the *Gita*, Krishna introduces Arjuna to the *Atma* right in the beginning, and thereafter imparts to him (in brief) the Knowledge of the *Atma* (*Atmajnana*). What precisely is this *Atma*? What is its nature? Why is it so important? Where do we find it? And, how do we find it?

The Three States of Consciousness

According to the texts of ancient Hindu philosophy, the *Upanishads* (or *Vedanta* as they are collectively referred to), a human being can exist in one of three states: The waking state (which requires no explanation), the dream state (which occurs when one is asleep), and the deep-sleep or the dreamless sleep state. Physicists give great importance to the first, dismiss the second and are simply not bothered about the third. Psychologists are not so brash and do give importance to the dream state but do not perhaps regard the deep-sleep state as anything other than a good and refreshing experience. The Vedantin or the scholar of *Vedanta*, accepts all the three states as a part of valid human experience, and then proceeds to inquire into their meaning.

The waking state is characterised by one's awareness of what is going on around oneself. Such an awareness is made possible by the senses which first gather information and then transmit them to the brain, where cognition occurs. This capacity for cognition is often spoken of as consciousness, and it is this consciousness which is switched off by a head injury, for example, or by an anesthetic.

The dream state is, in its own way, quite remarkable. Firstly, everything one "sees" during a dream not only seems extraordinarily real (while the dream lasts) but is created entirely by the mind. A person may not be able to draw even a simple object; yet, his/ her mind is able to create

automobiles, aeroplanes and skyscrapers. Indeed, even illiterate persons when they dream, create for themselves visions of exotic objects. Thus, the incredible creativity of the mind comes into its own during the dream state. Secondly, during a dream the person has absolutely **no** feeling about the existence of the world experienced during the waking state. Thirdly, one experiences an entire Universe but it is all actually "inside"! And lastly, the dream-state experiences transcend space and time as compared to those experienced during the waking state. Swami often illustrates this by saying that while dreaming, the person continues to be in bed but may yet "experience" a journey from Puttaparthi to New Zealand or America or whatever. Further, while the dream itself may last only for a couple of minutes, the dreamer can experience a perfectly normal journey lasting several hours (as one does in the waking state). The ability to create as it were its own space and time illustrates once again, the astonishing power of the mind.

Hard-core rationalists would laughingly dismiss the dream experience as mere imagination but while the dream lasts, it is all so very real; indeed, people laugh, cry, feel pain and even scream in terror while dreaming. By way of underscoring this point, Swami sometimes narrates a story relating to Emperor Janaka, which briefly goes as follows: One day, Janaka returns late in the evening to his chambers, after a taxing day at court involving the affairs of the state. His Queen who had been waiting for him welcomes him, and asks him to freshen up for dinner. But Janaka, exhausted as he is, slouches into a chair and dozes off for a few minutes. During his nap, he has a disturbing dream from which he wakes up with a start. As he looks around, the scene is very different from what he was seeing a short while ago - no forest, no tigers chasing etc. Puzzled, he begins to mutter, "Was that real, or is this real?" The Queen tries to persuade him to wash up and get ready for dinner, but Janaka continues to remain in a stupor, constantly repeating his question. Doctors are summoned but it does not help. Ultimately Sage Vasishta the preceptor is requested to come and when he arrives, Janaka is still asking the same question. Smiling, Vasishta places his hand on Janaka's shoulder and says, "O King, both are not real; only you are Real!" - Vasishta was of course referring to the *Atma*.

Consider now the deep-sleep state, in which there is no dream and the mind is absolutely still. What about the senses? They are all withdrawn into the mind. As Shelley says:

*Upon the couch the body lay
Wrapped up in the depth of slumber:
Its features were fixed and
meaningless, Yet animal life was there,....*

One nice thing about a deep sleep is that when one wakes up, one feels thoroughly refreshed. Is that all there is to the deep-sleep state? While scientists would say yes, a Vedantin would raise the question: "While you were fast asleep, your consciousness was totally dormant. How then do you know that you were sound asleep?" One can hem and haw something by way of a reply but it would not be convincing. A Vedantin, on the other hand, would firmly declare that although what we call consciousness was dormant, there was actually a **SUPERIOR CONSCIOUSNESS** that was alert and alive to the experience of the deep sleep.

The purpose of looking at experiences in all the three states together now becomes clear, it being merely to draw attention to the existence of what has been referred to above as "Superior Consciousness". Thus, a human being has, so to say, two layers of consciousness, a primary layer and a secondary one, as illustrated in Fig. 1. Secondary consciousness is the one which is active in the waking state and is what one normally refers to as consciousness.

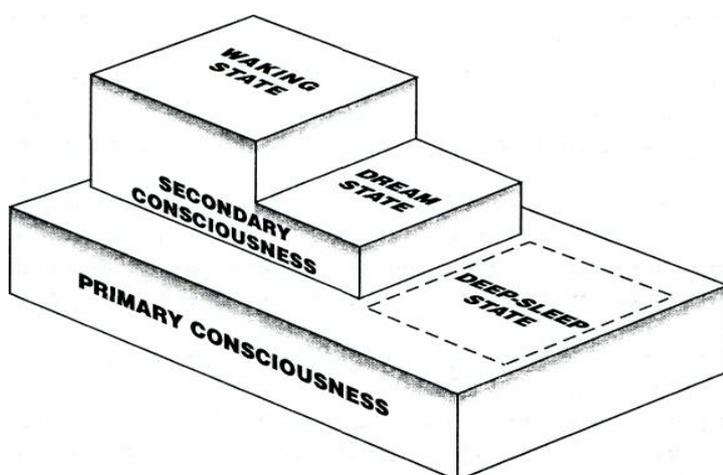


Fig. 1. Schematic illustration of the two types of awareness that operates in a human being. The basic substratum which has been variously referred to as a *Prajna*, Primary Consciousness, Superior Consciousness etc., is related to the "I" consciousness. The secondary consciousness is merely a reflection of the Primary, and, being body-oriented, is responsible for the "i" feeling or ego (*Ahamkaram*).

In the dream state, this secondary consciousness is only partially active, but in the deep-sleep state, it withdraws completely; at this stage the Primary Consciousness/ Superior Consciousness, which is always present as a substratum, is left alone to experience and enjoy all by itself the solitude of the deep-sleep state. Swarm says, that while the Primary Consciousness is the basis for "I" or what Krishna in the *Gita* refers to as the Self, the secondary consciousness is the basis for "i" or what may also be called the lower self or the body. The "i" consciousness is dominant in the waking state, less so in the dream state, and disappears completely in the deep-sleep state. The "I" consciousness, on the other hand, is always present but because of the dominance of the "i" feeling, stays eclipsed except in the deep-sleep state. It is interesting to note that as one wakes up from deep sleep, the "i" feeling progressively grows from nothing into something dominant - this is the evolution phase of the "i" consciousness. Incidentally, the dominance of the "i" is nothing but the assertion of the ego. The involution phase occurs when one sinks from wakefulness into deep sleep via the dream state; on that occasion, the "i" feeling progressively dissolves into nothing - see Fig.2. Thus, the deep-sleep state is spoken of as a "Causal" state, it being the cause for the other states (i.e., the dream and the waking states) which evolve from it.

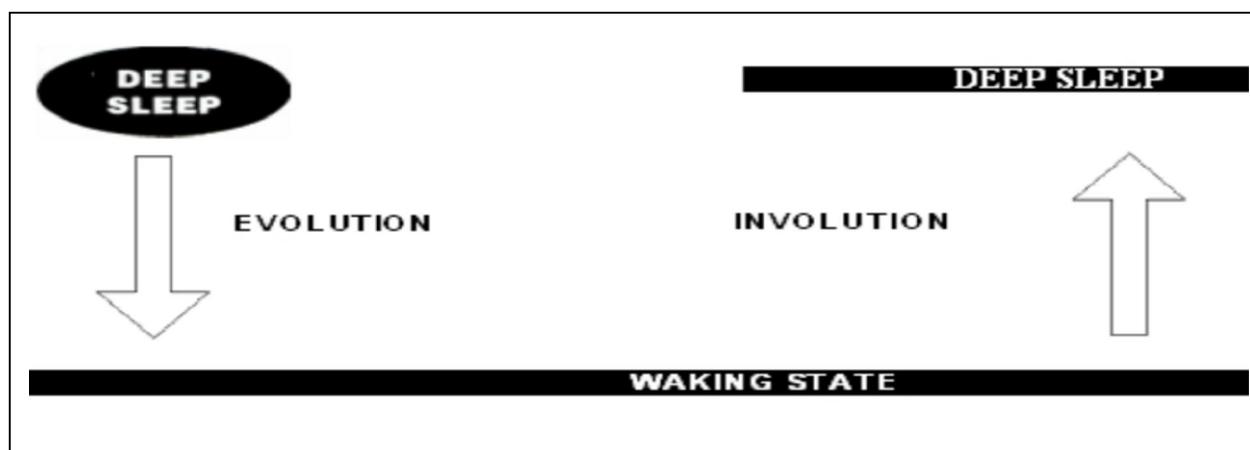


Fig. 2. This figure schematically portrays the transformation from the deep-sleep state to the waking-state, and vice versa. The former leads to the evolution of "i" feeling or ego and the latter to its dissolution. The deep-sleep or the *Prajna* state is the source from which wakefulness originates and the sink into which it dissolves. As would be discussed shortly, *Vedanta* strikes a parallel between this and what happens in the Cosmos itself.

The four important facts which emerge from the above analysis are:

- There are really two levels of consciousness, the Primary associated to "I", and the secondary to "i".
- The Primary Consciousness is always there, whereas the secondary undergoes evolution or involution, as the case may be, when there is a sequential change of states. The "I" consciousness though always present, is, in ordinary persons, eclipsed by the "i" consciousness (ego) in the waking and the dream states.
- The deep-sleep state is Primary or Causal; the other states emerge from it and dissolve into it.

The constant and ever-present Self or the thread of "I" consciousness (previously referred to as Primary Consciousness) has to be carefully noted. As the great philosopher-sage Sankara forcefully asserts, the Self is conscious even in deep sleep as well as in the waking and dream states, as Its power of Consciousness never ceases to exist, and as It is changeless.

Commenting on the three states of experience, Swami observes:

The wakeful state (Jagravastha) is the state of normal consciousness, and is concerned with the gross world of matter. It brings empirical knowledge of the phenomenal world acquired through sensations and perceptions.

The dream state (Swapnavastha)..... is concerned with the subtler aspects of human knowledge and experience. It carries with it the subtler impressions of the experiences of the waking state.

