

Timeless Teachings

Insights from the Brahmasūtras



His Holiness Jagadguru Śrī Bhāratī Tīrtha Mahāsvāmin

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Timeless Teachings

Insights from the Brahmasūtras

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About the Book

His Holiness Jagadguru Śrī Bhāratī-tīrtha Mahāsvāmin, the 36th Shankaracharya of the Dakshinamnaya Sringeri Sharada Peetham observed the *cāturmāsya-vrata* in Chennai from 3.7.2012 to 30.9.2012. Acquiescing to the prayers of His disciples, His Holiness delivered benedictory speeches on all Wednesdays, Sundays and on special occasions, except on *ekādaśī* days on which the Jagadguru observed silence. A nonpareil scholar of various *śāstras*, inclusive of *Nyāya* and *Vedānta*, His Holiness blessed His audience with 11 benedictory discourses on select portions of the *Brahma-sūtras* along with Bhagavatpāda's *bhāṣya* thereon. The talks were delivered in Tamil and each was of 30 minutes duration.

Notwithstanding the profundity and technicality of the subject matter, His Holiness, in His inimitable style, ensured that the import of the *sūtras* and the *bhāṣya* expounded by Him was easily intelligible to everyone who had the great good fortune of hearing Him. This book contains the aforesaid 11 speeches, edited and rendered into English. It is dedicated at the lotus feet of His Holiness, with *namaskāras* and apologies for the inadvertent errors in it.



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Supreme is Real; Duality is False

Invocation

वरमभयमुदारं पुस्तकं चाक्षहारं मणिवलयमनोज्ञैः पाणिपद्मैर्दधाना ।

सितवसनललामा कुन्दमुक्ताभिरामा वसतु शशिनिभास्या वाचि वाग्देवता नः ॥

(Kaivalyakalpadruma on Svārājyasiddhi, Prakaraṇa 2)
[*May Goddess Sarasvatī, whose lotus-like lovely hands with gem-studded bracelets munificently bear the signs of granting boons and freedom from fear, a book and a rosary, who is an unmatched beauty in a white attire, is charmingly complexioned like jasmines and pearls and whose face resembles the moon, reside in our organ of speech.*]

Introduction

The *Upaniṣads* teach, succinctly in some places and elaborately in others, that *Brahman*, the Supreme, is the only reality, the world is 'mithyā, false' and the 'jīva, the soul' is but *Brahman*. The Lord has imparted this in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Sage Vyāsa, in His terse aphorisms known as the *Brahmasūtras*, and Bhagavatpāda, in His lucid and in-depth exposition thereof, the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, have demonstrated that this is the scripture's final purport and

defended it by considering and compellingly confuting the various objections raised against it by subscribers to other schools of thought. With the *Brahmasūtras* and the *bhāṣya* thereon as basis, I shall present some of the objections and their rebuttals in a series of discourses. My aim is two-fold; to help you votaries of Bhagavatpāda appreciate that *Advaita-vedānta* as championed by Him is flawless and impregnable and to gratify the yearning of many to hear elements of the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* from me during this *cāturmāsya*.

Brahman, World and the Soul

Bhagavatpāda has distilled the scripture's conclusive thrust into half a verse thus:

ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्या जीवो ब्रह्मैव नापरः । (*Brahmajñānāvalīmālā* 20)

[*Brahman is real; the universe is mithyā, false; the soul is Brahman indeed, naught else.*]

That which is never sublated is termed *satya*, real. There is only one such entity and that is *Brahman*, the Supreme. The universe is not real in the said sense and, thus, is said to be '*mithyā, false.*' Misconstruing the *Vedāntin's* position that the world is *mithyā*, many have objected,

'We see the world and interact with others and yet you claim that it is quite unreal. That is ridiculous.' They fail to realize that what the *Vedāntin* means when he says that the world is '*mithyā*, false' is that, not being unchangingly timeless, it is not absolutely real like *Brahman*, nor is it wholly non-existent like the horn of a hare.

Objection: Soul Disparate from the Creator

While theistic schools in general hold that God created the world, *Advaita-vedānta* is unique in affirming that the *jīva* or soul is non-different from the Supreme. Up in arms against this, a disputant protests as follows. If the soul is the same as God, it follows that the *jīva* is the maker of the cosmos. That, however, cannot be the case, as it is conceivable that he would have created and subjected himself to even what is quite unfavourable to him like hell, diseases and decrepitude; he, would, on the contrary have effected only what is beneficial to him.¹

¹ इतरव्यपदेशाद्धिताकरणादिदोषप्रसक्तिः - As the soul is said to be identical with *Brahman*, defects such as its not doing only what is beneficial to it would arise. (*Brahmasūtra* 2.1.21) स स्वतन्त्रः कर्ता सन् हितमेवात्मनः सौमनस्यकरं कुर्यात्, नाहितं जन्ममरणजरारोगाद्यनेकानर्थजालम् ।

- Being an independent doer, he would create only what is beneficial and agreeable to him and not what is unfavourable to him such as birth, death, old age, disease and other snares of suffering. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.21)

Another argument¹ advanced by him is: Generally, on our accomplishing any notable task, be it delivering a speech or authoring a book, we remember it and acknowledge having done so. There is, however, no instance of anyone reminiscing at any time, 'I created this world.' So, the soul cannot be the creator and equating it with God is improper.

A further objection² of his is as follows. If the soul is the maker of the universe, it must also possess the power to withdraw its creation at will. But as a matter of fact, it is unable to shed even its current body without strain; many suffer much preceding death. So, the soul cannot be the creator and, thus, is not one with God.

Two Viewpoints in *Advaita-vedānta*

Advaita-vedānta adopts two viewpoints; the 'vyāvahārika, empirical' perspective and the 'pāramārthika, ultimate'

1 स्मरेच्च मयेदं जगद्विम्बं विचित्रं विरचितमिति ।

- Also, he should remember, 'I created this diverse universe.' (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.21)

2 शारीरोऽपीमां सृष्टिमुपसंहरेत् । स्वकीयमपि तावच्छरीरं शारीरो न शक्नोत्यनायासेनोपसंहर्तुम् ।

- The *jīva* would withdraw this creation at will but he is unable to discard even his own body effortlessly. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.21)

position. That *jīvas* are many, the world is experientially valid, God is superior to the *jīvas* and is the world's creator, preserver and destroyer are spoken of from the former, duality-centric standpoint. From the highest standpoint, however, *Vedānta* does not admit any duality and avers that there is only *Brahman*, the Absolute.

Queries and Answers in the State of Duality Only

Approaching his *Guru*, Bāṣkali entreated Bādhva to teach him the Truth; the *Guru* remained silent. Bāṣkali pleaded again but the *Guru* maintained silence. When the disciple asked for the third time, Bādhva, the *Veda* narrates, said:

ब्रूमः खलु त्वं तु न विजानासि । उपशान्तोऽयमात्मा ।

(Cited as *śruti* in the *bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 3.2.17)

[I teach but you fail to grasp; the *Ātman* is utterly tranquil.]

The *Guru* clarified that he had been imparting the Truth but Bāṣkali was not realizing that It is absolute quiescence.

About God in the form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, the *Guru*, it is said:

गुरोस्तु मौनं व्याख्यानं शिष्यास्तु छिन्नसंशयाः ॥ (*Dakṣiṇāmūrti-stotra*)

[The *Guru* teaches in silence; the disciples' doubts cease.]

चोद्यं वा परिहारो वा क्रियतां द्वैतभाषया ।

अद्वैतभाषया चोद्यं नास्ति नापि तदुत्तरम् ॥ (*Pañcadaśī* 2.39)

[A query or answer has to be couched in the language of duality. In non-duality's tongue, there is no query or reply.]

Questions and answers are possible only in the state of duality; in the highest state, there is none to teach or ask.

To sum up, *Advaita-vedānta* acknowledges duality at the empirical level and that God creates the cosmos and is estimable, while the *jīva* is different from Him and is His worshipper but denies duality from the highest standpoint.

God has no Likes and Dislikes

God creates the universe and gives *jīvas* experiences in accordance with their *karma*. He, for instance, fashions heaven and hell to reward the virtuous and penalize the sinful. Unlike the *jīva*, He has no likes or dislikes.

देवस्यैष स्वभावोऽयमाप्तकामस्य का स्पृहा ॥ (*Māṇḍūkya-kārikā* 2.9)

[He creates by nature. Wholly sated, what could He want?]

God is an '*āptakāma*, one who has no unfulfilled wish'. It is Him that we regard as the world's creator, not the *jīva*.¹

¹ अधिकं तु भेदनिर्देशात् - But because the scripture states that God (the Creator) and the soul are different, God is greater than the soul. (*Brahmasūtra* 2.1.22)

Empirical Soul-God Disparity Reasonable

The opponent directs a fresh salvo thus.¹ Let us take it that the soul is the Supreme. Then, by admitting disparity between them in the *vyāvahārika* state, you conflictingly unify mutually exclusive non-difference and difference.

This charge can be countered with a simple analogy.²

A diamond, a marble tile and a pebble on the road are all only stones but we deal with these three differently.

Diamonds are used in ornaments, marbles to beautify floors and pebbles to drive away crows and dogs! Each

of these three has a distinct value and utility for us; we do not replace a pebble with a diamond. However, they

are but stones that are reducible to valueless and barely distinguishable powder. Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita has said:

पाषाणाः सर्व एवैते पद्मरागेषु को गुणः ।

प्रकाशः कश्चिदत्रास्ति परत्र स न विद्यते ॥ (*Sabhārañjana-śataka* 5)

[*All these are only stones. What is special in a ruby? It has some lustre that is not there in the common stones.*]

¹ कथं भेदाभेदौ संभवतः?

- How can there be difference as also non-difference between two? (*Bhāṣya on Brahmasūtra* 2.1.22)

² अश्मादिवच्च तदनुपपत्तिः – The objection is unsustainable because the case is akin to that of different stones (that are the same in being earthy). (*Brahmasūtra* 2.1.23)

Similarly, though the soul and the Supreme are, in reality, just non-dual, pure, consciousness, when the Absolute manifests as a *jīva*, It does not possess the power to create the universe; that belongs only to God. Thus, there can be difference between God and the soul at the empirical level though they are ultimately non-different.

Objections Rooted in Misunderstanding of *Advaita*

As can be seen, the objections arise since the fact that *Advaita-vedānta* embraces not just ultimate non-duality but also empirical duality is missed. I shall now narrate an incident to illustrate misconception due to oversight. Bhagavatpāda has declared in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* that: मोक्षकारणसामग्र्यां भक्तिरेव गरीयसि । (*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 32)

[*Among the means to liberation, devotion is the foremost.*]

A follower of a dualistic school who had come across this half-verse said, 'Śaṅkara has stated that *bhakti* alone is the means to liberation. Only some other *Advaitins* hold that knowledge alone is its cause. There is no difference between what the preceptors of dualistic schools and Śaṅkara have taught about the means to liberation.' I told him, 'You should read Bhagavatpāda's entire verse and then arrive at what He meant. Its second half is:

स्वस्वरूपानुसन्धानं भक्तिरित्यभिधीयते ॥ (*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 32)

[*Meditation on one's true nature is termed 'bhakti'.*]

By limiting yourself to just the first half of the verse, you have come to a mistaken conclusion. The word *bhakti* has different connotations. Bhagavatpāda has Himself clarified here that His earlier mention of *bhakti* is in its (scriptural) sense of '*svasvarūpānusandhāna*, meditation on one's true nature' and not in its dualistic sense.'

In the various *śāstras*, the same word can have widely different meanings. Take the word '*graha*'. In the *Jyotiṣa-śāstra*, it denotes a celestial body. In the *Mīmāṃsā-śāstra*, it refers to a wooden vessel in which *soma* juice is kept as seen in the analysis therein of *Vedic* passages like: ग्रहैर्जुहोति (Taken up in *Mīmāṃsānyāya-prakāśa*, etc.)