In the third or the deep-sleep state (*Sushupti*), one is in an unconscious state as far as secondary consciousness is concerned, but the Primary Consciousness is very much operative (as it is in other states as well). Swami refers to this state as a "state of transcendental consciousness in which the dichotomy between grossness and subtlety disappears in Super Consciousness [or, what was referred to above as Primary Consciousness]". He adds:

Reality [thus] has three main aspects, namely, empirical reality, illusory reality and Absolute Reality. These three categories of human existence correspond to three levels of consciousness viz., Jagrata or the consciousness of wakefulness, Swapna or the subconsciousness of dreams and Sushupti or the unconsciousness of deep slumber.

Gleanings from the Mandukya Upanishad

Among the *Upanishads*, the *Mandukya* is one of the smallest with just twelve *Slokas* or verses but the *Muktikopanishad* hails the *Mandukya* as the quintessence of all the *Upanishads*. About it, Swami says:

In the text of the Mandukya Upanishad, there are only twelve Mantras (verses). These twelve Mantras contain the essence of all the Vedas..... They tell you in an excellent manner, the aspects of Brahman..... The one and only Upanishad which can lead us to the knowledge of Oneness or Advaita is the Mandukya Upanishad.

The *Mandukya* is relevant in the present context because it sheds much light on issues relating to the three states under discussion. Its greatest contribution is the enunciation of a one-to-one

correspondence between the three states mentioned, and three states of the macrocosm, besides linking it all to A UM.

The *Mandukya* says:

All this world is the syllable OM, Its further explanation is this: the past, the present, the future - everything is just OM. And whatever transcends the three divisions of time, that too is just OM.

For truly, everything is Brahman. And this Self within (Atma) is also Brahman.

Mandukya then goes on to describe what it calls the "four quarters" of the Self. Sage Sankara has pointed out that these four quarters are like the four quarters or parts of a coin. Each quarter resolves into the next, and when the three resolve into the fourth, the fourth emerges as the whole coin. In the same way, there are three states associated with the Self or experienced by It, one leading on to the other; together they lead to the fourth, which represents the totality of experience.

The various quarters are identified by *Mandukya* as follows: First there is the waking state where there is outward cognition; this is associated with an entity called *Vaisvanara*. Next comes the dream state where outward cognition is replaced by inward cognition, the associated entity now being *Taijasa*. Whereas in the waking state gross objects are experienced, in the dream state only subtle objects are experienced. Next comes the deep-sleep state in which there are no desires or dreams. One might think that cognition is totally suspended but *Madukya* holds that there is a cognition in this state also but of a different kind, a transcendent cognition which unifies all experiences into a single state of Bliss. This is also referred to as Self Cognition or the cognition by the Self. The entity associated with this state is called *Prajna* (which some refer to as Super Consciousness).

And now, *Mandukya* climbs rapidly to dizzy heights! It says:

This is the Lord of all - their Knower, their Inner Controller, their source, their origin and dissolution.

The Fourth (Turiya), the Wise say, is not inwardly cognitive, nor outwardly cognitive, nor cognitive both-wise; neither is it an indefinite mass of cognition, nor collective cognition, nor non-cognition. It is unseen, unrelated, inconceivable, uninferable, unimaginable, indescribable. It is the essence of the one Self-cognition common to all states of consciousness. All phenomena cease in it. It is peace, it is bliss, it is non-duality. It is the Self, and it is to be realised. This Atma (Self) is to be identified with OM, when OM is considered as a single syllable. When OM is considered as composed of parts, the quarters of the Atma are to be identified with the parts, and the parts with the quarters.

The parts of OM are: A, U, and M.

Vaisvanara, who has the waking state for his field, is the letter 'A', the first part of OM, because they [i.e., Vaisvanara and A] are both all-pervasive and have a beginning. One who knows this, obtains verily all desires and becomes the first.

Taijasa, who has the dream state for his field, is the letter 'U', the second part of OM, because it is both superior and in between [A and M]. One who knows this, becomes great in knowledge and the equal of all. No one ignorant of Brahman is born in his family.

Prajna, whose field is deep sleep, is the letter 'M', the third pan of OM, because they [i.e., Prajna and the letter M] are like the measure and the end of the others. One who knows this, measures everything by his knowledge and comprehends everything within himself.

The syllable OM in its partless [i.e., soundless] aspect is the Fourth, -transcendental, devoid of phenomenal existence, supreme bliss and non-dual. Thus the syllable OM is verily the Self (Atma). He who knows this merges his self in the Self.

Let us digest this heavy offering! The first point of course is that there is a unity of Consciousness in the three states namely, waking, dream and deep sleep. Whereas ordinary philosophers are content with an explanation of the world from the waking standpoint alone, *Vedanta* refuses to be so constrained. The next important point is that there is a Self which cognizes all the various states and their experiences, and persists throughout as the permanent and constant Witness. THIS PERMANENT AND CONSTANT WITNESS WHICH DOES NOT UNDERGO ANY CHANGE DESPITE CHANGES IN THE STATES, IS THE ATMA.

There is yet another subtle point which Swami Tyagisananda highlights. He says, that both in the waking state and in the dream state, the person having the experiences is none other than the ego of that person, for in *Vedanta*, there is no Real thing as a person, there being only the Self/'*Atma* (recall the Janaka story). Personality is a claim of the body, engineered by the resident ego. As Tyagisananda puts it:

The subject which persists through all the vicissitudes of age, education etc., of the waking state disappears, and another takes his place in the dream state.

The waking subject is thus not permanent..... This ephemeral subject is known as the ego. The same is the fate of the ego of dream state too. That also disappears in dreamless sleep. Neither the subject nor the object of the waking and the dream states remain in deep sleep.

But the deep-sleep state is not one of emptiness; in this state also there is an entity which is not only experiencing the total absence of all phenomena but also Bliss/ happiness. Indeed, without the existence of such an entity, one cannot ever in retrospect say, "Oh, I had a sound and dreamless sleep"; no recall is possible, unless there has been an experience first. And the entity having that experience is of course the Self (always present, though not so evident!). Swami Tyagisananda adds:

This Self, experiencing happiness and cognizing the absence of all phenomena in deep sleep, is a fact which one cannot get over. Since the whole world, dissolves as it were, in this deep sleep and emerges when one comes back from it to the dream or waking state, we have to conclude that it remains in a latent form in the dreamless sleep-consciousness, and is projected again at the time of re-manifestation.

It must be stressed here that there is nothing very spiritual about deep sleep! If at all it was considered in the above analysis, it was merely to infer the existence of what has been referred to as Primary Consciousness. As Vedantins say, the Bliss of deep sleep is merely quiescent and negative in character. Can one experience such bliss while awake? That issue comes up shortly. But in anticipation it can be said (as Bhagavan Baba has pointed out many times) that one is able to enjoy pure Bliss in the deep-sleep state because one has no body-consciousness while in

that state. **ABSENCE OF BODY-CONSCIOUSNESS IS THUS THE KEY TO ETERNAL BLISS.**

Next we consider *OM*, and its relationship to *A UM*. *Mandukya* says that *A UM* is made up of three letters A, U, and M. These are like the three quarters of a coin. Together, they lead to the fourth quarter which is *OM*. What does this mean?

The letters A, U, and M are associated with the three states. Now no sound can be produced without opening the mouth, and the first sound produced on opening the mouth is A (aa); hence it is all pervasive. *Mandukya* gives 'A' due importance by maintaining that *Vaisvanara*, the presiding entity of the waking state, is all pervasive in the sense that our knowledge of all states comes to us (by reasoning and analysis) during the waking state. As we shall later see, Baba also stresses the importance of the experiences of the waking state.

The dream state relates entirely to the world of the mind. Dealing as it does with subtle entities, it (the dream state) is held to be superior to that which deals only with the gross, namely the waking state. The mind which is the thinking aspect in manifested beings, of *Brahman* or the Supreme Being, is, as already noted, extraordinarily powerful. *Mandukya* links the dream state to the letter 'U'.

Next comes the deep-sleep state (*Prajna*) which *Mandukya* first relates to 'M' because when the syllable *AUM* is uttered, the first two elements merge into M just as the waking and the dream states merge into deep sleep.

Mandukya also compares the *Prajna* state to a 'measure', meaning a volumetric measure or a vessel of fixed size, into which grain is first filled and from which it is then poured out (to the customer). The *Prajna* state is compared to a measure because the waking and the dream states subside in it and then emerge from it later. Figuratively, A, U and M may be compared respectively to the body, mind and the heart; and the implication of the statement that A, U and M together resolve into the fourth quarter *OM* means that the body, mind/head and the heart must together lead a person to the *Atma*. In the language of the *Gita*, *Karma Yoga*, *Buddhi Yoga* and *Bhakti Yoga* lead one to Liberation.

Bhagavan Baba on AUM

Before proceeding further, it is only appropriate that Swami's all-important pronouncements on *A UM* are highlighted. He has referred to this subject on many an occasion, and a selection of His Divine observations follow:

Indestructibility is the Form of God, and for this indestructible God, 'A UM' is the name. 'A UM' the primordial Word, contains the essence of all the Vedas and is the source of all the Saastras. It provides the basis for the core of all religious teaching and eclectic knowledge, 'A UM' is the primordial Akshara (letter) and all other letters are its derivatives. The Divine letter 'A UM' represents Parabrahman (the Supreme Lord).

'A UM' is comprised of three syllables, 'A', 'U', and 'M', each of which has profound connotations. 'A UM' is the primordial Word which gives life (Chaitanya) to all other words. All the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Puraanas (epics) have extolled the Pranava (A UM) in many ways.

It is not possible for anyone to fully cognize or even describe the integral form of the sacred word 'A UM'. It is an integral word that stands for the Divine. It is the audible form of Brahman (Sabdabrahmamayi), it pervades the Universe of animate and inanimate beings (Characharamayi), it is resplendent Divine light (Jyothirmayi), it is speech (Vaangmayi), it is Eternal Delight (Nithyanandamayi), it is Transcendental (Paratparamayi), it is the mother of Maya itself, the creative consciousness of Brahman (Mayamayi) and Auspiciousness (Srimayi). 'A UM' thus has the foregoing eight Divine treasures (Aishwaryas). It is Divinely precious and should be recognized as the Name of God.

In the Ramayana, Lakshmana, Bharatha and Satrugna exhibit the qualities associated respectively with the three syllables 'A', 'U'and'M'ofAUM'. 'AUM' itself is personified in Rama.

'A UM' is a Name of God which can find universal acceptance. The Christians say 'Amen' in their prayers every day. It is only a different form of 'AUM'. 'A UM' has universal applicability. It cuts across all barriers of time, place, religion and culture, and can be uttered by all.

Life is a mighty river.... 'A UM' is the boat that takes you across the river chant the Pranava (A UM) within you repeatedly!

The Vedas declare that he who chants OM fully comprehending its meaning will merge with Brahman. One might wonder what 'fully comprehending' means; it implies, among other things, that while one is chanting, one is conscious that everything around is really a manifestation of God. Consider, as an example, the sounds of Nature. The chirping of the sparrows, the call of the cuckoo, the buzz of the bees, the rustle of leaves, the gurgling of the brook, the roar of the waves in the ocean, the howl of the gale, the clatter of thunder, why even the croak of a frog — all these are the sounds emanating from Creation and therefore constitute AUM. Thus when we hear the sounds of Nature, we must actually feel that we are hearing the voice of God. As Swami often says, God can and should also be perceived as sound (Nadabrahmam i.e., Brahman as sound or Nada). And so that we do not forget the importance of OM, He adds that OM is God's telephone number!

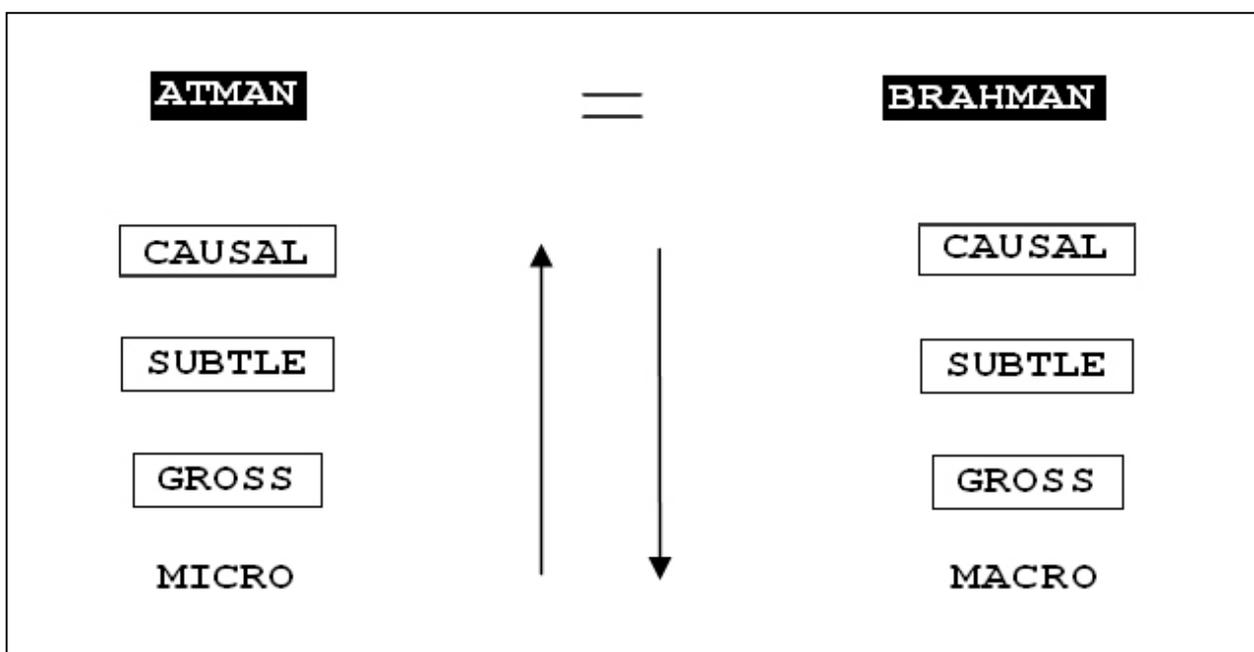


Fig. 3. This figure is presented in anticipation of ideas to be discussed shortly, and is intended to highlight the unity of the microcosm and the macrocosm. We have seen that the individual has three states of awareness. The "fourth" transcendental state (if it can be called that), is the *Atma*. As we shall soon see, there exists in the macrocosm too, three states corresponding to those of the individual; the "fourth" transcendental state approached from the viewpoint of the macrocosm is *Brahman*. However, at this level, the distinction between the micro- and the macrocosm ceases to exist. Thus, *Brahman* and the *Atma* refer to one and the same.

including the phenomenal world, has been declared as the form of *OM* or *Brahman* - in other words, the world is God or *OM* manifested. However, *Mandukya* takes care to reiterate that *Brahman* is not merely what we see outside (as objects, people etc.), but **also** the Self inside each and everyone of us. So, at the transcendental level the equality is established (see also Fig. 3) that:

$$Brahman = Atma = Self,$$

an equality contained in the statement *Ayam Atma Brahma*, one of the four famous aphorisms or *Mahawkyas* (great statements) of the *Upanishads*. This particular aphorism means, *Aham* (I) is the same as the *Atma*, which is the same as *Brahman*, and occurs in the *Atharviana Veda*. Looked at another way, the above equation relates to the micro- and the macrocosms because *Atma/Self* is an entity one normally associates with an individual, whereas *Brahman* is regarded as the foundation of the Universe; but, says the *Upanishad*, the two foundations are not distinct from each other; rather, they are one and the same, the constant theme of *Vedanta*. To put it differently, from the inward point of view of an individual, the Ultimate Entity is the *Atma*, whereas from an "external" point of view it is *Brahman*; but the two are the same - the inside is outside, and the outside is inside! Incidentally, the other three *Mahawkyas* are: (i) *Prajnanam Brahma*, meaning, *Prajna* or Awareness and *Brahman* are synonymous, which occurs in the *Rig Veda*, (ii) *Tat Twam Asi*, meaning, That thou art, which occurs in the *Saama Veda*, (iii) *Aham Brahmasmi*, meaning, I am *Brahman*, which occurs in the *Yajur Veda*.

The above statement that *Brahman* equals *Atma* says that the foundations of the Universe and of the individual are one and the same, or in other words, individual [Primary] Consciousness is the same as Universal Consciousness. But what about the states experienced by the individual? Are there corresponding states in the macrocosm? Indeed there are.

Let us start with the waking state. In this state, the individual has his or her experiences in the objective Universe; Swami refers to this as *Bhutakasa*, which in popular language means the gross world. If *Vaisvanara* is the presiding deity for the individual in the waking state, the corresponding entity for the *Bhutakasa* is *Virata*. Likewise, to the dream and the deep-sleep states also corresponds appropriate worlds with their own presiding deities. All this finally enables one to draw up a correspondence as in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison between the micro- and the macrocosm in the three states.

	Individual or Microcosm	Universe or Macrocosm
Waking state	Physical state	Bhutakasa
Body	'A' of 'AUM'	Gross world

Empirical reality	Vaisvanara	Virata
Dream State Mind Illusory reality	Mental State 'U' of 'AUM' Taijasa	Chittakasa Subtle World Hiranyagarbha
Deep Sleep State Life Absolute Reality	Primary Conscious state 'M' of 'AUM' Prajna	Chidakasa Causal World Ishwara

In the above, *Hiranyagarbha* is the Cosmic Mind while *Ishwara*, is God, Who is the Cause, "Who is the source from which the world has come and into "Whom the 'world finally dissolves. *Vedanta* argues that for an individual, the whole world dissolves as it were in the deep-sleep state, and re-emerges when one comes back to the waking state. On the other hand, the scriptures speak of God as the entity from which the world comes and into which the world dissolves. The argument is therefore advanced that since this description of *Ishwara* tallies with *Prajna* or the background state of Super Consciousness from which the world is projected again on awakening, *Ishwara* and *Prajna* are not different. One might wonder why *God/Ishwara* is not equated with *Brahman*. That is because *Brahman* is totally attributeless whereas *Ishwara* defined here has attributes. *Ishwara* is of course an aspect of *Brahman*. Krishna explains the difference in Chapter Fifteen of the *Gita*. In passing, it may be noted that as one progresses from the gross to the Causal world, not only do the successive worlds get more and more subtle, but also incredibly vaster.

Swami on the Micro-Macro Intercomparisons

In His characteristic manner, Swami has shed amazingly clear light on the subject. The micro is small while the macro is huge; let us take the micro to refer to an individual and the macro as infinity. Then, according to Swami:

Body x INFINITY = Universe/the Cosmic Form (i.e., the physical form of God).

Mind x INFINITY = Cosmic Mind.

Life x INFINITY = God (Ishwara).

The Cosmic Form is what has been referred to earlier as *Virata* and the Cosmic Mind of course is the *Hiranyagarbha*. Swami adds:

The Virata and the Hiranyagarbha are not distinct entities located in specific places. They are immanent in man.

Even for an ordinary individual, the mind is the source of creation. Suppose one wants to paint a picture; the idea of painting a picture originates in the mind; the subject for the picture originates in the mind, and so also the view to be painted, the choice of colours, etc. *Vedanta* holds that when *Ishwara* creates the world, there is first a corresponding thought (*Sankalpa*) in the Cosmic Mind which is the mind of *Ishwara*. As Swami says, the world is a reflection of God - the cause is God and the effect is the world. Where the individual is concerned, the heart - the spiritual heart that is - is

nothing other than (an element of) *Hiranyagarbha*. Although the *Hiranyagarbha* is a subtle entity, the scriptures speak of it as a Golden Egg (the literal translation of *Hiranyagarbha* is golden womb), possibly to convey that the world did come from a "womb" (as Krishna has declared). During the Summer Course in Brindavan in 1991,

Swami materialized the Golden Egg and, holding it before a dazed and spell-bound audience, spoke at length on the significance as well as the sanctity of the *Hiranyagarbha*. On another occasion He said:

He [the Hiranyagarbha] is the source of all kinds of knowledge, ethical, spiritual, physical, scientific and social. The entire Creation emerged from Hiranyagarbha at the beginning. Hiranyagarbha is in the form of an oval-shaped egg. Hiranyagarbha is the primary source of all living beings. It is Hiranyagarbha who endowed all these beings with the power of discriminating between the eternal and the ephemeral, between what should be sought and what should be renounced, between what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. What is the Supreme Knowledge that man needs to make his life purposeful? Hiranyagarbha offered to man the knowledge he needed for this purpose. This is the primary activity of Hiranyagarbha.

Summing up, in Swami's words,

God (Ishvara) is the aggregate of all individual Jivas; Virataswaroopa (Cosmic Form), is that of all individual bodies; and Hiranyagarbha (Cosmic Mind), is that of all individual minds.

The important principle here is that the whole is the sum of its parts - little drops of water make a mighty ocean. The water drop may be small and the ocean vast, but the ingredient is the same; the difference is in quantity and not in quality. Thus, qualitatively, there is no difference between the individual body and the Cosmic Universe; one is the part and the other is the whole. A similar relationship exists between the individual mind and the Cosmic Mind, as also the individual Consciousness and the Cosmic Consciousness *Ishwara*. Thus, truly speaking, there is no substantive difference between *Vaishvanara* and *Virata*, between *Taijasa* and *Hiranyagarbha*, and between *Prajna* and *Ishwara*, just as there is no difference in a certain sense between the wave and the ocean - recall also table given earlier.