[*He sacrifices using grahas.*]

ग्रहं संमार्ष्टि

(Discussed in the *Śābarabhāṣya* on *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* 3.1.13)

[*He wipes a graha.*]

The import of the first sentence is that one should perform a sacrifice with *grahas*, while that of the second is that one should wipe a *graha*. If a person takes the word *graha* here as denoting, as it often does, a celestial body such

as the sun or moon, the sentences would seem absurd to him, for there is no possibility of one sacrificing with or wiping, say, the moon. In the *Nyāya-śāstra*, we see the word ‘*graha*’ used in the sense of knowledge. Hence, technical words, such as ‘*bhakti*’, ‘*satya*’ and ‘*mithyā*’, must be appropriately understood. Misconstruing the words used in *Advaita-vedānta*, overlooking the standpoints from which non-duality and duality are spoken of therein and, consequently, faulting it is unjustified.

The Two Viewpoints are *Śruti*-based

The empirical, dualistic standpoint and the absolute, non-dualistic standpoint are not expedient conceptions of Bhagavatpāda to shore up *Advaita-vedānta*. The *śruti* itself adopts them and Bhagavatpāda has only faithfully echoed the view of the *śruti*. An *Upaniṣadic* teaching is:

यत्र हि द्वैतमिव भवति तदितर इतरं पश्यति...यत्र त्वस्य सर्वमात्मैवाभूत्
तत्केन कं पश्येत् । (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.5.15)

[For, when there is duality, as it were, one sees another
...but when all has become just his Ātman, what could
one see and through what?]

The empirical, dualistic viewpoint is presented in the first portion, which means, ‘When there is duality, as it were,

one sees another.’ The non-dualistic highest viewpoint is presented in the second part, which means, ‘But when all this has become his (the knower of *Brahman*’s) *Ātman* alone, what could one see and by what means?’ It is these dualistic and non-dualistic standpoints brought out in *Upaniṣadic* passages such as this that Bhagavatpāda has spelt out.

Soul-God Distinction Based on Limiting Adjuncts

To illustrate the apparent distinction between the *jīva* and God, Bhagavatpāda compares them to ‘*ghaṭākāśa*, the space within a pot’ and ‘*mahākāśa*, the vast space outside’.¹ There is, in reality, no difference between the space within a pot and that not delimited by it, for space is homogenous and all-pervasive. Yet, when delimited by a pot, it is termed ‘*ghaṭākāśa*, pot-space’. When the pot breaks up, it ceases to be conceived of as limited in any sense. In *śāstraic* parlance, the pot in the example

¹ नैष दोषः, महाकाशघटाकाशन्यायेनोभयसंभवस्य तत्र तत्र प्रतिष्ठापितत्वात् ।

- There is no fault of incongruity because the possibility of non-difference and difference between the soul and God has been demonstrated here and there through the maxim of the great-space and the pot-space. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.22)

is termed space's '*upādhi*, limiting adjunct'. *Brahman* with '*avidyā*, ignorance' or the intellect as its *upādhi* is the *jīva*, while *Brahman* with *Māyā* as *upādhi* is God. Just as we distinguish between the pot-space and the space outside in view of the limiting adjunct, the pot, but not otherwise, we differentiate between *jīva* and God at the empirical level due to the *upādhis* concerned but not from the standpoint of the Truth.

When it is understood that *Vedāntins* admit duality at the empirical level and affirm non-duality from the standpoint of the Truth, there is no room for objections of the kind seen. All should strive to comprehend *Advaita-vedānta* correctly, tread the path shown by *Bhagavatpāda* and attain beatitude.

॥ हर नमः पार्वतीपतये । हर हर महादेव ॥

God: The World's Maker and Material Cause

Invocation

वरमभयमुदारं पुस्तकं चाक्षहारं मणिवलयमनोज्ञैः पाणिपद्मैर्दधाना ।
सितवसनललामा कुन्दमुक्ताभिरामा वसतु शशिनिभास्या वाचि वाग्देवता नः ॥

(Kaivalyakalpadruma on Svārājyasiddhi, Prakaraṇa 2)

[May Goddess Sarasvatī, whose lotus-like lovely hands with gem-studded bracelets munificently bear the signs of granting boons and freedom from fear, a book and a rosary, who is an unmatched beauty in a white attire, is charmingly complexioned like jasmines and pearls and whose face resembles the moon, reside in our organ of speech.]

Introduction

Bhagavatpāda was undoubtedly an incarnation of Lord Paramaśiva; even His superhuman intellectual acumen is evidence of this. With incisive reasoning congruent with the teachings of the authoritative scriptures, He set to naught objections from every quarter to the tenets of *Advaita-vedānta*. Though in-depth comprehension of everything that He has expatiated on in His works is

beyond the reach of our limited intellects, we ought to strive to assimilate at least a modicum of what He has illuminated; immense benefit would be our reward. With this in mind, I shall now take up some topics related to God's creation of the universe that have been presented by Sage Vyāsa in the *Brahmasūtras* and thrashed out by Bhagavatpāda in His *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*.

Objections Concerning God's Causality in Creation

The *Upaniṣads* declare that God is the cause of the universe.

यतो वा इमानि भूतानि जायन्ते । येन जातानि जीवन्ति । यत्रयन्त्यभिसंविशन्ति । तद्विजिज्ञासस्व । तद्ब्रह्मेति । (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.1.1)

[*Seek to realize that from which all these beings are born, that by which, when born, they live and that into which, on departing, they merge. That is Brahman.*]

The opponent takes exception to the scriptural position that God manifests the world without needing anything to do so. His contention is based on what one normally observes in the world. It is seen that to make anything, some raw material is indispensable. A lump of clay is

required to fashion an earthen pot; sugarcane is needed to produce sugar; limestone is required to manufacture cement. The raw material out of which something is made is termed its 'material cause (*upādāna-kāraṇa*)'. Apart from the material cause, a person who is capable of converting the raw material into the final product is also required. Such a person is called, in scriptural parlance, the product's 'efficient cause (*nimitta-kāraṇa*)'.

The disputant questions the *Vedāntin* thus: 'You claim that God created this universe. What is the material with which He started to make the world? A potter requires a lump of clay to start with in order to make a pot. What is the equivalent raw material with which God fashions the world? A potter is the efficient cause of a pot. Who is the corresponding efficient cause of the universe? Prior to creation, there was no object that could have served as the raw material for God. Were it to be imagined that there was some such material available at that time, the question that would then require an answer is how that object came to be in the first place. So, you are staring a conundrum in the face.'

Bhagavatpāda has a piece of advice for the disputant: 'You need to bear in mind that it is untenable to take it for granted, as you have done, that the norms that you observe in the world should hold good in God's case too. You do find in the world that a potter starts with some clay and produces a pot. However, based on this, you cannot dismiss the possibility of God creating the world without any basic material. Do not compare God, who is omnipotent, with a potter.' He has drawn attention to a scriptural passage pertinent to this point thus:

तथा चाहुः पौराणिकाः ।

अचिन्त्याः खलु ये भावा न तांस्तर्केण योजयेत् ।

प्रकृतिभ्यः परं यच्च तदचिन्त्यस्य लक्षणम् ॥

(Cited in the *bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.27)

[*The revered author of a Purāṇa has pointed out:*

Entities that are beyond the scope of thought should not be argued about. The definition of the unthinkable is that which is distinct from worldly entities.]

One should not venture to ascertain, exclusively through ratiocination, what is inexplicable; what transcends the norms of nature is inconceivable. God's creation of the cosmos is of this kind.

God: The Material and Efficient Cause of the World

God Himself is the material cause of the universe; He is its efficient cause too. Sage Vyāsa's aphorism is:

प्रकृतिश्च प्रतिज्ञादृष्टान्तानुपरोधात् ॥ (Brahmasūtra 1.4.23)

[*Brahman must be the material cause as well as the efficient cause of the world, so as to not contradict the proposition and the illustration in the Upaniṣads.*]

Bhagavatpāda has shown how the *Vedic* proposition and example reveal God as the raw material and maker.¹

¹ प्रतिज्ञा तावत् 'उत तमादेशमप्राक्ष्यः येनाश्रुतं श्रुतं भवत्यमतं मतमविज्ञातं विज्ञातम्' इति ; तत्र चैकेन विज्ञातेन सर्वमन्यद्विज्ञातमपि विज्ञातं भवतीति प्रतीयते ; तच्चोपादानकारणविज्ञाने सर्वविज्ञानं संभवति, उपादानकारणाव्यतिरेकात्कार्यस्य...दृष्टान्तोऽपि 'यथा सोम्यैकेन मृत्पिण्डेन सर्वं मून्मयं विज्ञातं स्याद्वाचारम्भणं विकारो नामधेयं मुक्तिकेत्येव सत्यम्' इत्युपादानकारणगोचर एवास्मायते... एवं यथासंभवं प्रतिवेदान्तं प्रतिज्ञादृष्टान्तौ प्रकृतित्वसाधनौ प्रत्येतव्यौ ।...अधिष्ठात्रन्तराभावोऽपि प्रतिज्ञादृष्टान्तानुपरोधादेवोदितो वेदितव्यः । अधिष्ठातरि ह्युपादानादन्यस्मिन्नभ्युपगम्यमाने पुनरपि एकविज्ञानेन सर्वविज्ञानस्यासंभवात्प्रतिज्ञादृष्टान्तोपरोध एव स्यात् ।

- The proposition is, 'Did you ask about that entity taught by the scripture (*Brahman*) on knowing which even what is unheard becomes heard, what is not thought of becomes thought of and what is unknown becomes known (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.1.2)?' It is patent herein that by knowing one entity, everything that is unknown too becomes known. That knowledge of everything is possible from the knowledge of its material cause since an effect is non-different from its material cause...The *Vedic* illustration is: 'O pleasant, just as by knowing a lump of clay, all things made of clay become known, since clay alone is real and all its transformations have only speech as basis and exist only in name' (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.1.4); this too points to the material cause only...In this way, in each *Upaniṣad*, the proposition and the illustration ought to be understood as establishing that *Brahman* is the material cause of the world...In line with the proposition and the illustration, it must also be understood that there is no efficient cause other than Brahman, for if some maker apart from the material cause were admitted, it will not be possible to know everything by knowing one entity and so the proposition and illustration would be contradicted. (*Bhāṣya on Brahmasūtra* 1.4.23)

Appearance of God as the World

You asked what raw material was available to God to manifest the world. I shall now present a comparable situation and pose a query. A person comes across a coiled rope in semidarkness and mistakes it to be a snake. He even avers that there is a snake in front of him. What is the material basis of that snake?

It is none other than the rope, for it is the rope itself that is misapprehended as the snake. Does the rope cease to exist or become affected in any way when the snake comes into view in its place? No, the rope remains as before. When the person's delusion becomes dispelled, the snake disappears and he sees only the rope in its place.

Just as the rope appeared to the undiscerning one as a snake, God appears to us in the form of the universe. Just as when that person's delusion ceases, the snake vanishes and he clearly perceives just the rope, when our ignorance ends, the universe will no more appear as before; the Supreme will manifest clearly. The thrust of the analogy given is that it is the Supreme Itself that

appears as the world, without the need for any distinct raw material.

Sri Sadāśiva Brahmendra, who was fully enlightened and a great *yogin*, has declared that a *jīvanmukta*, one liberated while living, is not dumbfounded by anything.

सवितर्यपि शीतरुचौ चन्द्रे तीक्ष्णेऽप्यधो वहत्यग्नौ ।

मायिकमिदमिति जानन् जीवन्मुक्तो न विस्मयी भवति ॥

(*Ātmavidyāvilāsa* 18)

[*Knowing that the world is illusory, the one liberated while alive would not become confounded even if the sun were to become cool-rayed and the moon hot and fire were to point downwards.*]

A knower of the Truth will not be taken aback even if sunrays, which are normally warm, were to become icy, moonlight were to become sizzling hot during the night and a burning log's flames, which normally point only upwards, were to become downward-turned. He knows that everything is illusory. What is there to be stunned about the universe, which is but illusory?

Suffice it to note here that God is the world's '*abhinna-nimittopādāna*, the material as well as efficient cause'.

God Needs No Aids for Creation

A potter requires not just clay but also factors such as a wheel and a rod to turn the wheel to complete his task. In view of cases in point like this, the opponent objects that as various things are utilized to fashion a product and as no aids were available to God before creation, He could not have produced the world. Touching upon this expostulation, Sage Vyāsa advances the case of milk turning into curd as a counterexample¹. Bhagavatpāda points out that it is possible for transformations to take place, as in the case of milk turning into curd, without extrinsic means, because of some intrinsic property of the entity that undergoes the modification. The opponent interjects by saying that milk requires heat to turn into curd. Bhagavatpāda counters this by pointing out that milk has the intrinsic capacity to become modified into curd and that is why it does so.

त्वार्यते त्वौष्ण्यादिना दधिभावाय । (Bhāṣya on sūtra 2.1.24)

¹ उपसंहारदर्शान्नेति चेन्न क्षीरवद्धि - (If it be objected that *Brahman*, being without aids before creation, cannot be the cause of the world) since one is seen to gather materials to produce anything, (we say:) No, this is possible, as in the case of milk (turning into curd). (*Brahmasūtra* 2.1.24)

[*Heat and the like speed up its becoming curd.*]¹

All that an extrinsic factor such as heat does is to hasten or facilitate the change. Thus, there is no hard and fast rule that all transformations require some external factor or the other. As for God, He is all-powerful and requires nothing even to consummate or expedite the fruition of His potential to manifest anything.

The opponent then argues that while it may be possible for something insentient like milk to give rise to an effect such as curd even without needing external means, a conscious entity such as a potter cannot make a product without various materials; likewise, *Brahman*, which is conscious, could not have created the world because of the absence of aids. Sage Vyāsa's rebuttal is:

देवादिवदपि लोके ॥

(*Brahmasūtra* 2.1.25)

1 यदि च स्वयं दधिभावशीलता न स्यात्, नैवौष्ण्यादिनाऽपि बलाद्दधिभावमापद्येत । न हि वायुराकाशो वौष्ण्यादिना बलाद्दधिभावमापद्यते । साधनसामग्र्या च तस्य पूर्णता संपाद्यते । परिपूर्णशक्तिकं तु ब्रह्म । न तस्यान्येन केनचित्पूर्णता संपादयितव्या ।

- If milk did not have the intrinsic capacity to turn into curd, it could not have been forcibly transformed into curd even by heat or any other factor. Air or space cannot, for example, be forced by factors such as heat to become curd. The associated factors only consummate milk's own capacity to become curd. *Brahman*, however, is all powerful. Its power is not in need of being perfected by anything else. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.24)

[(Brahman can create without aids) like the gods and others, as seen in the world.]

Bhagavatpāda explains that *mantras* and corroborative passages of the *Vedas*, the *Itihāsas* (*Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*), and the *Purāṇas* contain accounts of powerful sentient beings such as the *Devas*, manes and seers creating various things by just willing them to be. Likewise, God, who is conscious, creates the world without any extrinsic means. Ordinary mortals require aids to produce something; God does not.

To him who seeks to have an idea of how God creates the universe without raw materials or aids, an example may be cited from the *Mahābhārata*. Here, I must stress that we must never doubt the validity of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*, such as the *Bhāgavata*. They contain not tales but details of true events. The *Mahābhārata*¹ records that when the wicked Duśśāsana started disrobing Draupadī, she called out to Lord Kṛṣṇa for succour. Moved, He promptly wrought a miracle; He blessed Draupadī with an unending series of saris and

¹ *Mahābhārata* 2.68.40 – 2.68.48 (Gita Press Edition)

saved her honour. There is no room here for questions such as: 'How did He produce the numerous garments that He vouchsafed Draupadī? In which textile mill were they manufactured? How many labourers were there in the Lord's factory?' The reason is that the Lord has the power to perform miracles like this without requiring anything. God is, likewise, quite capable of manifesting this diverse universe in a trice, just on His own¹. Merely because our ability to accomplish anything is limited, we ought not to doubt His illimitable power. Bhagavatpāda has concluded:

तस्माद्यथैकस्य सामर्थ्यं दृष्टं तथा सर्वेषामेव भवितुमर्हतीति नास्त्येकान्तः ।

(*Bhāṣya on Brahmasūtra 2.1.25*)

[*There is, thus, no inviolable rule that the power that is seen in someone must be all that is there in another too.*]

In contrast to ours, Bhagavān's power is unimaginable and boundless indeed. Thus, He can and does create the universe by Himself, without any aids.

¹ श्रूयते हि महाभारते श्रीकृष्णस्य संकल्पमात्रेण द्रौपद्याः पटपरम्परोत्पत्तिः । अतः सिद्धमसहायस्यापि ब्रह्मणः कारणत्वम् – It is heard of in the *Mahābhārata* that a series of clothes arose for Draupadī by the mere wish of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. It is thus shown that Brahman makes the world even without any aid. (*Ratnaprabhā on the bhāṣya on Brahmasūtra 2.1.25*)

God Creates Without Any Expectation

The opponent then takes exception in a different way to the *Vedantin's* view that God created the universe. Sage Vyāsa has encapsulated this objection in the following aphorism:

न प्रयोजनवत्त्वात् ॥ (Brahmasūtra 2.1.32)

[(Brahman did not create this universe) since a motive is required (and it is absent).]

It is a matter of common experience that people engage in an activity only if some end of theirs is served thereby.

प्रयोजनमनुद्दिश्य न मन्दोऽपि प्रवर्तते ॥

(Sarvavedānta-siddhānta-sārasaṅgraha 11)

[Even a fool does not act without a motive.]

Even a nincompoop or a lunatic would not endeavour to do something if he sensed it to be pointless. That God, with all His brilliance, would have aimlessly set about creating the world defies credibility. So, He cannot be its maker. Sage Vyāsa responds that:

लोकवत्तु लीलाकैवल्यम् ॥ (Brahmasūtra 2.1.33)

[But (Brahman's creative activity) is just a pastime, like that seen in the world.]

Bhagavatpāda clarifies: 'Notwithstanding the absence of any benefit to Him, God proceeds to create the world.'

Your protest rests on your untenable projection of our goal-driven behavioural pattern on to God. Moreover, great persons have done deeds, unmotivated by self-interest. God, who has no unfulfilled wishes, can and does create, unregimented by expectations.¹

The disputant interjects: 'One may, perhaps, take up an undemanding undertaking, unprompted by a purpose. By no stretch of imagination is the creation of the world a mean task. Implausibility smites any claim that even

1 यथा लोके कस्यचिदासौषणस्य राज्ञो वा राजामात्यस्य वा व्यतिरिक्तं किञ्चित्प्रयोजनमनभिसंधाय केवलं लीलारूपाः प्रवृत्तयः क्रीडाविहारेषु भवन्ति यथा चोच्छ्वासप्रश्वासादयोऽनभिसंधाय बाह्यं किञ्चित्प्रयोजनं स्वभावादेव भवन्ति एवमीश्वरस्याप्यनपेक्ष्य किञ्चित्प्रयोजनान्तरं स्वभावादेव केवलं लीलारूपा प्रवृत्तिर्भविष्यति । न हीश्वरस्य प्रयोजनान्तरं निरूप्यमाणं न्यायतः श्रुतितो वा संभवति ।...यदि नाम लोके लीलास्वपि किञ्चित्सूक्ष्मं प्रयोजनमुत्प्रेक्ष्येत तथाऽपि नैवात्र किञ्चित्प्रयोजनमुत्प्रेक्षितुं शक्यते, आसकामश्रुतेः ।

- Just as it is seen in the world that someone who has everything wished for, such as a monarch or a minister, indulges as a mere pastime, without any separate motive, in sportive strolling and just as one inhales and exhales naturally, without any distinct motive, likewise, God can have activities as a mere sport, coming about just because of His nature (*Māyā*), without reference to any utility for Him. It is impossible to logically or scripturally ascribe some extraneous aim to Him...Though even with regard to the pastimes seen in the world, some subtle motive may be conceived, this cannot be done with respect to God's activity in view of the scriptural declarations that He has no unfulfilled desire. (*Bhāṣya on Brahmasūtra 2.1.33*)

without any benefit to impel Him, God launched into this Herculean venture.’ Bhagavatpāda, however, sets the record straight by pointing out:

यद्यप्यस्माकमियं जगद्विम्बविरचना गुरुतरसंरम्भेवाभाति, तथापि परमेश्वरस्य लीलैव केवलेयम्, अपरिमितशक्तित्वात् ।

(*Bhāṣya on Brahmasūtra 2.1.33*)

[*Although the creation of this universe appears to us to be a stupendous task, yet, to God, it is but a mere play, for His power is boundless.*]

Though we envisage that the creation of the cosmos is a gargantuan endeavor, to God, it is child’s play, for His power is inestimable. He looks for nothing from it, for He, of infallible will, has no unconsummated wish. While He stands to gain nothing from it, He creates, without capriciousness or bias, such that all beings are able to duly experience the fruits of their actions.¹

1 वैषम्यनैर्घृण्ये न सापेक्षत्वात्तथा हि दर्शयति - No partiality and cruelty can be attributed to God on account of His taking other factors into account, as this is what the scriptures point out. (*Brahmasūtra 2.1.34*)

सापेक्षो हीश्वरो विषमां सृष्टिं निर्मिमीते । किमपक्षत इति चेत् ? धर्माधर्मावपेक्षत इति वदामः ।

- God brings about this unequal creation by taking other factors into consideration. If asked what He factors in, we say that it is the merit and demerit of beings. (*Bhāṣya on Brahmasūtra 2.1.34*)

Eschew Logic that is Discordant with the Scripture

The disputant's objection to the scriptural position that God is the cause of the universe on the grounds that He lacked raw materials, aids and motive is unsustainable, as He needs none of these. By arguing about matters that transcend the scope of intellection, one only ends up betraying one's ignorance; this is what the opponent of *Vedānta* does.

Bhagavatpāda has announced to the disputants: 'I am presenting matters in the light of the scripture and not mere logic. None, including you, can afford to disregard the authority of the *śruti*.' The stature of *śruti* and *smṛti* is as follows:

श्रुतिस्तु वेदो विज्ञेयो धर्मशास्त्रं तु वै स्मृतिः ।

ते सर्वार्थेष्वमीमांस्ये ताभ्यां धर्मो हि निर्बभौ ॥ (Manusmṛti 2.10)

[*The Veda, it should be known, is śruti and the traditional texts (of sages) about dharma, smṛti. They are beyond disputation in all matters¹, since it is through these that dharma comes to light.*]

¹ The *Vedas* are wholly authoritative; the *smṛtis* are authoritative on all matters wherein they do not contradict the *Vedas*.

The promulgators of the texts on *dharma* have, ages ago itself, counselled us that we should never indulge in fallacious argumentation about the teachings of the *śruti* and *smṛti*. After all, it is through them that *dharma* and the Supreme Reality can be comprehended by us. Disregarding the scriptures and relying merely on our own ratiocination in such abstruse matters would be a blunder.

Bhagavatpāda has considerably advised us thus:

वाक्यार्थश्च विचार्यतां श्रुतिशिरः पक्षः समाश्रीयताम् ।
दुस्तर्कात्सुविरम्यतां श्रुतिमतस्तर्कोऽनुसन्धीयताम् ॥

(*Upadeśapañcaka* 3)

[*Enquire into the import of the scriptural avouchment (about the non-dual Truth). Adopt as final the view of the Upaniṣads. Wholly desist from reasoning that is discordant with the scripture. Reflect through reasoning that is in line with the import of the scripture.*]

Directing our attention to *Vedic* passages, we must use our intellect to engender conviction about the teaching of the *śruti* and not for vainly gainsaying it.

As we have been seeing, there is no room for objections about creation as revealed to us by the scripture. God is Himself the material cause of the universe and is the one who, on His own, creates, sustains and dissolves it. He has made the world without expecting anything in return and, thereby, enabled all beings to experience the fruits of their past actions. The scripture's main aim is to enable us to become liberated from transmigratory existence by realizing the non-dual Truth made known by it.

॥ हर नमः पार्वतीपतये । हर हर महादेव ॥

Unity to Division; Unreal to Real

Invocation

वक्तारमासाद्य यमेव नित्या सरस्वती स्वार्थसमन्वितासीत् ।
निरस्तदुस्तर्ककलङ्कपङ्का नमामि तं शङ्करमर्चिताङ्घ्रिम् ॥

(*Samkṣhepa-śārīraka* 1.7)

[I pay obeisance to Śankara whose feet are worshipped by the seekers of the Truth and who is that exponent of the scripture on attaining whom the Veda, the eternal word, became free from the mire of fallacious logic and connected with its true meaning.]