To put it all in a slightly different manner, according to *Vedanta*, the individual is not merely the gross body he usually imagines himself to be, but a composite of three distinct bodies - the gross, the Subtle and the Causal. Each body has its experiences in its own universe - the gross body in the gross world (*Bhutakasa*), the Subtle body in the Subtle world (*Chittakasa*), and the Causal body in the Causal world (*Chidaakasa*). About these three bodies, Swami says:

Man can cognize the -working of the world by understanding the nature of the gross body, the Subtle body, the Causal body and the Super-causal body. The gross body which is inert in nature, is composed of elemental substances.

The Subtle body is Mayaswaroopa (illusory form). In the dream state, the mind not only creates but also experiences pleasure and pain, fears and agitations. In the Subtle body, these illusory creations of the

mind are experienced. These experiences are felt to be real only at the moment. Maya is that mental state in which the existent appears to be non-existent and the non-existent appears to be existent. All the experiences in the dream state are seen in the waking state as unreal.

What is real and true must exist in the waking, the dream and the deep-sleep states. Truth is that which is unchanging at all times -past, present and future. Hence, the Subtle body is associated with Maya.

The Causal body is associated with the deep-sleep state, and is itself a derivative of the Super-causal body, which is associated with the so-called fourth state (presently to be discussed). As Swami points out, it is as a reflection of the Supreme One that the three bodies function. It is also worth appreciating that the Subtle body is far more powerful than the gross body, not in terms of raw animal power but in terms of creativity. For example, whereas the ordinary body is subject to space and time, the Subtle body transcends both these, since the mind creates its own space as well as time. This is a remarkable capability of the mind (in this particular state), a capability whose significance has been grasped only by Vedantins. The mind in the dream state becomes very powerful, because it is the microcosm of *Hiranyagarbha*. There is a deep and profound reason for the existence of this hierarchy of universes and bodies. As Swami has explained, they essentially provide a staircase for Cosmic energy to come down step by step to the gross world and to the individual. Bhagavan adds:

Every force can work only through some medium or the other, which is physical. The same power that operates the gross body, works through the subtle process of thought. They (the gross and the Subtle bodies) are not two different entities; one is the subtle form of the other, that is all.

Thus, as Swami often emphasises, the *Atma* or the *Brahman* is the ultimate basis. It is the basis for everything that one perceives or experiences in the physical Universe; however, it is incredibly subtle. Below it (in the hierarchy discussed above) is *Ishwara*, following which is the slightly less subtle world of the Cosmic Mind, of which the individual mind forms a part. Last comes the physical world (with which most of us are totally preoccupied), which is very visible and can be experienced by the senses; every individual is a part of the gross world. Mistakenly, we take the physical world to be the only reality, but in truth, there is a higher though more subtle Reality namely, the *Atma/Brahman*, which is also the basis for everything. The human's purpose in life is to recognise this Fundamental Reality, and to feel one with It.

The Fourth State - *Turiya*

What about the 'fourth quarter' that *Mandukya* talks about? This state which really subsumes all the others, even as *OM* subsumes *A UM*, is referred to as *Turiya*. Though often translated as the fourth state, experts point out that the *Turiya* is not a state at all; rather, it is very existence itself, which takes on the appearances of the various states earlier described and catalogued. As Sage Ramana puts it:

*[Pure] Consciousness is the only Reality. Consciousness plus waking we call the waking state. Consciousness plus dream we call the dream state. Consciousness plus [deep] sleep we call the deep-sleep [or dreamless] state. Because by long habit we have been regarding these states as real, we call the state of Pure Awareness the fourth or *Turiya*. There is, however, no fourth but only one state.*

Suppose one were to ask: "Who am I?" Bhagavan Baba says the Vedantic answer would be:

I am not the one experiencing the waking-state, nor am I the one experiencing the dream-state, nor am I the one asleep in the deep-sleep state. I transcend all these. I am the Transcendental Reality itself [or what Ramana refers to as Pure Consciousness].

The Turiyavastha is the highest state of consciousness in which the essential nature of the Atma is experienced. The Turiyavastha is a pure, tranquil and steady state of Superconsciousness in which all discriminating and differentiating Gunas are transcended and dissolved in the eternal and absolute reality of Brahman.

In brief, *Turiya* is *Atma* or *Brahman*, for both mean the same. It provides the connecting link between not only the three universes, the gross (*Bhutakasa*), the Subtle (*Chittakasa*) and the Causal (*Chidaakasa*), but also between the states of experience of an individual. It is, as Swami puts it, like the string that passes through a garland of beads, and is the **same** whether one considers the macro- or the microcosm. Incidentally, seen in this light, *Brahman* transcends even *Ishwara*, defined earlier as the presiding agency of the Causal world - recall Table 1; and this precisely is what Krishna tells Arjuna in *Sloka* (8. 20) of the *Gita*.

Caution: The term *Ishwara* is sometimes used synonymously with *Brahman*. Such usage is avoided here. Others choose to refer to *Brahman* as the Supreme *Ishwara* or *Parameshwara*.

Samadhi

This brings us next to what is often described as the *Samadhi* state. A Vedantin would describe this as a state in which a person transcends the limitations of the mind and ascends to a plane of consciousness higher than thought itself. All this might sound to be a set of fancy words; yet, the *Samadhi* experience is very genuine and great *Yogis* have experienced it. Perhaps Vivekananda's graphic description of it might give some idea of the experience. He says:

One day in the temple-garden at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna [Vivekananda's Master] touched me over the heart, and first of all I began to see the houses - rooms, doors, windows, verandahs, the trees, the sun, the moon, all were flying off, shattering to pieces as it were, reduced to atoms and molecules and ultimately became merged in the Akasha (sky). Gradually again the Akasha also vanished, and after that my consciousness of thesewhat happened next, I do not recollect. I was at first frightened. Coming back from that state again I began to see the houses, doors, windows, verandahs and the other things. On another occasion, I had exactly the same realisation by the side of a lake in America.

Vivekananda had this trance-like experience when he was not yet advanced as a *Yogi*, the experience having been given to him by his *Guru* just so that he could get a brief taste of a state where sheer oneness prevails. Apparently, people not particularly noted for their spirituality (but perhaps with a spiritual streak in them) have also had similar experiences. The poet Lord Tennyson describes his experience as follows:

..... a kind of waking trance, I have frequently had, quite from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me through repeating my own name two or three times to myself, silently, till at once, as it were, out of the intensity of consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being; and this,

not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility the loss of personality (if it were so) seeming no extinction I am ashamed of my feeble description. Have I not said the state is utterly beyond words?

The popular notion is that the *Samadhi* state is connected with a trance-like experience such as Ramana Maharshi and Ramakrishna Paramahansa often experienced. Since during a trance the physical body is still and appears inert, people used to refer to Ramakrishna as the man who died five or six times a day! Swami has pointed out that this is a totally wrong interpretation of the word. It is true that in the trance, there is a wonderful and indescribable oneness; however, the trance is also a fleeting experience. According to Swami, one does not have to be in a trance to experience Bliss. One can be wide awake and still be in the *Samadhi* - a state which sometimes is spoken of as 'waking sleep'! In fact, as Swami stresses, one who is fully evolved goes through life itself in a *Samadhi* state, whether he is awake and engaged in work, or sleeping - because this person experiences nothing but Bliss all the time. How is that possible? Because he sees only oneness, because he dwells in that state where there is no differentiation and because that state is Bliss itself. Clearly, such an experience would be totally beyond the comprehension of ordinary mortals, which is why such people (who incidentally are none other than the *Sthithaprajnas* Krishna talks about in Chapter 2 of the *Gita*) are regarded as strange beings.

Swami enlightens us further with the observation that

Samadhi is the state in which Dhyana (meditation) attains fulfillment. In this state, the individual rises beyond the objective world of relative reality, the subjective identity of himself and even that very activity that he is engaged in (Dhyana). Samadhi is NOT a state of unconsciousness; neither does it mean frisking about in emotional excitement. The word Samadhi itself is indicative of its significance. 'Sama' is equipoise, 'dhi' is intelligence. Samadhi is that state of intellectual equipoise where the individual transcends the world of duality and experiences the Bliss of Divine communion.

Elsewhere He adds:

Samadhi means thinking with equal-mindedness. To be equal-minded in cold or heat, in profit and loss, in praise or censure.... that is Samadhi. Therefore, a person who is immersed in Samadhi, whose mind is in equanimity, will always be in a state of Bliss, whether he is in the Bhutakasa, the waking state, in the Chittakasa, the dream-state, or the Chidaakasa, the deep-sleep state.

Going by Krishna's definition, we can say that a *Sthithaprajna* or a person with perfect equanimity would be always in a state of *Samadhi*.

The jivatma and the Paramatma

The word *Atma* is often used with various prefixes, leading to words such *asjivatma*, *Mahatma* and even *Duratma*; and besides all these there is also the word *Paramatma*. Such proliferation naturally leads to some confusion, especially when it is said that the *Atma* is really one! Some clarifications are therefore called for.

Consider a person sailing from say Hawaii to the West Indies by the 'western' route, i.e., he goes

first through the Pacific, then through the Indian Ocean past Sri Lanka and South Africa, and finally via the Atlantic to the destination. It is one continuous waterway from start to finish, and yet different names are given to different stretches of water encountered en route.

Next consider an empty pot placed on the ground with its mouth facing the sky. There is space inside the pot as well as above it, in fact, stretching all the way to the end of the Universe! And yet, one often talks of the space inside the pot as if it were distinct from that outside it.

The important point brought out by the above illustrations is that although the entity (water or space as the case may be) is itself single and extended, for convenience it is compartmentalised and identified as different segments. Depending on one's perspective, one can either look upon the entity as just one single one or as made up of distinct segments.

These examples have a direct bearing on the situation with respect to the *Atma*. *Paramatma* or *Brahman* is like the wide expanse of water or better, space which pervades everywhere while *Jivatma* is a 'portion' of it - just as a portion of the body of water is called the Indian Ocean or Atlantic Ocean, or a portion of space is called the pot-space.

Thus it is that Krishna tells Arjuna,

The Eternal Jivatma, in the human body is but a part of My own Being; and it is that alone which draws round Itself the mind and the senses, both of which are rooted in Prakriti.

(Gita 15. 7)

A question that immediately arises in this context is: "Just as space is 'trapped' (to some extent) by a pot, what is it that 'partially' traps the all-pervasive *Atma*?" The answer is that it is the Subtle body which does so, and it is this 'trapped' portion of the infinite *Atma* which is often referred to as the *Jivatma*. Qualitatively there is no difference between *the Jivatma* and the *Paramatma* but the difference is that *the Jivatma* is embodied or "trapped". If *Paramatma* is a Witness (as Krishna tells Arjuna), then so is the *Jivatma* - only, the *Paramatma* is a Witness to the entire Universe whereas the *Jivatma* is a Witness to the experiences of the body in which it is "located". Swami elucidates further:

Who is a jiva? Jiva is God. The jiva [the individual Self] resides in a body.....