I have been discoursing upon Sage Vyāsa's pithy and Bhagavatpāda's comprehensive rebuttals of objections that have been raised against *Advaita*, the scripture's conclusive view. I shall now take up another such point of protest.

Objection: *Advaita* Undoes the 'Enjoyer-enjoyed' Division

Everyone experiences through the senses of hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell, the corresponding sensory objects. The distinction between '*bhoktr*', the one who

experiences’ and ‘*bhogya*, that which is experienced’ is patent in the world. The soul (*jīva*), which is conscious, is the *bhokṭṛ* and the material world of sensory objects is the *bhogya*.

The disputant contends as follows: ‘According to the *Vedāntin*, *Brahman* is the material cause of the world; further, the soul is not other than the Supreme. If, thus, the *bhogya*, by virtue of an effect being non-different from its material cause, and the *bhokṭṛ* were both to be but *Brahman*, the perceptually well-established division between the *bhogya* and the *bhokṭṛ* would be absent and either of them could well become the other. Chaos would be the consequence. For instance, it is a matter of everyone’s experience that it is we who taste food and not the other way around but were the *Vedāntin*’s position that all is *Brahman* to be correct, we could well be eaten anytime by what we sit to eat! That is absurd.’

***Vedāntin*: Non-difference and Division Accountable**

Disputants raise objections like this because they fail to appreciate that *Advaita-vedāntins* do admit empirical

distinction between the soul, the material world and God and affirm non-duality only from the standpoint of the Absolute.

Sage Vyāsa has abridged the aforesaid objection and empirically counterbalanced it in brief thus:

भोक्त्रापत्तेरविभागश्चेत्स्याल्लोकवत् ॥ (Brahmasūtra 2.1.13)

[If it be said that (Brahman cannot be the material cause of the world) since, with objects becoming the enjoyer, the distinction between the enjoyer and the enjoyed will cease, we reply that the distinction can well exist as is observed in the world.]

Bhagavatpāda has elucidated that while the soul, which experiences, and the world, which is experienced, are not other than *Brahman*, nevertheless they can and do maintain their distinctness with respect to each other. Their non-difference from *Brahman* does not imply the catastrophic consequence imputed by the disputant that:

भोक्ता भोग्यभावमापद्येत भोग्यं वा भोक्तृभावमापद्येत... ।

(Bhāṣya on Brahmasūtra 2.1.13)

[The enjoyer would become the enjoyed or the enjoyed would become the enjoyer.]

In view of Sage Vyāsa having said ‘as is seen in the world’, Bhagavatpāda has proffered a worldly example.

न च समुद्रादुदकात्मनोऽनन्यत्वेऽपि तद्विकाराणां फेनतरङ्गादीनामितरेतरभावा-
पत्तिर्भवति ।

(*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.13)

[*Though foam, waves and the like are not different from the watery ocean, whose modifications they all are, yet, they remain distinct from each other.*]

We see waves and foam appearing and disappearing in the ocean. Are they disparate from the ocean? No; they are constituted by the watery ocean and are essentially water. Nevertheless, waves and foam do not lose their individuality in relation to each other; their distinction is discernible. Likewise, though the soul and the world are actually not different from *Brahman*, they remain distinct as the enjoyer and the enjoyed. Therefore, the *Vedāntin's* position that *Brahman* is the material cause of the world is not contradicted by people's apprehension of the distinction between the *bhoktṛ* and the *bhogyā*.

Objection: Unreal Veda Cannot Yield Valid Knowledge

A different charge levelled by the opponent of *Advaita-vedānta* is: You claim that everything but *Brahman* is

mithyā, false. If so, the *Vedas*, which are included in the cosmos, must also be untrue. Are you not led to this conclusion even because of *Vedic* passages such as the following, which you find favourable to non-dualism?

यत्र वेदा अवेदा भवन्ति (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.3.22)

[In that state, the *Vedas* cease to be the *Vedas*.]

According to you, the unity of the soul and *Brahman* is a fact, liberation is the fruit of realizing this and this right knowledge arises from *Vedic* declarations such as:

तत्त्वमसि (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.8.7)

[You are That (the Supreme).]

If the *Veda* is false, how can true enlightenment arise from it? An unreal cause cannot produce a real effect.

Suppose that a rope is misperceived as a snake.

न हि रज्जुसर्पेण दष्टो म्रियते । (Bhāṣya on Brahmasūtra 2.1.14)

[None dies because of being bitten by a snake that is actually a rope so mistaken.]

There is no question of such a snake killing anyone by injecting venom; a false snake cannot cause death, a real effect. Similarly, if, as you think, the *Veda* is false, it cannot give rise to true knowledge of the identity of the soul and *Brahman*.

An Analogy: Unreal Poison can Result in Real Death

Bhagavatpāda confutes the disputant's contention by proffering a counterexample to show that it is possible for even an unreal cause to bring about a real effect.

शङ्काविषादिनिमित्तमरणादिकार्योपलब्धेः ।

(*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.14)

[*A real consequence such as death is seen to stem from a (false) cause, such as hypothetical poison.*]

A person partook of a meal at a house. Subsequently, a prankster lied to him that his host had laced his food with poison. He swallowed the lie hook, line and sinker, panicked and became obsessed with the thought that on account of his having ingested poison, his death was inevitable and imminent. So intense was his emotional distress that he soon collapsed and died. Thus, in this case, imagined poison lead to real death.

Dreams, though Unreal, May Predict True Events

Bhagavatpāda has presented another example, that of dreams, to buttress His point that a true effect may arise from an unreal cause; though false, dreams may, at times, point to the occurrence of some real events.

Two instances of prognosticative dreams reported in the *Rāmāyaṇa* come to mind. The first is from its *Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa*.¹ When King Daśaratha breathed his last, Sage Vaśiṣṭha sent emissaries to bring back Bharata from his maternal grandfather, the monarch of Kekeya's place to Ayodhya. As for Bharata, he had a disturbing dream. Recalling it, he said, 'I saw my father gulping down oil, plunging himself into it and then proceeding southwards in a chariot drawn by donkeys. This dream indicates a mortal danger to my father, to Rāma or to me.'² Later, on reaching Ayodhyā, he learnt that Daśaratha had died. What Bharata beheld in his dream was untrue; his father did not actually quaff oil, submerge in it or head south. Yet, it rightly signalled a real tragedy.

The second of the instances from the *Rāmāyaṇa* is that portrayed in the *Sundara-kāṇḍa*. Sītā, held captive by

¹ *Rāmāyaṇa* 2.69.8 – 2.69.18

² अहं रामोऽथवा राजा लक्ष्मणो वा मरिष्यति ॥ नरो यानेन यः स्वप्ने खरयुक्तेन याति हि ।
अचिरात्तस्य धूमाग्रं चितायां संप्रदृश्यते ॥ - The king (Daśaratha), Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa
or I will die. Smoke is soon seen from the funeral pyre of the person who goes in
a dream in a chariot drawn by asses. (*Rāmāyaṇa* 2.69.17-18)

Rāvaṇa, given an ultimatum by him and harassed by the ogresses guarding her was feeling so desolate as to think of giving up her life. Trijaṭā (Vibhīṣaṇa's daughter) pressed her companions to desist from menacing Sītā and narrated to them a poignant dream that she had had. She said, 'I saw Rāma comely attired, seated atop a big elephant with four tusks. I even beheld him heading north. I perceived Rāvaṇa, drenched in oil, mounted on an ass and moving south. So, Rāma shall be victorious and Rāvaṇa shall perish.'¹ Sītā rejoiced on hearing this.

Trijaṭā's dream is a significant event in the *Sundara-kāṇḍa*. Rāma never really mounted an elephant with four tusks and Rāvaṇa never sat on a donkey and proceeded to the south. Nonetheless, the false dream did correctly point to Rāma's later triumph and Rāvaṇa's defeat and death.

¹ *Rāmāyaṇa* 5.27.6 – 5.27.49.

Explicating the verse about Rāma on an elephant with four tusks, Govindarāja has written in his gloss on the *Rāmāyaṇa*:

तथा चोक्तं स्वप्नाध्याये 'आरोहणं गोवृषकुञ्जराणां...स्वप्नेषु...धन्यम्' इति – It is said in the text *Swapnādhyāya*, 'Mounting cows, bulls and elephants in dreams is auspicious.'

Thus, as highlighted by these two instances, there is recognition in the world that dreams, though unreal, may hint at what shall come to pass¹; likewise, though unreal from the ultimate standpoint, *Upaniṣadic* passages can give rise to valid knowledge about the identity of the soul and *Brahman*.

One ought not to be suspicious of even what is observed in the world of the unreal pointing to the real. Moreover, the scripture itself speaks of prognosticative dreams. Bhagavatpāda has drawn attention to the words of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* that:

यदा कर्मसु काम्येषु स्त्रियं स्वप्नेषु पश्यति समृद्धिं तत्र जानीयात्तस्मिन्स्वप्न-
निदर्शने । (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.2.8)

[*When, over the course of rites done for desired fruit, the sacrificer beholds a woman in dreams, he should know in view of that, that there will success.*]

¹ प्रसिद्धं चेदं लोकेऽन्वयव्यतिरेककुशलानामीदृशेन स्वपदर्शनेन साध्वागमः सूच्यत ईदृशेन असाध्वागम इति – It is well-known in the world to those versed in discerning from cases of concordance and discordance that such and such dream suggests that good will come about and that such and such dream indicates that something bad will happen. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.14)

If a person who has embarked on a good work happens to have a dream in which he beholds a *sumāṅgalī* (a chaste lady with a living spouse) adorned with ornaments and other insignia that are considered auspicious, he could infer from the dream that he will attain his aim without impediments. On the other hand:

पुरुषं कृष्णं कृष्णदन्तं पश्यति, स एनं हन्ति ।

(*Aitareya Āraṇyaka* 3.2.4)

[*A black man with black teeth seen in a dream causes the death of the dreamer.*]

One's seeing in a dream a person with black skin tone and black teeth indicates that a fatal danger awaits one.

Details about what is prognosticated by which type of a dream are found in works such as *Svapnādhyāya* (a treatise dealing with the interpretation of dreams).

Just as imagined poison may result in an actual death and just as a dream, though false, can indicate something real, so too can the ultimately unreal *Vedāntic* teachings give rise to a real knowledge of the unity of the soul and *Brahman*.

Impeccability of *Advaita-vedānta*

Objections against *Advaita* philosophy such as the one just taken up are rooted in misconceptions about it. As *Advaita* is the conclusive view of the *śruti* as well as the *Brahmasūtras*, there is no ground for anyone to deny its soundness. Our position, as stipulated at the outset, is that we admit diversity at the empirical level and wholly deny it only from the standpoint of the Absolute. If one bears this in mind, one will not be buffeted by misgivings. Various disputants balk at digesting it and then carp at *Advaita-vedānta*. Bhagavatpāda shouldered the onus of totally confuting every one of the objections directed at *Advaita-vedānta* to preclude any claim that it can be successfully challenged. One with a shallow knowledge of *Advaita-vedānta* may have some reservations about its tenability. However, if one were to properly enquire into it, one would surely conclude that it is impeccable. So, we ought to go into it and properly assimilate it.

Faith, Certitude, and Proper Reasoning

Lack of faith and being ever doubtful augur ill for one. When a young boy, Lord Kṛṣṇa lifted the *Govardhana*

mountain¹ and held it up with his little finger. Sceptics dismiss this as impossible. However, the incident did take place; after all, the power of the Lord beggars belief. Lord Rāma slew Subāhu with a single arrow and, again with a single arrow, hurled Mārīca far and dumped him into the ocean², notwithstanding the fact that Subāhu and Mārīca were tremendously mighty demons and, at that time, Rāma was but a lad less than sixteen years of age.

ऊनषोडषवर्षो मे रामो राजीवलोचनः । (Rāmāyaṇa 1.12.2)

[(Daśaratha.) *My lotus-eyed Rama is yet to be sixteen.*]

What could be done if someone obdurately disbelieves the factuality of these awe-inspiring feats? You cannot effectively convince a person who is ever incredulous.

अज्ञश्चाश्रद्धानश्च संशयात्मा विनश्यति । (Bhagavadgītā 4.40)

[*One who is ignorant and faithless and has a doubting mind perishes.*]

According to the Lord, great is the loss of a person who lacks faith in anything and keeps doubting everything.

¹ *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* 10.25.19.

² *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.29.22-23; 1.29.14-15.

मानं प्रत्यक्षमेकम् (Svārājya-siddhi 1.30)

[Direct perception alone is the means to right knowledge.]

A materialist may claim that he will accept as true only what he himself perceives. However, his claim is hollow.

(Vedāntin:) Do you admit your grandfather's existence?

(Materialist:) Why do you even ask such a question?

(Vedāntin:) You say that you are willing to accept as true only what you have perceived; as for your grandfather, you have never seen him. So, as per your position, you never had any grandfather.

(Materialist:) Of course, my grandfather existed; else my father could not have been born.

(Vedāntin:) In that case, you are inferring his existence and, thus, relying on a means of knowledge other than perception. Moreover, you depend on your father's words to know who your grandfather was. Therefore, willy-nilly, you admit other means of valid knowledge. It would be unintelligent to deny them; in fact, you cannot conduct your life as you do without them.

The foremost of the means of valid knowledge is the *śruti* and it has *Advaita* as its settled conclusion. If one

were to repudiate the authority of the *śruti*, that would be the acme of inanity. We should, contrariwise, employ reasoning to engender conviction in *Advaita*, which has been presented by the *śruti*. Bhagavatpāda has said:

वाक्यार्थश्च विचार्यतां श्रुतिशिरः पक्षः समाश्रीयताम् ।
दुस्तर्कात्सुविरम्यतां श्रुतिमतस्तर्कोऽनुसन्धीयताम् ॥

(*Upadeśapañcaka* 3)

[*Enquire into the import of the scriptural avouchment (about the non-dual Truth). Adopt as final the view of the Upaniṣads. Wholly desist from reasoning that is discordant with the scripture. Reflect through reasoning that is in line with the import of the scripture.*]

As noted, Bhagavatpāda's expatiation of *Advaita-vedānta* lays to rest all objections. Further, all the passages of the *Veda* are given their rightful place, with none set aside or downplayed on the ground that it is problematic.

Bhagavatpāda has laid down that:

न हि वेदवाक्यानां कस्यचिदर्थवत्त्वं कस्यचिदनर्थवत्त्वमिति युक्तं प्रतिपत्तुम्,
प्रमाणत्वाविशेषात् । (Bhāṣya on *Brahmasūtra* 3.2.15)

[*It is improper to interpret some Vedic sentences as meaningful and some as meaningless, for all are valid.*]

It is not as though some passages of the *Veda* are valid while some others are not. Bhagavatpāda has, in fact, even kindly reconciled for us, in His *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, those scriptural passages that, at the first blush, seem to be mutually contradictory.

May you all comprehend *Advaita-vedānta*, conduct your lives as advocated by the scripture and attain beatitude.

॥ हर नमः पार्वतीपतये । हर हर महादेव ॥

Conscious and Pure Cause; Inert and Impure Effect

Invocation

वक्तारमासाद्य यमेव नित्या सरस्वती स्वार्थसमन्वितासीत् ।
निरस्तदुस्तर्ककलङ्कपङ्का नमामि तं शङ्करमर्चिताङ्घ्रिम् ॥

(*Samkṣepa-śārīraka* 1.7)

[I pay obeisance to Śankara whose feet are worshipped by the seekers of the Truth and who is that exponent of the scripture on attaining whom the Veda, the eternal word, became free from the mire of fallacious logic and connected with its true meaning.]

I have been discoursing on how Bhagavatpāda has, in His commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*, established that *Advaita* is the settled conclusion of the *Upaniṣads* and is logically irreproachable. I have, apropos, presented several objections posited by disputants against *Advaitavedānta* and their rebuttal by Bhagavatpāda. I shall now dwell on few a more such objections and how they have been countered.

In an earlier talk, I had enunciated the scriptural position that God is the maker of the world and its material cause

too. Prior to creation, there was no entity other than the Supreme and, so, nothing else that could have served as the material cause – the *upādāna-kāraṇa* or *prakṛti*, in scriptural parlance – of the universe. Taking exception to the *Vedic* teaching that God is the cosmos' material basis, the antagonist sets forth his objection as follows.

Objection: Effect Cannot Be Dissimilar to Its Cause

We observe in the world that the qualities of objects are essentially those of the raw materials from which they arise. For example, sugarcane is intrinsically sweet and, accordingly, sugar, whose product it is, is also sweet, not otherwise. *Brahman* is a conscious entity; the world is insentient. Were *Brahman* to be the material cause of the world, the latter must, like *Brahman*, be sentient only. However, unlike its supposed cause, it is inert. Hence, *Brahman* cannot be its material cause. The rule that an effect's qualities are akin to those of its cause would, otherwise, be contravened.

Not only is the world inert, it is '*aśuddha*, impure' too. In what sense is it impure? In the cosmos, every object can effect joy in some, misery in some and disillusionment

in others. Consider, for instance, a mango fruit. When eaten, it delights an individual who loves mangoes. On the other hand, when consumed by a person who has been advised by a physician to avoid partaking of it, it triggers some ailment in him and causes unhappiness. To a person who craves for but is unable to obtain it, the same fruit causes disillusionment. Similarly, all other objects have the potential to effect happiness, misery or disappointment in different beings.¹ Because all worldly objects are of this kind, the world is deemed, as stated, to be impure. As for *Brahman*, It is pure; It is utterly free from any defilement. If the world arose from *Brahman*, it too should have been pure, but it is not. Since, unlike *Brahman*, which is conscious and pure, the world is inert and impure, *Brahman* cannot be its material cause.

Response: Not Essential that Effects Resemble Causes

Bhagavatpāda rebuts this objection by pointing out that it is not a hard and fast rule that the characteristics of

1. अशुद्धं हीदं जगत्, सुखदुःखमोहात्मकतया प्रीतिपरितापविषादादिहेतुत्वात्स्वर्गनरकाद्युच्चावच-
प्रपञ्चत्वाच्च - This world is impure because, having the aspects of happiness, sorrow,
and delusion, it causes enjoyment, grief, disillusionment etc., and is diversified into
superior and inferior forms such as heaven and hell. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.4)

any effect should be the same as that of its cause. In keeping with Sage Vyāsa's words¹, He gives an example. दृश्यते तु ...उत्पत्तिः अचेतनत्वेन च प्रसिद्धेभ्यो गोमयादिभ्यो वृश्चिकादीनाम् ।

(*Bhāṣya on Brahmasūtra 2.1.6*)

[*It is seen that scorpions and other such creatures arise from cow-dung and the like that are known to be inert.*²]

A scorpion, which is sentient, originates from cow-dung, which is insentient. As a conscious entity may emanate from something inert, the opponent's rule that an effect must inherit all the characteristics of its cause turns out to be violable.

Bhagavatpāda has given a counterexample of another kind too. Humans, who are a conscious beings, grow hair, which is insentient³. The examples relating to the genesis of scorpions and hair disfavour the opponent's avowal that an effect's characteristics cannot be different

¹ दृश्यते तु – But it is seen in the world (that effects can be dissimilar to their causes). (*Brahmasūtra 2.1.6*)

² This view was prevalent in the past and accepted even by the opponent. The origin of scorpions from cow-dung finds mention even in works like the *Suśrutasaṁhitā*, a celebrated, ancient text of *Āyurveda*.

³ दृश्यते हि लोके चेतनत्वेन च प्रसिद्धेभ्यः पुरुषादिभ्यो विलक्षणानां केशनखादीनामुत्पत्तिः
- It is seen in the world that men and other beings, who are all known to be sentient, produce hair, nails, etc., that are dissimilar (insentient). (*Bhāṣya on Brahmasūtra 2.1.6*)

from those of its cause.¹ When it is seen in the world that an effect can be dissimilar to its cause, why cannot the universe, Bhagavatpāda asks the opponent, arise from *Brahman* just because it is inert and impure, while *Brahman* is not? Moreover, the indisputably authoritative *śruti* itself declares that *Brahman* is the material cause of the universe.² Thus, we *Advaitins* have the authority of the *śruti* as well as the support of the illustrations in

¹ A pertinent question posed by the opponent and the *Vedāntin's* response are: नन्वचेतनान्येव पुरुषादिशरीराण्यचेतनानां केशनखादीनां कारणानि, अचेतनान्येव च वृश्चिकादि-शरीराण्यचेतनानां गोमयादीनां कार्याणीति । उच्यते – एवमपि किञ्चिदचेतनं चेतनस्यायतन-भावमुपगच्छति किञ्चेत्यस्त्येव वैलक्षण्यम् ।

- (Objection:) The sources of the insentient things like hair and nails are only the insentient bodies of humans and other beings (and not their conscious soul). Further, insentient cow-dung and the like give rise to only the insentient bodies of scorpions and such other creatures (and not their conscious soul). (Thus, in both the examples, the cause as well as the effect are inert and, so, not dissimilar).

(*Vedāntin's* reply:) Even then, there is certainly the difference in these cases that some insentient things (like cow-dung) form the abode of a conscious entity (such as a scorpion) while others do not. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.6). Thus, according to Bhagavatpāda, the opponent's rule that an effect must have only characteristics that are in line with those of its cause is violable because cow-dung, the cause, which lacks a conscious soul, gives rise to the body of a scorpion, which is dissimilar to its cause in that it is the abode of a conscious soul, while the human body, which houses a conscious soul, produces an effect, hair, which is dissimilar to its cause in that it is not the abode of a conscious soul.

² आगमविरोधस्तु प्रसिद्ध एव, चेतनं ब्रह्म जगतः कारणं प्रकृतिश्चेत्यागमतात्पर्यस्य प्रसाधितत्वात्
- The discordance (of the opponent's position) with the scripture is patent, for it has been shown that the scripture's thrust is that *Brahman* is the material and the efficient cause of the universe. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.6)

the world to show that an effect can have features that are unlike those of its cause¹.

Though Present, Consciousness Need not Manifest

We find in the *bhāṣya* that a partial response has also been given to the objection raised by the opponent. It is contended that the entire universe is actually sentient. This position gives rise to the objection that if such is the case, every object of the world, be it a stone, a pillar, or a mountain should show signs of life. The answer is that there is no such requirement. While consciousness is there everywhere, it is manifest in certain entities and not manifest in others. The objects where consciousness,

1 विलक्षणत्वेन च कारणेन ब्रह्मप्रकृतिकत्वं जगतो दूषयता किमशेषस्य ब्रह्मस्वभावस्याननुवर्तनं विलक्षणत्वमभिप्रेयते, उत यस्य कस्यचित्...इति वक्तव्यम् । प्रथमे विकल्पे समस्तप्रकृतिविकारभावोच्छेदप्रसङ्गः । न ह्यसत्यतिशये प्रकृतिविकार इति भवति । द्वितीये चासिद्धत्वम् । दृश्यते हि सत्तालक्षणो ब्रह्मस्वभाव आकाशादिष्वनुवर्तमान इत्युक्तम् ।

- He who criticizes the view that the world has *Brahman* for its material cause on the ground of 'dissimilarity' should specify whether, by 'dissimilarity', he has in mind that all the characteristics of *Brahman* are not found in the world or that not one of them is so present...In the first case (wherein he requires that all the features of the cause should be present in the effect), all cause-effect relationships would be overturned because, in the absence of anything special in the effect, how could it be a product of the cause (rather than be just the cause). In the second case, the objection (that the world is dissimilar to *Brahman* in that no characteristic of *Brahman* is present in it) is baseless since, as has already been stated earlier, *Brahman's* nature of 'existence' is present in space, etc. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.6)

though present, is not manifest are deemed inert. There is no rule that just because consciousness is present in all objects, it should be also be patent in all of them.

Further, when a person falls deeply asleep or faints, no purposeful movement or response is seen in him. So, though he is a conscious being, this is not evident at that time to others. On the other hand, when he is awake and talks to someone in the waking state, his sentience is patent. Thus, there are times when consciousness is not manifest even in entities that are regarded as sentient.