The Jivatma and the Divine Principle [Paramatma] are not two distinct and separate entities.

The next question which arises is: "What does *this jiva* do, residing in the body?" The answer is: "*The jiva* acts merely as a Witness, besides of course supplying energy." To understand this statement, one must first appreciate that *the Jivatma* is of the same nature as the *Paramatma*. The latter is the **ultimate** source of Cosmic Energy which animates the Universe, and, as far as the body is concerned, the vital forces which animate the body derive their energy from the *Jivatma*.

The question of the vital forces and the role they play is a bit involved and requires some explanation. Let us first accept that there are certain vital forces which make the body "alive". Where do they get their energy from? From *the jiva*. To understand that better, consider a steam engine. The engine functions because of steam but to produce steam one needs fire. Thus fire (which is primary) is like *the jiva* and steam is like the vital force. (Swami uses an electrical analogy, often comparing the ultimate source of energy to electricity - "bulbs are many, but the

current is one", is a favourite expression of His.) Seen in this light, the so-called vital forces, vital though they are to the body, exist and operate entirely on account of the *Atma*.

Just as the fire in the steam engine produces heat and leaves all the rest to the steam and the mechanical machinery, so also *the jiva* "triggers" the vital forces which in turn make the body engage in action. Thus, like the fire in the steam engine, *the jiva* is not directly involved, being, as both Krishna and Swami declare, a mere Witness.

How does this "Atma-cum-vital force" combination actually operate in practice? To understand this, let us examine what one actually means when one says, "I see" or "I hear". Swami explains sight as follows:

Take for example the power of sight. You think it is the eyes that see. No. The eye is inert matter. Who is it that sees? The seer is the Atma Consider the ears. People are listening to a broadcast from the loudspeakers. They may consider the loudspeakers as the source of the sounds they hear. But if there is no current, the loudspeakers will be silent. The current is the basic factor. The ears are like a loudspeaker. It is because of the current of the Atma that the ears are able to hear. Hence, for the functioning of all the sense organs, the Atma is basic.

To the scientifically minded, it might seem far fetched to assert that it is the *Atma* which illumines, the eyes for example. This is not so unreasonable as it might sound. One has to merely compare the eyes of a living person with that of a corpse; none can deny that the eyes of a living person shine in some inexplicable manner; they have a glitter and can convey pain as well as joy. How is it that the eyes become "alive"? *Vedanta* says it is on account of the *Atma*.

It is not just the sense organs alone but even the intellect which is illumined by the *Atma*. Swami explains:

But from where does the intellect get its power? The intellect is shining on account of the Atma The ultimate source that illuminates everything is the Atma. It is the main switch.

To stress that everything is illumined and energised by the *Atma* alone, Swami further adds:

In the absence of Atmic power which enables all the organs or tools to function, the body becomes a worthless mass of flesh and bones.

And He continues:

We need not carry a lamp to see a burning lamp for the burning lamp can be seen by its own light. When the Self shines in all its splendour by its own light in everyone, we do not need any other light of knowledge to see the Self. It is not possible to see the light of the Atma even by the light of the intellect (Buddhi), since Buddhi itself derives its light from the Self. Intellect is like the 'bulb, and the Self is like electricity. It is the light of the Atma that shines through the senses and the organs of the body.

One might at this stage like to know more about the "trapping". Without going into the details, one may roughly visualise the living being as:

LIVING BEING = GROSS BODY + SUBTLE BODY + ATMA.

The gross body is easy to understand, being the biological entity consisting of the various organs. The Subtle body, on the other hand, is a more difficult concept since we cannot see it directly. It consists, among other things, of the mind and the oft-mentioned vital forces (the five *Praanas*). *The Atma*, it must be remembered, is subtler than even the Subtle body. The Subtle body derives energy from the "trapped" *Atma*, and in turn the vital forces cause the gross body to perform various actions. The term SOUL which is often used is nothing but the "*Atma* + Subtle body" combination. It is because the *Atma* (or rather a "portion" of it) gets caught up with the Subtle body, one often refers to the "portion" of *the Atma* in the body as the "embodied One"; it is the same as the Self or the *Jiva*.



Fig. 4. What we normally refer to as the body corresponds to the physical or the gross body (*Sthula Sarira*), which is describable by physics, chemistry and biology. But the body also lives, and has feelings and emotions, which science is unable to explain. *Vedanta* deals with these "imponderables" by invoking the concept of the Subtle body (*Sukshama Sarira*). To use the language of science, the Subtle body is an energy field, and exists like an invisible aura enveloping the body. Does it have any specific shape or form? We do not know. Some feel that the spinal column which is believed to be the pathway for the spiritual force (*Kundalini Sakti*), actually pertains to the Subtle body and not the physical body. This makes sense, especially since both physical examination as well as X-ray examination of the spine of the gross body does not reveal such pathways.

Figure 4 offers a schematic showing the Subtle body in juxtaposition to the physical body. Incidentally, the so-called liberation of the Soul is nothing but the (permanent) rupture of the bond between *the Atma* and the Subtle body; more would be said about it shortly.

An interesting financial analogy can be given to explain the "difference" between the *Paramatma* and *the jivatma*. Suppose a person has thousand dollars in a bank. The bank does not physically keep a bundle of currency notes worth a total of thousand dollars in a particular place to indicate that there are thousand dollars in the account. The deposit is recorded merely as a number in some ledger, or stored as an electronic signal in a computer; in other words, the money is present in an intangible form, so to speak. Suppose the person draws one hundred dollars from his account, say in the form of one-dollar bills. The dollar bills represent money, and so does the entry in the account. The dollar bill however is of small denomination whereas the money in the deposit is much more. Further, the money in the account is "inert" whereas the

dollar bill can be directly used for cash transactions. *The jivatma* is like the dollar bill; it is as Krishna says, "a small particle" of the *Paramatma*. But, unlike the bank account which diminishes when a withdrawal is made, the *Paramatma* being Infinite, can never be "depleted". Further, just as the currency is suitable for cash dealings, *the jivatma* is in a "form" suitable for contributing to the action in Nature or *Prakriti*.

On Conscience and Consciousness

Two words often used by Swami namely, conscience and consciousness, can be understood on the basis of the above discussion. As Swami Himself puts it:

Brahman [Paramatma] refers to the Universal Consciousness that is present in all beings. The Consciousness that is present in the [individual] body is called [Jiva] Atma. It is called Conscience. The distinction between Conscience and Universal Consciousness should be noted. Conscience is a reflection of the (Universal) Consciousness. When the Conscience (or the Atma) ultimately leaves the body., it merges in the Universal Consciousness and becomes one with It. The process may be likened to the oneness that occurs when the air within a balloon joins the atmospheric air outside [which occurs when the balloon bursts].

..... The individual Self is the Jivatma. The Universal Self is the Paramatma. The individual Self confined within a body is like air confined within a balloon. When the individual Self sheds its attachments relating to the body and develops universal Love, it overcomes the confines of the body. It merges in the vast, infinite Love. This merger is described as Mukti, Moksha or Liberation.

So, there it is; Swami not only gives us a very clear description of the relationship between the individual Conscience and the Universal Consciousness, but also a graphic picture of Liberation. We thus see that our inner Conscience (which are so used to ignoring), is nothing other than the Voice of Swami, the Voice of *Paramatma*, the Voice of *Brahman*, the Voice of God Almighty.

Death, Re-Birth and Liberation.

Swami has no doubt explained Liberation, but what about death? This too is easily understood with the help of the "equation" given earlier, namely,

$$\text{LIVING ENTITY} = \text{GROSS BODY} + \text{SUBTLE BODY} + \text{ATMA}$$

Death occurs when the Subtle body withdraws, meaning essentially the withdrawal of the vital forces or the *Praanas*; which is why, death is often described in India as the 'going away of the *Praana*'. Swami sheds further light in the *Sandeha Vahini*, from which an extract follows:

Bhaktha: You said, Swami, that in everything there is Atma. Is there Atma in a dead man?

Swami: A good question indeed!.... Well, it is only when you have awakened from deep-sleep or Susuhpti that you are aware there is an "i", is it not? In the same manner, there is Atma in the corpse also.

Bhakta: Then how can it be called dead? How can death happen, when there is Atma?

Swami:Death means the fading out of the "i" consciousness. Re-birth happens when "i" consciousness comes again. This is what is called birth and death, my boy. Ahamkara (ego) is born, Ahamkara dies, that is all.

At first sight, this dialogue may be puzzling but, drawing upon what Swami has said elsewhere, the meaning becomes clear. The word *Ahamkara* stands for ego or body-consciousness, and is derived from the word *Aham* which means "I", the Supreme I that is. This "I" and the *Atma* are indistinguishable. When the *Atma* becomes associated to a body (i.e., becomes embodied), the Subtle body gets "energised". As a result of this association, the mind, which is a part of the Subtle body gets to know about the "I" and promptly hijacks the *Aham* feeling (or the feeling of "I"), converting it to *Ahamkara* or the "i" feeling. One sometimes says that *Ahamkara* converts "Be-ness" into "being". It is like the servant who begins to act like the master. As Swami has explained on many occasions, *Ahamkara* thus born is nothing but the famous ego. In short, we say a person is alive when the life force activates the "i" consciousness in him. This life force and the "i" consciousness are associated with the Subtle body. On death, the Subtle body transfers to a new gross body; the latter then becomes energized i.e., alive while the former becomes inactive i.e., dead. The "i" feeling now transfers to the new body. Regarding the Subtle body, Swami says:

A person can discard as many gross bodies in which he takes residence, as the number of times he pares his nails. But the Subtle body cannot be changed; it lasts and persists.

One might still wonder about the presence of the *Atma* in the dead body. This remark could be understood with the help of the following example. Let us regard the sky as the analogue of the *Atma*; it is everywhere, and exists by itself. Now in the sky there appears a cloud, occupying some space, which is obligingly provided by the sky; no sky, no cloud. Suppose the cloud moves away to another spot. When it moves, the cloud does not carry the sky with it; it does not have to for the sky is everywhere; and the sky continues to be present also in the spot previously occupied by the cloud. In short, even though the cloud moves, space remains static and continues as before. The Subtle body is like the cloud whereas *the Atma* is like space, and thus it is that one says that *Atma* continues to be present in the corpse. In fact, the *Atma* is everywhere, inside even the atom; in this respect, it is like the imponderable ether which physicists had invented in the nineteenth century to explain the propagation of light.