The objection that the universe could not have arisen from *Brahman* since it is inert and, thus, dissimilar to *Brahman* would not hold water if it were admitted that the universe is actually conscious in its entirety and that what is seen as an insentient object is just one in which consciousness, though present, is not manifest.¹

¹ The opponent takes cognizance of this explanation and responds to it as follows: तेनापि कथञ्चित्तनाचेतनत्वलक्षणं विलक्षणत्वं परिह्रियेत, शुच्यशुद्धित्वलक्षणं तु विलक्षणत्वं नैव परिह्रियते - By this explanation, (the objection that *Brahman* cannot be the material cause of the world because of) the conscious-inert dissimilarity (between *Brahman* and the world) may be somehow be dealt with. Nevertheless, the pure-impure dissimilarity (between *Brahman* and the world) cannot be accounted for by it. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.4)

Objection: The World Degrades *Brahman* at Merger

Another line of argument adopted by the disputant is as follows. A passage of the *śruti* that testifies, according to the *Vedāntin*, to the cosmos having its roots in *Brahman* is:

यतो वा इमानि भूतानि जायन्ते । येन जातानि जीवन्ति । यत्प्रयन्त्यभि-
संविशन्ति । तद्विजिज्ञासस्व । तद्ब्रह्मेति । (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.1.1)

[*Seek to realize that from which all these beings are born, that by which they live and proceeding to which, they merge. That is Brahman.*]

It speaks of entities ‘proceeding towards (*prayanti*)’ and ‘entering into (*abhisamviśanti*)’ *Brahman*. We become sullied when filthy water drenches us. When the world unites with *Brahman*, would not the latter become inert and impure like the universe? Such is a preposterous corollary of the *Vedāntin’s* contention that *Brahman* is the world’s material basis. Sage Vyāsa has condensed this objection thus:

अपीतौ तद्वत्प्रसङ्गादसमञ्जसम् ॥ (*Brahmasūtra* 2.1.8)

[*(The view that Brahman is the material cause of the world is) absurd because the cause may become like the effect at the time of the effect’s dissolution into it.*]

No Defilement of the Supreme by the World

Bhagavatpāda clarifies to the opponent that unlike what is presumed by him, an effect does not merge with its cause while its special features are intact; it does so after becoming stripped of its various characteristics by virtue of which it was identifiable as a specific effect. For example, an earthen pot does not revert to earth with its typical rotund form intact; it does so only after losing its shape, upon, say, being smashed to smithereens and dispersed in the clayey soil.¹ As it is bereft of its distinctive features prior to moving into its cause, there is no question of the pot imparting rotundity to clay, its source. An effect could corrupt its cause only if it were to go into the latter while preserving its inferior features but were it maintain them, its association with its source would not amount to its '*laya*, dissolution' at all. The term '*abhisamviśanti*, enter' of the scriptural passage does not refer to association with distinguishing features intact. As the world merges with the Supreme only after it is free of its particularities, there is no question of its degrading the Supreme.

¹ न तु दृश्यन्तभावात् – There is nothing incongruous (that is, the world does not pollute the Supreme at the time of merger), for there are examples (of effects not defiling their causes). (*Brahmasūtra* 2.1.9)

Two views, one that an effect is non-existent before it arises and the other that it was present in a latent form earlier, are encountered in our philosophical literature. The former is termed '*ārambha-vāda* (the theory of the origin of what did not exist)'. According to it, an effect such as a pot that was totally non-existent earlier arose consequent to a potter's working on clay. The latter has two closely related variants named '*pariṇāma-vāda* (the theory of transformation) and '*vivarta-vāda*, (the theory of apparent transfiguration); while *Vedāntins* primarily subscribe to, they do adopt *pariṇāma-vāda* in their empirical explanations. The *pariṇāma-vāda* vision is that a pot pre-exists in clay in a potential form and manifests due to a potter's processing clay. The cause undergoes a real transformation that culminates in the effect's manifestation. As per *vivarta-vāda*, the cause, without actually changing, appears as the effect; a stock example is that of a rope being misperceived as a snake.

The *Upaniṣads* and, thus, *Bhagavatpāda* reject the view that an effect was once non-existent. If a pot was non-existent earlier, why should it arise only from clay and not from any other entity for it is equally absent there?

Hence, the reasonable position is that the pot was latent in clay. The world was, likewise, present in a potential form in the Supreme. It manifests at the time of creation, then persists for some time in a manifested state, with distinguishing features, and, at the time of dissolution, reverts to its former, undifferentiated condition. Since the world's dissolution spoken of in the scripture is that which takes place after it has shed its gross form, unlike what the opponent argues, its merger with the Supreme by reversion to the latent state in which it had been prior to creation has no negative impact on the Supreme.

Inconclusiveness of Logic Unfounded on the Scripture
Sage Vyāsa and Bhagavatpāda point out to the opponent that he ought not to raise objections about the world's source on the basis of just reasoning because, in such matters, logic without a scriptural prop is inconclusive.¹

¹ तर्काप्रतिष्ठानात्...- Because reasoning is inconclusive (it cannot upset *Vedānta's* upshot). (Part of *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.11)

नागमगम्येऽर्थे केवलेन तर्केण प्रत्यवस्थातव्यं यस्मान्निरागमाः पुरुषोत्प्रेक्षामात्रनिबन्धनास्तर्का अप्रतिष्ठिता भवन्ति, उत्प्रेक्षया निरङ्कुशत्वात् ।

– What can known only through the scripture should not be challenged by recourse to mere logic, since reasoning that disregards the scripture and is rooted in only human conjecture is inconclusive, as conjecture is unregulated. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.11)

It is said:

यत्नेनानुमितोऽप्यर्थः कुशलैरनुमातृभिः ।

अभियुक्ततरैरन्यैरन्यथैवोपपाद्यते ॥

(*Vakyapadīya* 1.34)

[Even what has been painstakingly demonstrated by adroit logicians is proved to be otherwise by defter dialecticians.]

Buoyed by confidence in his being an incisive logician, a person may advance a philosophical position but that would fall out of favour among scholars upon a more discerning dialectician overturning it. We observe that scientists of today have radically revised conclusions reached centuries ago by some scientists following deep thought. Thus, ratiocination, per se, lacks finality.

Logic Concordant with and Conviction in the Scripture

Whatever the *śruti* establishes about matters that are supersensible is ever valid and hence the conclusion reached through reasoning that is bedded in the scripture has an irrevocable finality. Accordingly, Bhagavatpāda has given the following beneficial counsel:

दुस्तर्कात्सुविरम्यतां श्रुतिमतस्तर्कोऽनुसन्धीयताम् ॥

(*Upadeśapañcaka* 3)

(Wholly desist from reasoning that is discordant with the scripture. Reflect through reasoning that is in line with the import of the scripture.)

Reasoning should be pressed into service to support, and never to contest, what the *śruti* teaches. The world owes its origin, sustenance and dissolution to God. As this is the revelation of the scripture, we should, through logic, put doubts to rest and firm up our imbueement of this. Sage Vyāsa and Bhagavatpāda incarnated to spell out the true purport of the scripture to the world.

As the scripture's decisive purport is unexceptionable, he, who persists, like one driven, in questioning *Vedānta* lacks the faith vital to know the Truth and stands to lose. He who yearns to realize the Truth should refrain from raising question upon question. It is, of course, not as though there are any chinks in *Vedānta's* armour or that there is any objection from any quarter that cannot be adequately met. From Bhagavatpāda's works, it is patent that He never shied away from squarely facing up to the challenges of disputants. If the opponent's case was weak or not presented optimally, He even helped the disputant by refining and adding punch to his objections.

(एकत्ववादी त्वं, वेदार्थपरत्वात्, बहवो हि नानात्ववादिनो वेदबाह्यास्त्वत्प्रतिपक्षाः ।) एतदेव मे स्वस्त्ययनं यन्मामेकयोगिनमनेकयोगिबहुप्रतिपक्षमात्थ । अतो जेष्यामि सर्वान् ; आरभे च चिन्ताम् ।

(*Bhāṣya on Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.8.5*)

[(*Disputant: Being committed to the teaching of the Veda, you are a monist. Many are the opponents who subscribe to plurality and are unwedded to the Vedas.*) (*Bhagavatpāda:*) *This itself is a benediction for me that you say that I am a (Vedic) monist who is confronted by many (non-Vedic) pluralists. Hence, I shall prevail against them all. I shall now initiate the discussion.*]

He asserts in His *bhāṣya* on the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* that He is geared up to take up the gauntlet of a host of critics.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* relates that several savants grilled Yājñavalkya about *Vedānta* with a view to putting him down but he silenced each of them with his forceful replies. He then challenged them to singly or collectively test him further or to face his questioning.¹ On hearing his words, not one of the scholars dared to even try to trip him up and all held their peace. When he directed

¹ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.9.27*

a query at them about the Truth, they were flummoxed. What conviction Sage Yājñavalkya and Bhagavatpāda must have had in *Vedānta*!

If we correctly understand *Advaita-vedānta*, the final view of the scripture, as explained by Bhagavatpāda, we would be convinced that it is irreproachable and not be troubled by doubts. We should be grateful and devoted to Him. May you all be the recipients of His blessings.

॥हर नमः पार्वतीपतये । हर हर महादेव ॥

God Only Appears as the World; He is Impartial

Invocation

वक्तारमासाद्य यमेव नित्या सरस्वती स्वार्थसमन्वितासीत् ।
निरस्तदुस्तर्ककलङ्कपङ्का नमामि तं शङ्करमर्चिताङ्घ्रिम् ॥

(*Samkṣepa-śārīraka* 1.7)

[I pay obeisance to Śaṅkara whose feet are worshipped by the seekers of the Truth and who is that exponent of the scripture on attaining whom the Veda, the eternal word, became free from the mire of fallacious logic and connected with its true meaning.]

Based on Sage Vyāsa's aphorisms and Bhagavatpāda's commentary thereon, I have been presenting *Advaita*, the final position of the scripture, some of the objections raised against it and their rebuttal.

Objection: Problems with *Brahman* Becoming the World

An objection that I had taken up in an earlier talk was, 'If God is the maker of the cosmos, what raw material does He have to fashion it?' The *Vedāntin's* reply, as seen, is that He Himself is its material cause. The disputant tries to put the *Vedāntin* on the horns of a dilemma as follows.

If *Brahman* is to be the world's material cause, It must change into the latter just as clay, the material cause of an earthen pot, becomes transformed into a pot. Then, just as after the modification, the pot takes the place of clay and just as milk wholly becomes curd, post-creation, *Brahman* would subsist only in the form of the universe. The realization of the Supreme, which the *Vedāntin* holds to be the sole means to emancipation, would, thereupon, have no scope as no transcendent *Brahman* would be left to realize; as for *Brahman* in the form of the world, It is already patent to all. If the Supreme were to change not wholly but only partially into the world, Its unchanged and transcendent part would remain to be realized and attained. The *śruti*, however, says:

निष्कलं निष्क्रियं शान्तं निरवद्यं निरञ्जनम् ।

अमृतस्य परं सेतुं दग्धेन्धनमिवानलम् ॥

(*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.19)

[It is without parts, without activity, serene, impeccable, untainted, the ultimate bridge to immortality and like fire with fuel spent.]

The word *niṣkalam* here specifies that *Brahman* is not partite. Thus, the view that It has parts vitiates the *śruti*.

The upshot is that *Brahman* could have neither wholly nor partially become the world and, so, the *Vedāntin's* position that the Supreme is Itself the world's material cause is untenable.¹

Indivisible *Brahman* Appears Partially as the World

Bhagavatpāda points out that the scripture teaches us that *Brahman* is indivisible and transcendent and yet, manifests, in part, as the universe.² There are two ways in which a cause manifests as an effect. In some cases, the cause undergoes a change and becomes the effect; this is termed '*pariṇāma*'. In others, the cause appears as the effect without actually undergoing any modification; this is called '*vivarta*'. The conversion of clay into a pot and that of milk into curd are instances of the first kind. A rope appearing as a snake to one who misapprehends it in dim light is an example of '*vivarta*'. The objection

¹ कृत्स्नप्रसक्तिर्निरवयवत्वशब्दकोपो वा – (If *Brahman* is the material cause of the world) then either *Brahman* would become wholly transformed into the world or the *Upaniṣadic* teaching about *Brahman* having no parts would be contradicted. (*Brahmasūtra* 2.1.26)

² यथैव हि ब्रह्मणो जगदुत्पत्तिः श्रूयते, एवं विकारव्यतिरेकेणापि ब्रह्मणोऽवस्थानं श्रूयते... शब्दश्रोभयमपि ब्रह्मणः प्रतिपादयत्यकृत्स्नप्रसक्तिं निरवयवत्वं च

- Just as the *śruti* says that the world arose from *Brahman*, it also teaches that *Brahman* remains independent of Its effect...The *śruti* propounds both that *Brahman* does not wholly manifest as the world and that It is without parts. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.27)

rests on the erroneous premise that *Brahman* undergoes actual metamorphosis, while the fact is It only illusorily appears as the world. Just as a rope remains without any deviation from its nature even when it appears as a snake, *Brahman* remains indivisible and transcendent even when It apparently manifests as the cosmos.