To continue with the issue of death, we first note that although the *Atma* is the primary source of life energy (or, for that matter, any type of energy), it is the Subtle body -which captures this energy and transmits it to the various organs for them to function (biologically). The Subtle body is thus like a bulb. To produce light, one needs both electricity as well as a bulb. The *Atma* is like electricity, and is "available" everywhere, but visible light is produced only where there is a bulb and has been plugged-in. When a person dies, the Subtle body cuts loose from the physical body and looks for a new "accommodation" or gross body (see also Fig. 5). And when it settles down there, it promptly gives life to that new body. Now the Subtle body can operate only if there is "energy" available for it. Its energy source is *the Atma*, which, however, is Omnipresent. Thus, when the Subtle body arrives at a new location, it has no problem with "electric supply" (as Swami might put it), because the place is "already wired up". [See also (*Gita*: 15.8).]





Fig. 5. The Subtle body referred to in the previous figure is not visible to the eye. When a person dies, his Subtle body (inclusive of the 'trapped' *Atma*) decouples from the gross body and 'floats away' - of course, this cannot be seen since the entity escaping is subtle and beyond the senses. After the lapse of a suitable interval of time, the Subtle body now seeks association with a new infant body, and thus it is that the person is reborn, as schematically illustrated above. Krishna makes a brief reference to this in *Sloka* (15. 8) of the *Gita*.

In summary, both during deep sleep as well as in death the ego is absent - in one case it is temporarily dissolved and in the other it takes flight - which is why a philosopher regards death as a long sleep, accompanied by a change of "dress" on waking up.

The "recipe" for escaping from the cycle of birth and death should now be clear -the bond between the *Atma* and the Subtle body must be broken, and the key to this is the permanent dissolution of the ego. Ultimately, all the various paths and spiritual exercises or *Sadhanas* prescribed boil down to just this - destroying the ego and breaking the bond! And when this bond between the *Atma* and the Subtle body is broken, one is said to be liberated. For the bond to be broken, one must, as Krishna says, essentially conquer the mind/self with the Self. Once the conquest is successful, thereafter one just waits out till the body dies. This time, however, there is no Subtle body to keep the *Atma* trapped as before and it is all over! The balloon bursts and the trapped air merges forever with the atmosphere outside. Swami often stresses that the human form is given so that one may use the opportunity to cut loose for ever. As He puts it:

You are born so that you may not be born again; you die so that you may not die again!

The T\$ody-Mind~Atma Complex

The body, the mind and *the Atma* together form a powerful trinity. This combination is the same for all but what the person actually is depends upon how this combination functions in practice. The person could, as Swami says, be like an animal, be human, be demonic or be Divine. He further observes:

When we speak of man, we should consider him as the combination of the body, the mind and the Spirit (Atma). The body is an instrument for performing actions. Mind is the faculty which determines what is right or wrong. The Atma (Spirit) is that which is ever pure, unchanging and permanent.

"Man" implies three things: doing, knowing and being. It is when the body, the mind and the Atma are present in union that a human being can be said to exist. When the body alone acts, without regard to the mind and the Atma, that person is said to be in the animal state. When the mind alone acts in association with the body, without regard to the Atma, that condition is described as demonic.

What about achieving the Divine state? For that, Swami says, one must be installed in the Atmic principle, transcending the body and the mind; if examples are needed for understanding that statement, those of the Sages Ramana and Ramakrishna should suffice.

Reality, *Maya* and All That!

It is necessary at this juncture to make a reference to the famous *Maya* or the so-called illusion, much discussed by Vedantic philosophers. Many interpretations have been given to this word, such as:

- *Maya* is the inscrutable Divine Power used for Creation.
- *Maya* means illusion or delusion.
- *Maya* is the dazzle of *Prakriti*
- Or, as Goethe beautifully puts it,

Mysterious even in open day Nature retains her veil, despite our clamours; That which she does not willingly display Cannot be wrenched from her with levers, screws and hammers,
and so on.

The world appears so very real to us. Why then do philosophers dismiss it as unreal? They do so with good reason but in order to comprehend precisely what they mean, one must proceed carefully.

Let us start with the dream state. No one would have any difficulty in dismissing the dream experiences as unreal. But a little reflection would show that we so dismiss only while we are in the waking state; during the dream itself, however, those so-called illusory experiences seem very real. In fact, during the dream, one has no cognizance whatsoever of the world experienced during the waking state, so much so for the person dreaming, the phenomenal world simply does not exist! Much as we might dispute, philosophers are fond of equating the two kinds of experiences, and the Janaka story narrated earlier is merely an echo of this view. The French philosopher Descartes shared this perspective and declared:

When I consider the matter carefully, I do not find a single characteristic by means of which I can certainly determine whether I am awake or whether I am dreaming. The visions of a dream and the experiences of my waking state are so much alike that I am completely puzzled, and I do not really know that I am dreaming at this moment.

Swami too often refers to the two experiences as "night-dream and day-dream"!

For most people, all this might seem just a play on words and so let us examine the argument more closely. The world we say is real. Now what is meant by reality? To a Vedantin, Reality, which is the same as Truth, refers to something that is permanent, i.e., is unchanging and is ever constant. Stated that way, clearly the *Brahman/Atma* alone qualifies to be called Real. Then whatever happens to the world which seems so real to us? Is that all an illusion?

This business of illusion comes up largely on account of a famous statement due to Sage Sankara: *Brahma Sathyam, Jagat Mithya*, meaning God is true but the world is false. Sankara said the world is false basically in the sense that it is transient. However, in his prolific writings, he does advance rather involved arguments to justify that the world is actually an illusion. "How can that be?" one would ask. If Sankara felt pain -and he sure must have - would he call that an illusion?! Actually, Sankara explains pleasure and pain also away (!) but those arguments being

rather complicated, we need not get involved in them. Instead, one might accept, as Swarm says, that the experiences of the phenomenal world do have a reality of their own, although this reality is transient and empirical. It is important not to summarily dismiss this world as an illusion, for that might lead to the temptation to do things that are decidedly immoral! Indeed, those who wrote down moral codes and the canons of *Dharma* did so with the clear understanding that for ordinary mortals this world is NOT an illusion.

Why then waste time with a lot of "fancy talk"? There is a purpose. First, let us ask: "What precisely does *Vedanta* mean when it refers to illusion?" Swami provides us with the answer:

Illusion refers to that which does not exist. Imagining that which does not exist, to exist, is Maya. Whatever you think exists, does not really exist. Whatever you think does not exist, really exists.

No doubt the phenomenal world strongly projects a reality of its own but it is only ephemeral or transitory. Behind it, however, lies a substratum of what might be called a higher reality which is the True Reality. If one sees only the foreground and fails even to appreciate that there is a background, then one is justified in talking about an illusion. The standard and classic example provided by *Vedanta* in this context is the rope-and-the-snake mix-up.

There lies a curled up rope in a dark room; a person enters the room, sees something lying coiled on the floor, immediately screams, "Snake, snake!", and then rushes out of the room. A lamp is fetched and people enter the room; in the light they see not a snake but a mere coiled rope. *Vedanta* uses this example to effectively declare the following:

What really existed was the rope. There was only the rope and it was there always - before the person came, when he first saw it (mistaking it for a snake), and later when the people came with a lantern. However, when the person first entered, he saw a snake instead of the rope that was actually there; he did not see the rope at all but just a snake, and that is why he yelled in fear. Now where did this non-existent snake come from? From his mind! This image, manufactured by his mind, was superposed on the picture of the rope captured by the eyes, and interpreted wrongly. In short, an image, a picture that did not exist, was superposed on something that actually existed. This superposition of the non-existent is an illusion. For ordinary mortals, the world is an illusion because they are not able to clearly see that youth, wealth, beauty and power are not permanent; instead, they act as if they last for ever. They are dazzled by the beauties and the attractions which the phenomenal world has to offer but are totally blind to the Creator who has infinitely more to offer (if approached, of course!).

Thus, if the Vedantin is at pains to prove that the world is unreal, he has a valid reason for doing so. As Swami says,

Brahman is the "rope"; Jagat (the world) is the "serpent" superimposed on it by Reason afflicted by illusion.

Frequently the argument is presented as if the world itself is a mere illusion and nothing more. If it were so, why should *Avatars* come? Why should one particular *Avatar*, take the trouble to teach something called the *Gita*? Why should another coming five thousand years later, spend day and night tirelessly explaining how to translate Krishna's advice into practice? Indeed, one can even ask

whether the *Avatars* themselves are an illusion. No, the Cosmos has a valid reality of its own. Explaining precisely what this means, Swami observes:

Some call this world illusory and ephemeral. It is described as Maya or Mithya - an illusion or a delusion. This is evidently wrong -I am Real (Sathya). You are Real. The whole Universe is Real. Consciousness is immanent in everything.

To go about thinking the world to be unreal, illusory and so on will amount to practising a fraud on the people and not proclaiming the truth. If the world is unreal, then even teaching that it is unreal is equally unreal and has no meaning. No. That is not so. This Cosmos is Real...The forms in it may change. Bodies may change... but what should be recognised is that at the core of all things is a Fundamental Reality.

To drive home the point, Swami sometimes uses the example of the movie. The movie is projected on a screen which forms the substratum or the basis - no screen, no images. The images are fleeting but the screen is permanent. It might be argued that the screen is "uninteresting" and therefore irrelevant, and that one goes to the movie to see and enjoy the images and not to ponder about the screen. This argument may apply to the screen in the movie theatre but one must appreciate that one is merely offering an analogy for the substratum. Further, the images of life are equally transient and totally irrelevant in the long run. What is relevant is the substratum called God, and as long as one is not alive to that, one is justified in claiming that the world is unreal, illusory, like the non-existent snake in the Vedantic example.

The problem with the world as it is normally perceived is that it makes one forget God vis-a-vis day-to-day life, making us think or feel that God is to be approached only when one is in difficulty; or, if one is otherwise free from problems, He merits only an occasional "courtesy call". As a Vedantin would point out, no matter how much one eats during a dream, it does not provide nourishment to the physical body. In the same way, one cannot expect spiritual progress merely from being immersed in the world, without linking it all to one's basic roots, i.e., the *Atma*. Needless to say that this theme also forms the core of all of Swami's Divine discourses.

The movie analogy might perhaps be used once again to drive home the point about the illusory nature of the phenomenal world. In India, it is not unusual to see simple and unsophisticated people crying during movies, unable to bear the sufferings portrayed on the screen. The urban sophisticate sitting in the adjacent seat laughs at the naivete of the villager and patronisingly tells him, "Why are you crying? This is not real. In fact, the actor gets paid for acting as though he/she is suffering." The 'n^m' or the Wise One has the same comment for the ordinary human, who unable to see the transient nature of this world, gets over involved emotionally, and inflicts on himself unnecessary pain and suffering. From the *Jnani's* point of view, man is as foolish or naive as the ignorant villager shedding tears in a movie.

In short, the Vedantin's argument is neither silly nor trivial. On the contrary, it has a profound significance and one should not be under the impression that Swami has contradicted it. It should be carefully noted that Swami uses the word Real instead of real; the latter is what we would normally use, and in this picture of reality there is seldom any place for God; but in Swami's picture, God is primary - that is the sense in which one should understand remarks like the "Cosmos is Real" etc. Sage Ramana too often used the movie screen analogy and he says:

You see various scenes passing on a cinema screen; the fire seems to burn buildings to ashes; water seems to wreck ships; but the screen on which the pictures are projected remain unburnt and dry. Why? because the pictures are unreal and the screen real.

In the same way, the world is a phenomenon upon the substratum of the single Reality which is not affected by it in any way. Reality is only One. [Recall Krishna's remark that the Atma cannot be cut, wetted etc.]

Talk of illusion is only due to the point of view. Change your viewpoint to that of Knowledge and you will perceive the Universe to be only Brahman. Being now immersed in the world, you see it as a real world; get beyond it and it will disappear and Reality alone will remain.

Reduced to brass tacks, what it all means is the following: Ordinary mortals need not tie themselves into knots about whether this world is real or illusory. The world has an empirical reality of its own, which it is safe to accept. However, having said that, one must also be careful not to imagine that many things which are actually transient are long-lasting or even eternal. A simple example is in order here.

Let us say there is a person holding a very high office which comes with many privileges. The person happily enjoys all these perks, but in the process becomes oblivious to the fact that the moment he steps down, away go the trappings. He knows but forgets or allows the fact to escape from his memory. Comes finally the day when the tenure ends, and with it a new life sans perks starts but the person finds it to be a shattering experience. Why? Because he has allowed himself to be under an illusion.

This example brings home the lesson that what one must really guard against is the growth of attachment due to the superposition of "wrong notions on Reality as it actually is. In this sense, the comment and warnings of the Vedantin are valid. In short, it is not the world which is an illusion but our view of it. The world as created by God is like the rope of the Vedantic example but our view of it is like the snake. So, what we have to watch out for really are our interpretations and constructs. Swami summarises it very nicely:

You see a rope and think that is a snake; but there is no snake at all. You are subjected to fear and tension by imagining that there is a snake where there really is no snake. What is the reason for this fear? Imagining things which really do not exist is the cause for the fear.....

You are experiencing a number of sorrows because you have forgotten the fact that the entire world is the very embodiment of God. It is not just world as you think. You see the world from the phenomenal point of view; you are not looking at it from the process of inquiry. If you were to look at the world through the eyes of inquiry, you would realize that it is only a flow or a stream of continuous change. This ongoing, uninterrupted flow of change is the basic characteristic of the phenomenal world.... It [continuous flow] means a stream of changing truth, a truth which is qualified and therefore not fully True. It is a combination of pure Truth, which is always unchanging, and untruth, which deals with things that are changing.

In effect, there are basically two types of illusion one must guard against. The first is external in origin; here illusion makes us see multiplicity in Creation, obscuring the underlying unity. The second is internal; here illusion makes us think we are the body, whereas we are actually *the Atma*. Ignorance is

the source of both, and hence it is that ignorance must be driven out with Knowledge.

Notwithstanding all that has been said, ordinary mortals can justifiably worry about *Maya* and how to transcend it. There is, however, no cause for worry, and Swami reminds us of the assurance Krishna gave to Arjuna:

Arjuna, I am the authority that wields Maya. This jagath (Universe) which is a product of Maya moves and behaves according to My will. So whatever is attached to Me and acts according to My will cannot be harmed by Maya... Maya dare not approach any one who has taken refuge in Me... The hurdle of Maya can be crossed either by developing the attitude of oneness with the Infinite God or the attitude of complete surrender to the Lord.

Advaitam

Krishna told Arjuna that he was not the body but the *Atma*. Out of infinite compassion, this same message is being dinned into our (reluctant!) ears day in and day out by Swami. It is one thing to repeat parrot-like that "I am the *Atma*", and quite another to actually feel that way. What is important is to progress to the state where one truly feels one is the *Atma*. And it is in order to remind man of this vital journey, that the scriptures built in caveats known as the *Mahavakyas*, one of which was earlier referred to earlier, namely, *Aham Brahmasmi*, meaning, I am *Brahman*. How does one make this pilgrimage to *Brahman*? Is it enough to repeat the *Mahavakyas* like a tape recorder? Obviously the answer is no. What then must one do?

Like every journey, the journey to *Brahman* involves several stages. It is customary to identify in this long and arduous journey, three important stages known respectively by the names *Dvaitam*, *Vishitadvaitam*, and *Advaitam*. The names might sound a bit forbidding but what they imply is not difficult to understand.

Before proceeding further, let us define the principal objective to be the determination of the answer to the question: "Who am I?" Indeed, the purpose of human life is to enable one to arrive for himself/herself at the answer. Swami helps us.

When you are born, you cry, "Koham? Koham? - Who am I?" If you waste your entire life in only maintaining your physical existence, when will you ever be able to understand who you really are? There is a deeper significance contained in your life than merely caring for your body. You have to start your life with "Koham?", "Who am I?" and you have to end your life with "Soham! I am He, lam That!". You have to recognise that you yourself are the Divinity.

So that is our destination - the feeling that I am **God**. To put it somewhat differently, from God we have come and to God we must return, i.e., we must go back to where we came from. Now the recommended starting point for this eventual realization is *Dvaitam* or an attitude of duality. Here one does not load oneself with abstract notions difficult to comprehend, but simply accepts God as a Supreme Being and that this God must be properly worshipped. Without complicating matters, one merely says: "God is God and I am I; we two are different (that is how duality enters the picture). He is Supreme whereas I am insignificant. I must worship Him." Swami summarises it as follows:

At the very beginning when you say "Daasoham, Daasoham, O Lord, I am Your servant", the Lord is separate and the servant is separate, and their respective status is clearly different.

In the *Dvaitam* stage, one has full body-consciousness, meaning that one identifies oneself with the body or the lower self. Swami stresses this by remarking:

You remain small by identifying yourself all the time with the body. You think Aham Dehasmi, I am the body; this thought keeps you in a state of littleness.

From *Dvaitam*, one next proceeds to the *Visishtadvaitam* stage, wherein one concedes that there is a bit of Divinity in oneself and one recognizes that one is actually a spark of the Divine. The earlier chant *Daasoham* (I am Your servant) is now replaced by *Soham* (I am He). One has no doubt elevated oneself, but a distinction is still being maintained by referring to I and He as if they are separate. For this reason, *Visishtadvaitam* is often referred to as qualified-monism or qualified non-dualism. Swami says that this is the stage where one recognizes that although one might worship God using many different names and forms, the Ultimate behind is just One. Urging that one must progress from *Dvaitam* or duality to the next stage of *Visishtadvaitam* or qualified non-dualism, Swami observes:

But go on from Aham Dehasmi to Aham Jivasmi; from "I am the body" to "I am the Soul, the spark of the Divine." In this way, rise up from the stage of dualism (Dvaitam) to qualified non-dualism (Visishtadvaitam).

Now comes the final stage of the journey when all trace of distinction between Divinity and oneself is erased; indeed, one ascends to the dizzy state where there is nothing but oneself! This is the last stop - *Advaitam*. Initially the cry was *Daasoham* (I am Your servant), then it became shortened to *Soham* (I am He), and now it becomes truncated even further to simply *Aham*, meaning 'I am I'. About these changes, Swami comments:

Aham means "I"; it is the pure Self without any modification or limitation. The journey from "Daasoham" to "Aham" is a little like the healing process that takes place with a wound; the protective layer of hard skin that forms over the wound eventually falls off by itself as- the wound heals. When both the "Daa" and "So" covering the pure "I" have fallen off, then you will be in the final stage of Advaitam or non-dualism. Then you are immersed in the one Truth, Aham Aham, I am I.

Instead of *Daasoham* to *Soham* to *Aham*, one can also describe the three-stage journey via the phrases *Aham Dehasmi* to *Aham Jivasmi* (both of which have already been mentioned) to finally *Aham Brahmasmi*. As Swami says:

This [Aham Brahmasmi] is the stage of complete non-dualism (Advaitam). The feeling you start with, that you are the body, is steeped in dualism; it is very birthplace of sorrow. As long as you are immersed in duality, everything is sorrow and grief. If you identify yourself with the Atma, everything will be happiness and joy.

Much has been written on the subject of *Aham Brahmasmi* but none has clarified the matter as

Swami has. He declares:

The principle of "I" is all pervasive. People may call themselves by different names. But the one thing common to all of them is the concept of "I". The very first word in the Universe was "I". Aham is the first name of the Lord. Aham Brahmasmi, Aham comes first and Brahmasmi comes afterwards.

Actually, although the *Mahavakyas* are often taken as proclaiming the philosophy of *Advaitam*, Swami says that if one examines carefully, even they fall slightly short of true *Advaitam*. He remarks:

Declarations like Aham Brahmasmi and Tat Twam Asi are cited as pronouncements proclaiming Advaitam. But this is not correct. These statements refer to two entities, Aham and Brahman, Tat and Twam. The recognition that the one and the same Atma dwells in all is true Advaitam.

Swami then goes on to say that man is the image of the Creator. The "I" indicates the oneness of man and his Creator. Man must therefore shatter all barriers and rise to the level of the Creator - that is the purpose of life.

To summarize: There are three stages in the road to God-realization - dualism (*Dvaitam*), qualified non-dualism (*Visishtadvaitam*) and full non-dualism (*Advaitam*). In the beginning one declares, "I am a devotee of God", clearly implying that God and the devotee are two distinct and separate entities. God is believed to far away and the quest is to get closer to Him. After a long journey, one finally comes face-to-face with God, enabling one to declare, "O Lord, I am Your devotee". Notice the change in the declaration, which comes about because one feels Him inside one's heart. The third and the ultimate stage is one where truth dawns and the realization occurs that "I am God and God is me". As Swami explains, *Advaitam* is the stage when one cannot distinguish between God and oneself. Of course it is a long journey to get there, and there is an anecdote which emphasizes the point.

Once in Brindavan, Swami came out for *Darshan*. On the way He saw a few boys standing and stopped to make small conversation with them. As is often His habit, He asked the boys one by one "Who are you?". Dutifully they all stated their respective names except the last boy who answered, "I am Swami!". Swami smiled and said: "In that case, you go and give *Darshan*."