It is because of Its illusory power, *Māyā*, that though without parts, the Supreme appears in part as the world; *Māyā* effects even what is rather incongruous. Here is a verse from Bhagavatpāda's *Māyā-pañcaka*:

निरुपमनित्यनिरंशकेप्यखण्डे मयि चित्ति सर्वविकल्पनादिशून्ये ।

कलयति जगदीशजीवभेदमघटितघटनापटीयसी माया ॥

(*Māyā-pañcaka* 1)

[*Māyā*, which is skilful in accomplishing the impossible, brings about the distinctions of the world, God and the soul in me, who am consciousness, unique, eternal, without parts, infinite, and free from all distinctions.]

In the non-dual *Brahman*, *Māyā* conjures the differences of the soul, world and God; thus, one thinks, 'I, the soul, am disparate from God and the world is other than both of us.' Nothing is impossible for *Māyā* to accomplish.

What Bhagavatpāda has pointed out in response to the objection that though without parts, *Brahman* appears partially in the form of the world is based on the *śruti* and is a part of His expatiation of Sage Vyāsa's *sūtra*:

श्रुतेस्तु शब्दमूलत्वात् ॥ (Brahmasūtra 2.1.27)

[But it must be admitted on the basis of the *śruti* (that *Brahman* is without parts and yet does not fully become the world), for *Brahman* is knowable only from the *śruti*.]

The objection is out of place as the Supreme and its appearing as the cosmos can be discerned only from the *Upaniṣads* and not through mere argumentation.¹

Sage Vyāsa has further said in response to the objection:

आत्मनि चैवं विचित्राश्च हि । (Brahmasūtra 2.1.28)

[Besides (varied creation can take place without *Brahman*

1 ब्रह्म शब्दप्रमाणकम्, नेन्द्रियप्रमाणकम्, तद्यथाशब्दमभ्युपगन्तव्यम् ।...लौकिकानामपि मणिमन्त्रौषधिप्रभृतीनां देशकालनिमित्तवैचित्र्यवशाच्छक्तयो विरुद्धानेककार्यविषया दृशन्ते । ता अपि तावन्नोपदेशमन्तरेण केवलेन तर्केणावगन्तुं शक्यन्ते - अस्य वस्तुन एतावत्य एतत्सहाया एतद्विषया एतत्प्रयोजनाश्च शक्तय इति । किमुताचिन्त्यस्वभावस्य ब्रह्मणो रूपं विना शब्देन न निरूप्येत ।

- The *śruti* is the valid means of knowing *Brahman*, not the senses. So, It should be accepted to be as the *śruti* says It is....Even worldly objects such as gems, incantations and herbs are seen to have a variety of potencies which, owing to differences in time, place and occasion, give rise to various incompatible effects. These potencies themselves cannot be understood through mere reflection, without advice such as, 'This entity has these potencies, is aided by such and such factors, acts on these and serves such purposes.' Surely, then, the nature of *Brahman*, whose power is unfathomable, cannot be determined without the scripture. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.27)

undergoing change) because it occurs in the soul (in dreams) and in the case of others (such as the devas).]

In His commentary on this aphorism, Bhagavatpāda points out in support of *Brahman* manifesting the world without being affected that even we do produce a diverse world, during dreams, without ourselves undergoing any loss of our nature. That the objects of the dream-world are illusory and created by the individual soul has been indicated by Sage Vyāsa and settled by Bhagavatpāda in the '*Sandhyādhikaraṇa*' of the *Brahmasūtras*.¹

Let us suppose that in a dream, we go on a pilgrimage, arrive at Kashi, bathe in the Ganga, perform much charity and worship Lord Viśveśvara. We then wake up and find ourselves not at Kashi but only at the place where we lay down and went to sleep. The Kashi that we saw is not the real Kashi, which is afar, but one that we conjured up. When we can create a diverse world of dreams in and while remaining ourselves, why cannot God?

¹ मायामात्रं तु कात्स्न्येनानभिव्यक्तस्वरूपत्वात् - But the dream-world is a mere illusion since its nature does not manifest with all the attributes of the world of the waking state (such as adequate space for objects, time for events and causes and not being subject to negation. (*Brahmasūtra* 3.2.3)

Objection: God would be Partial and Cruel

The disputant now objects as follows to the *Vedāntin's* conclusion that God is the efficient cause of the world. You hold that God has ordained this universe. If so, He dispenses sorrow to some while He bestows happiness on others. He blesses some with riches while He denies even a meal to some. He who confers widely varying degrees of joy to beings must be deemed partial. As He awards misery to many, He must be cruel. While we feel distraught when we see even a single person losing his life, God annihilates all beings at the time of cosmic dissolution. How cruel! So, if God is the maker of the world, He is partial and merciless and, thus, ungodly, rather than impartial and kind, as God should be.

God is not Biased or Unkind

Sage Vyāsa in brief and Bhagavatpāda at length confute this objection as follows. God is neither partial nor cruel, for in giving joy or sorrow on beings, He duly takes into account their past actions.¹ A teaching of the *śruti* is:

¹ वैषम्यनैर्घृण्ये न सापेक्षत्वात्तथाहि दर्शयति - God is neither partial nor cruel since He takes into account other factors; for this is what the *Vedas* show. (*Brahmasūtra* 2.1.34)

पुण्यो वै पुण्येन कर्मणा भवति पापः पापेन ।

(*Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 3.2.13)

[*One becomes virtuous through virtuous deeds and a sinner through bad deeds.*]

God gives beings joy or sorrow, of varying degrees and at various times, as per their own *dharma* and *adharma*. Hence, God cannot be charged with bias or cruelty.

Bhagavatpāda has given an analogy for God's neutrality.

ईश्वरस्तु पर्जन्यवद्द्रष्टव्यः । (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.34)

[*God should be seen to be like rain.*]

Rain has no bias; God is like it. Consider two adjacent farmlands. Rain falls uniformly on both the fields. The farmer owning one of them diligently cultivates his land and reaps a bountiful harvest, while the peasant of the adjacent land whiles away his time and, so, obtains no yield. Can the latter blame the rain that enabled the sown seeds to grow as being partial to the industrious farmer? No; even the pattern and extent of rainfall on the two fields were the same. God is unbiased like rain.

Sage Vyāsa has described God in a hymn as:

रागादिदोषरहितं...

(*Viśvanāthāṣṭaka* 8)

[(Worship the Lord) who is free from defects such as attachment and aversion.]

God is untouched by likes and dislikes. He has Himself stated this thus:

समोहं सर्वभूतेषु न मे द्वेष्योऽस्ति न प्रियः । (Bhagavadgītā 9.29)

[I am the same towards all beings. None is hateful or dear to Me.]

Take the case of a fair judge. He punishes those guilty of offenses and exonerates those who are blameless. He cannot be rightly accused of animosity towards the former and love for the latter. He would, if needed, clarify that he goes only by the facts of each case and not by personal preferences. Like a fair judge, God rewards or punishes us in accordance with our *karma*. We would be blundering if we impute partiality and cruelty to Him.

Objection: Disparity at the Start of Creation Unjustified

The disputant counterattacks that even if be conceded that God gives happiness and unhappiness to a person now in keeping with what he did in his previous births, God's rewarding or punishing him in his very first birth, when he was without past *karma*, would be unjustified.

***Vedantin's* Response: Creation Has No Beginning**

Sage Vyāsa has responded that transmigratory existence is sans beginning, this being what the scripture teaches and what is reasonable.¹ The *Veda*, for instance, says:

धाता यथा पूर्वमकल्पयत् । (*R̥gveda-saṁhitā* 10.190.3)

[*The Creator created as before.*]

God's present creation is in line with His previous one, that creation accorded with the one preceding it and so on ad infinitum. So, none has a very first birth where one starts without any store of *karma* that God can consider.

God cannot be charged with cruelty even on the ground that He destroys all beings at the onset of each cosmic dissolution. This is because that is when, for a time, there is no *karma* that is on the point of fructifying; there is a natural lull. Accordingly, God, in His kindness, provides, a deep-sleep like period of total rest to all till it is time for *karma* to start fructifying again and creation restarts.

¹ न कर्माविभागादिति चेन्नानादित्वात् – If it be contended that God could not have taken *karma* into account due to absence of differentiation in *karma* at the start, we say 'no', since creation is without beginning. (*Brahmasūtra* 2.1.35)

उपपद्यते चाप्युपलभ्यते च – And that creation is without beginning is apt and is what the scripture teaches. (*Brahmasūtra* 2.1.36)

***Advaita* Alone is Unquestionable**

I had drawn attention in an earlier discourse to the norm that a conclusion arrived at by one on the basis of just one's analytical acumen will be confuted someday by some brighter intellectual. Bhagavatpāda has, however, declared, 'What I have propounded is not a product of independent intellection. It is only the *śruti*'s teaching that I have spelt out and substantiated. All of us need to bow to the authority of the *śruti*, for we are *vaidikas*, the adherents of the *Veda*.' The term *vaidika* denotes not just a *purohit* (a priest who conducts religious rites), as some think, but applies to all of us who esteem the *Veda*. As it is the *Veda* that is the fount of *Advaita* philosophy, we should never entertain any misgiving about it. Instead, as would be becoming of us, we should have and fortify conviction in it.

Sage Vyāsa in the *Brahmasūtras* and Bhagavatpāda in His commentary thereon have forcefully brought out the immaculateness and unassailability of *Advaita*, the final purport of the *Upaniṣads*. While the adherents of other schools vainly and variously try to fault *Advaita-vedānta*,

they overlook the fact that their positions are on a weak footing. More than once, Sage Vyāsa has pointed out that a disputant's charge assails his own school by writing: स्वपक्षदोषाच्च ॥ (*Brahmasūtra* 2.1.10; *Brahmasūtra* 2.1.29) [*And since the opponent's own position is vitiated.*]

Those who opposed *Advaita-vedānta* and were dealt with often by Sage Vyāsa and Bhagavatpāda were the adherents of one of two philosophical schools: *Sāṃkhya* and *Vaiśeṣika*. Exposing the fatal fallacies in both these and neutralising the objections voiced by their votaries against *Advaita-vedānta*, Bhagavatpāda informed them, 'Your tenets are riddled with irremediable shortcomings. When counter-attacked, you are, thus, at your wits end. Our position is, however, held safe by the unassailable *śruti*.' Apart from the ancient *Sāṃkhya* and *Vaiśeṣika*, various philosophical schools have arisen over the ages; their followers too have attempted but failed to find any weakness in *Advaita-vedānta*.

Eminent intellectuals of other nations too are clear that *Advaita* is the best among Indian philosophies, is logical

and possesses answers to potential objections, while other schools are far from being so.

You should sincerely strive to grasp *Advaita-vedānta* as expounded by Bhagavatpāda and repeatedly cogitate on it so that you may realize the Truth. May God bless all of you to do so.

॥ हर नमः पार्वतीपतये । हर हर महादेव ॥

God: The Origin of Even Space

Invocation

वरमभयमुदारं पुस्तकं चाक्षहारं मणिवलयमनोज्ञैः पाणिपद्मैर्दधाना ।

सितवसनललामा कुन्दमुक्ताभिरामा वसतु शशिनिभास्या वाचि वाग्देवता नः ॥

(*Kaivalyakalpadruma on Svārājyasiddhi, Prakaraṇa 2*)

[*May Goddess Sarasvatī, whose lotus-like lovely hands with gem-studded bracelets munificently bear the signs of granting boons and freedom from fear, a book and a rosary, who is an unmatched beauty in a white attire, is charmingly complexioned like jasmines and pearls and whose face resembles the moon, reside in our organ of speech.*]

I have been presenting the thrust of the *Upaniṣads* that the God is the source of the universe. I took up several objections that have been raised against this and their rebuttal by Bhagavatpāda in His *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*.