The subject of *Advaitam* features prominently in a large number of Swami's Divine discourses - naturally - and Swami spares no pains to use different analogies and examples to drive home the point. One of these which is particularly easy to grasp is the two-circle analogy. He says:

Consider, for a moment, a very big circle, and consider that just by its side and separate from it there is another circle, one which is very much smaller. The big circle may be thought of as God and the small one as jiva, the individual Soul. Here the individual is different and distinct from God; this is Dvaitam - dualism. Next you drag the small circle so that it lies within the big circle. You then have Visishtadvaitam or qualified non-dualism; now the Jiva is part of Divinity, he exists in God. What then is the meaning of Jiva becoming totally merged in God? The small circle has to broaden itself and grow bigger and bigger until it has fully expanded to the size of the big circle. At that point, the two circles are indistinguishable, Jiva and Deva (God) are one; man has merged into God. This

is Advaita, complete non-dualism.

It is worth appreciating that though *Advaitam* (non-dualism) is the ultimate goal, it is prudent to start with *Dvaitam* (dualism), which is why the path of *Bhakti* or devotion assumes so much importance; and that also is the reason why both Krishna and Swami lay so much stress on *Bhakti*. At the same time, it is equally important not to lose sight of one's intrinsic Divinity. To underscore this point, Swami often calls attention to the example of Christ who began by declaring that "I am the Messenger of God", later modified it to, "I am the Son of God", and then to, "I and My Father are one", indicative of His transition through the three stages discussed in detail above. Finally, Christ referred to the Holy Ghost, which is the same as the fourth state discussed by *Mandukya*.

The following anecdote may be of some value in stressing the importance of *Aham*. Once in Kodaikanal, Swami asked the assembled gathering: "Who am I?" Various replies were given, like: "You are Shirdi Sai reincarnated", "You are Krishna come again", "You are a *Poorna Avatar*", etc. Swami kept smiling and shaking His head as if to indicate that the answers were not correct. Finally an elderly gentleman made bold to say, "Swami, You are Yourself". Pleased, Swami nodded His head and remarked, "That is the correct answer. I am Myself; I am I".

"I", says Swami, is the first name of Divinity. Commenting on it, He remarks:

There is only one reality that exists in this world. That Reality is Divinity. What is the first name of that Reality? Neither the Atma, nor God nor even AUM is the first name. In fact, "I" is the first name of Divinity. This "I" is frequently used in daily life for "I" is the basis of all our deeds. "I" is the vital breath, the Self,..... That is why it is said, "Ishwara Sarva Bhutanam", (The Lord manifest Himself in all). It is because this "I" is existing in all that the Lord is said to manifest in all.

The pure *Aham* state is what Christ referred to as the Holy Ghost. On this topic, Ramana says:

Of all the definitions of God, none is so well put as the Biblical statement: I AM THAT I AM (Exodus, 3.14). None is so direct as the name "I AM" of Jehovah. The Absolute Is. It is Self, God.

The subject of *Advaitam* is a vast ocean and what has been discussed here is just a small portion of it. However, the important thing is not the acquisition of scholarship about *Advaitam* but to practise it! And as far as that is concerned, Swami's pronouncements, some of which have been cited above, should be ample.

In a nutshell, *Advaitam* means seeing unity in diversity. On the face of it, this might seem impossible and even meaningless. However, the essential point is the *feeling* of oneness, rather than indulging in mental gymnastics to pretend that the tiger, the fish and the coconut tree are all alike. They certainly are not as far as form and other earthly characteristics are concerned. But at the same time, they all are projections of the same One or *Brahman*. To drive home the point that there is no qualitative difference in the basis for the diverse forms, Swami often cites the example of the ocean, the waves and the foam. The ocean is vast and remains constant, and is like the *Brahman*. From the ocean are born the waves. They are numerous in number and exhibit literally, infinite variations - no two waves are exactly alike. Further, they are all evanescent; and yet

the water in the wave tastes just as salty as the water of the still ocean. The same applies to the foam also. There is thus an underlying unity between the one ocean, the numerous waves, and the foam that rides the waves piggyback. On this topic of the waves and the sea, Swami observes:

Your Reality is the Atma, a wave of the Paramatma. The one object of this human existence is to visualise that Reality, that Atma, that relationship between the wave and the sea.

The one steeped in *Advaitam* always sees and is conscious of this underlying unity in diversity, and is indifferent to the superficial diversity except perhaps in a purely functional sense (as Ramakrishna says, the tiger also is God, but better not to go near him, especially during his lunch hour!).

Once one recognises and remembers this underlying unity, other's joy becomes one's own joy; likewise, other's suffering and pain become one's own. In short, there is no difference whatsoever between the other and oneself. All are one, and there is only One - that is what *Advaitam* is really all about. Swami adds the final and lucid touch in a characteristic manner. He says that the statement "unity in diversity" must be considered at three levels, at the level of the body, the mind and the heart or the Soul. Where the Soul is concerned, there is only one *Atma*; in other words, there is no such thing as my *Atma*, your *Atma* and so on. At the level of the heart therefore, there is no diversity whatsoever and the question of seeking unity in diversity simply does not arise. At the other extreme end, namely that of the body, it would be both foolish and naive to seek unity since bodies are different; this is what the example of the tiger just discussed, brings out. The quest for *Advaitam* really belongs to the realm of the mind. It is the mind which must be disciplined into feeling that there is an all-encompassing unity which envelopes diversity.

Summary

- As mentioned earlier, this is a "heavy" chapter. A summary might therefore be useful and is given below.
- *Vedanta* posits that a human being can exist in three states - the waking, the dream and the deep-sleep states.
- There are two types of consciousness (or awareness) which exist, the Primary and the secondary. The latter is what is usually referred to as consciousness. It is the one which makes the body aware of the external world.
- The Primary Consciousness or Superior Consciousness is always alert, whereas the secondary consciousness is fully operative only in the waking state, partially so in the dream state, and totally dormant in the deep-sleep state. The Primary Consciousness relates to "I" or *Aham*, whereas the secondary consciousness relates to "i" or *Ahamkara* or ego.
- The deep-sleep state is fundamental or Causal; the dream and the waking states emerge from it and dissolve into it.
- The *Mandukya Upanishad* relates these three states to the three letters A, U, and M of *AUM*.
- Encompassing the three is the so-called fourth state, *Turiya*. *Mandukya* relates *Turiya* to *OM*. *Mandukya* further states that *A UM* leads on to *OM*.
- The Primary Consciousness or Primary Awareness is also sometimes referred to as the Self.
- This Self cognizes all the various experiences, and persists throughout as the permanent and constant Witness.

- This permanent and constant Witness which does not undergo any change along with changes in the three states, is also *called the Atma*.
- As far as the Cosmos is concerned, the human is the microcosm, the Cosmos itself being the macrocosm.
- The three states experienced by the individual are respectively related to: (i) the body, (ii) the mind, and (iii) Absolute Reality.
- There are correspondingly three bodies - the physical body, the Subtle body and the Causal body respectively, which have experiences in the three states mentioned above.
- With each of these three states of the microcosm is associated a deity. They are: *Vaisvanara* (associated to the body), *Taijasa* (for the mind) and *Prajna* (Primary Consciousness).
- The macrocosm is simply the superposition of all the microcosms. Thus all the bodies of all the beings constitute the Physical Universe or the Gross world, also called the *Bhutakasa*. The union of all the minds similarly leads to the Universal or the Cosmic Mind. This Cosmic Mind has a world of its own, called the subtle world or *Chittakasa*. Likewise, there exists a "macroscopic" counterpart of the Primary Consciousness viz., Universal Consciousness, which operates in a world called the *Chidaakasa*.
- In other words, if the individual body belongs to and has experiences in the gross world or *Bhutakasa*, the individual mind similarly belongs to the subtle world or world of *Chittakasa*, while the individual Primary Consciousness is likewise a "part" of the Universal Consciousness, associated to which is the world called the *Chidaakasa*.
- The presiding agencies of these three worlds or Universes mentioned above are respectively: *Virata, Hiranyagarbha and Ishwara*,
- *Virata, Hiranyagarbha and Ishwara* are respectively the "macro" counterparts of *Vaisvanara, Taijasa and Prajna*.
- If one goes upwards in the microcosm, one goes through *Vaiswanara, Taijasa, Prajna* and ends up with *theAtma*. If one does likewise in the macrocosm, one goes through *Virata, Hiranyagarbha, and Ishwara*, ending up with *Brahman*. No matter which way one climbs, the destination is the same. In other words, *Atma = Brahman*.
- Thus it is that one often says that the microcosm is in the macrocosm and vice versa.
- *TheAtma* is all pervasive but just as space, while all pervasive, sometimes gets associated to local regions, like the space within a pot for *example, Atma* can get "trapped" in bodies like the human body. Such an entity is called the "embodied *Atma*" or *jivatma*.
- Under certain circumstances, when *the Atma* gets so embodied, it animates the being, providing the prime energy; the animated being then has life.
- What is usually termed Soul, refers to the embodied *atma*, or the {*Atma + Subtle body*}.
- During life, the Soul occupies a body. Thus, a Living body = (Gross body + Soul) = {Gross body + Subtle body + *Atma*}. Upon death, the Soul departs, meaning that the {*Atma + Subtle body*} combination says goodbye to the gross or the physical body, and floats away to have a separate and ethereal existence. This separate existence lasts till the combination finds a new body to reside in, which is rebirth.
- The cycle of birth, death and rebirth goes on seemingly without an end. But an end is possible i.e., rebirth can be prevented. When that happens, one says that the Soul is liberated.
- Liberation (*Moksha*) means that *the Atma* cuts loose from the Subtle body. This can happen only through intense spiritual practice or *Sadhana*.

- Two terms are often used; *The jivatma*, and the *Paramatma*. Seen from one point of view, the former refers to the "limited" *Atma* trapped in a body whereas the latter refers to the Unlimited *Atma*. Life thus consists of a journey from the limited to the Unlimited.
- Stated briefly, *Maya* means superimposing a non-existent thought or notion on Reality.
- We see diversity where there actually is unity - that is *Maya*.
- There are three stages in the road to Liberation or God-realisation. They are: Dualism or *Dvaitam*, qualified non-dualism or *Visishtadvaitam* and complete non-dualism or *Advaitam*. One must progress stage by stage.
- A human being is a conglomerate of body, mind and *Soul/Atma*. Bodies are necessarily distinct, and it would be silly to imagine they are all one. On the other hand, the *Atma* is indivisible and there is no question of diversity; there is no such thing as my *Atma*, your *Atma*, etc. *Advaitam* means the feeling of oneness. From the above remarks it should be clear that the pursuit of *Advaitam* must start in the domain of the mind. It is at the mental level that all feelings of distinctions and differences must be erased. That really is *what Advaitam* boils down to. When mental distinctions are dissolved, the mind itself may be said to have faded away!
- The end of the road is the feeling of Being: **I AM. This is the state of total Bliss.**