Creation primarily involves the genesis of the five great elements, which are *pṛthvī* (earth), *āpas* (water), *tejas* (fire), *vāyu* (air) and *ākāśa* (space). Other objects are products of these five primary elements.

Objection: Space's Origin is Unaccepted by a *Śruti*

I shall now take up for analysis, an objection raised by an opponent about the creation of space. While he accepts that God created earth, water, fire and air, he does not admit that God is the maker of space. In his view, being eternal, it is created by none. When detailing the creation of the elements, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*¹ does not list space. So, he concludes, God did not create space.²

Response: *Śruti* Declares that Space has Originated

The *Vedāntin* responds that the objection is invalid as an *Upaniṣad* specifies that space arose from the Supreme.³

तस्माद्वा एतस्मादात्मन आकाशः सम्भूतः

(*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1)

[*It is from Brahman, which is this Self, that space arose.*]

Counter Objection: Mention of Space's Origin is Figurative

The opponent counters: Though a *śruti* says that space stemmed from God, still, that does not stand to reason.

¹ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.2.2 and 6.2.3.

² न वियदश्रुते: - Space is uncreated, as its origin is not mentioned in a *śruti*. (*Brahmasūtra* 2.3.1)

³ अस्ति तु - But a *Vedic* text does speak of the origin of space. (*Brahmasūtra* 2.3.2)

One cannot accept as factual whatever is said in the *Veda* as it does contain even patently weird statements.

आदित्यो यूपः (*Taittirīya-brāhmaṇa* 2.1.5.2)
[*The sacrificial post is the sun.*]

This *Vedic* statement is contradicted by perception; the sacrificial post and the solar orb are decidedly different. While the *Veda's* authority is unassailable, passages such as this should not be understood literally. Similarly, scriptural passages about space originating from God should be understood, not literally, but figuratively.¹

He then explains as follows why space cannot be made. Raw materials, their mutual contact and a manufacturer are needed for producing a product.² For example, for a cloth to come about, threads, contact between them and a weaver are essential. As regards space, which is homogeneous, raw materials and their conjunction are inconceivable and a maker has no role. So, space's origin is impossible and the text about it must be figurative.

1 गौण्यसंभवात् - The *Upaniṣadic* passage about the creation of space is figurative, because space cannot be produced. (*Brahmasūtra* 2.3.2)

2 समवाय्यसमवायिनिमित्तकारणेभ्यो हि किल सर्वमुत्पद्यमानं समुत्पद्यते - Whatever originates does so (according to the logician) from its inherent, concomitant and efficient causes. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 2.3.2)

***Vedāntin*: Reason to Deny Space's Origin is Invalid**

The *Vedāntin* responds that while the triad spoken of by the opponent as vital may be so for certain products like pots and cloth, all created objects do not require the conjunction of the basic raw materials used. In some cases, the very raw material comes to be called an effect when it attains a new state with certain characteristics. Milk, for example, itself attains a different state with some new properties and, thus, turns into its product, curd. So, space's origin cannot be ruled on the said ground.

View that Space is Eternal will Contradict the *Śruti*

The *Vedāntin* confronts the opponent with the following passage from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*:

एकमेवाद्वितीयम् (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.2.1)

[(Before creation, this was Existence,) one alone, without a second.]

According to the *śruti*, only Brahman was there before creation; there was nothing else. If it be said that space too is eternal like *Brahman*, then, it being an additional entity present prior to creation, the *śruti's* affirmation that there was just *Brahman* then would be contradicted.

Opponent's Analogy to Account for the *Śruti's* Words

The opponent responds to the *Vedāntin's* challenge thus: A person went to a potter's house and found some clay kept there. He paid a visit to the place on the subsequent day too, but this time, he beheld earthenware items, such as pots. He exclaimed, 'Only clay was here yesterday, but now, in its place, there are various earthen utensils.' When the visitor said, 'Only clay was here,' he did not imply that nothing at all was present other than clay, for the potter and his aids, such as a wheel and a rod, to make the clayey products were also perceived by him. The import of his statement is just that no products of clay were there earlier. Likewise, the *Vedic* teaching that in the beginning there was *Brahman* alone should be understood, in a secondary sense, to mean that prior to creation, not a single effect of *Brahman* was present. The existence of space in addition to *Brahman* is not denied as it is not a product of *Brahman*.

***Vedāntin's* Response**

We cannot interpret precise *Vedic* passages in the light of informal worldly usages. As for the *Vedic* passage, it has, not one but three words - '*ekam*, one', '*eva*, alone'

and ‘*advitīyam*, without a second’ – though every one of them is capable of pointing out that only *Brahman* existed prior to creation. It thereby unconditionally rules out everything other than *Brahman*. Hence, space must have an origin, as, otherwise, this declaration of the *śruti* would be contradicted.

All Effects are Non-different from Brahman, the Cause

The *Vedāntin* also points out that in several *Upaniṣads*, it is proposed that upon knowing one entity, *Brahman*, all becomes known. A query in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* is:
कस्मिन्नु भगवो विज्ञाते सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवतीति ।

(*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.1.3)

[*On knowing what does all this becomes known?*]

The answer to the question, “On knowing what does all become known?” is then given as the Supreme.

A related example given in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* is:
यथा सोम्यैकेन मृत्पिण्डेन विज्ञातेन सर्वं मृन्मयं विज्ञातं स्यात्

(*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.1.4)

[*Just as by knowing a single lump of clay, all products of clay become known.*]

On knowing clay, the material cause, all modifications of clay, such as earthen pots, become known as, 'These are but clay.' Because every effect is non-different from its material cause, it is known by knowing the latter. Only if *Brahman* is the material cause of all can everything be known by knowing It. Were space not an effect of *Brahman*, it will not become known when *Brahman* is realized. The vital proposition of the *Upaniṣads* about the knowledge of *Brahman* resulting in the knowledge of all would then become falsified. The validity of the *śruti* is, however, not disputed even by the opponent. So, it must be admitted, that even space originates and has *Brahman* as its source.¹

Vedantin: What is Seen to be Separate is a Product

Bhagavatpāda has explained as follows another reason given by Sage Vyāsa in support of the origin of space.² It is observed that whatever is an effect is distinct from

¹ प्रतिज्ञाऽहानिरव्यतिरेकाच्छब्देभ्यः - The *Upaniṣadic* proposition (that all is known by knowing *Brahman*) is unaffected only if everything is non-different from Brahman and this follows from scriptural passages (about the non-difference of an effect from its material cause). (*Brahmasūtra* 2.3.6)

² यावद्विकारं तु विभागो लोकवत् - But space is an effect, for, as seen in the world, every effect is distinct from something. (*Brahmasūtra* 2.3.7)

something else; an earthen pot, which is an effect, is, for instance, seen to be different from an earthen cup and from a cloth. Earth, water, fire, air and space are known to be separate from one another (and from time). So, even space should be something caused.

The opponent protests, '*Brahman* is separate from space. So, by your rule, It too must be an effect. This is absurd.' The *Vedāntin* points out that as *Brahman* is the cause of all and is the very basis of their existence, there is never any real separation between anything and *Brahman*. An earthen pot, for instance, owes its very existence to and is not other than clay, its cause, and, as such, there is no real separateness between the two. Thus, the rule that every effect is separate from something has no bearing upon *Brahman*. As for space, since it is separate from entities like the earth, it must, going by the rule, be an effect and, so, must have an origin.

Opponent: *Brahman's* and Space's Eternality Similar

The opponent now raises another objection. It is said:

आकाशवत्सर्वगतश्च नित्यः (Called *śruti* in the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*)

[*Brahman is omnipresent and ceaseless like space.*]

Brahman is said here to be all-pervasive and eternal like space. Only if space were timeless, it could have been so presented as an exemplar. Hence, it is wrong to hold that space arose from *Brahman*.

***Vedāntin:* Space is Long-lasting, not Absolutely Eternal**
 Bhagavatpāda has countered the opponent's view thus: Whenever an analogue is given to explain something, full equivalence between the exemplar and the exemplified is unmeant. Only certain aspects of the analogue need to match what is being illustrated.

A person said that the sun moves fast. When asked to elaborate, he stated that the sun speeds like an arrow from Lord Rāma's bow. The idea is that the sun travels very swiftly and not that its speed and that of Rāma's arrow are equal. Similarly, when the scripture teaches that the Supreme is all-pervasive and everlasting like space, the aim is not to equate *Brahman* and space but to bring out that *Brahman* is everywhere and timeless. As for space, it is spoken of as 'eternal' not because it is literally so but because it outlasts all the other elements that constitute the cosmos. During cosmic dissolution,

the earth perishes first, then water, then fire, then air and only then does space perish.

The celestial *devas* are said to be eternal since they live very much longer than us. A year of our life is just a day for them; a year of theirs corresponds to 365 years of human life. Because they persist for lakhs of our years, they are called immortals. Some of names by which these gods are known are, as listed in the lexicon, *Amarakośa*:

अमरा निर्जरा देवाः...अमर्त्या अमृतान्यसः (*Amarakośa* 1.1.13 -16)
[*Deathless, never aged, gods, immortals, nectar-eaters.*]

We read in the *Rāmāyaṇa* that Daśaratha, a human like us, said that 'Rāma was born to me after 60,000 years.' Many may not believe this but I, who have faith in the text, do. The duration of Rāma's rule was 11,000 years.

दशवर्षसहस्राणि दशवर्षशतानि च ।

रामो राज्यमुपासित्वा ब्रह्मलोकं प्रयास्यति ॥ (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.97)

[*Having ruled for eleven thousand years, Rāma will go to the realm of Brahman.*]

The lifespan of humans extended then to thousands of years. The *devas*, however, live very much longer. That is why they are called immortals and not because they are unconditionally so. Similarly, when space is said to

be eternal, it is because it exists for a very long time relative to other entities. But it does originate and end.

The creation of space has been clearly spelt out in the *śruti*. As seen, the *Yajurveda's Taittirīya Upaniṣad* says:
तस्माद्वा एतस्मादात्मन आकाशः सम्भूतः । (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1)

[*From that Brahman, which is this Ātman, space arose.*]

The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* of the *Atharvaveda* states:
एतस्माज्जायते प्राणो मनः सर्वेन्द्रियाणि च ।

खं वायुर्ज्योतिरापः पृथ्वी विश्वस्य धारिणी ॥ (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 2.1.3)

[*From It arises prāṇa, the mind, all the organs, space, air, fire, water and the earth, which bears all.*]

So, it is improper to conclude that space is uncreated.

Difference Between Before and After Space's Origin

The opponent poses yet another objection: 'None of the attributes of an effect are present before its origin. For instance, before a pot is created, no activity such as fetching water in the pot would be possible. Before curd is formed, a related transaction such as the partaking of curd is not possible. What is it which was not there before space's origin and which came about after that?'

The *Vedāntin's* response is as follows: 'As space exists now, we are able to move around. Prior to the creation of space, no movement was possible. Regard this as a space-related distinction.'

Passages about Space's Origin are not Figurative

The opponent had suggested that the *śruti* passage, 'आकाशः सम्भूतः [*Space was born (of Brahman, the Self)*]' be interpreted figuratively as in the case of passages like, 'आदित्यो यूपः [*The sacrificial post is the sun*].' Figurative interpretations are called for in the case of '*arthavāda-vākyas*, corroborative passages' such as the latter whose purport contradicts perception. The *Upaniṣadic* passage in question about space's origin is, however, not an *arthavāda*; it is not contradicted by any means of knowledge nor is it a restatement of something known through them. So, its primary meaning must be accepted.

Conclusion

If we accept the origin of space from the Supreme, we would reap the twin benefits of having subscribed to the proposition of the *Upaniṣads* that upon knowing the

Supreme everything, without exception, becomes known and to the scriptural position that God is the creator of the entire cosmos. It would be inapt to repudiate the origin of space merely because it does not accord with one's mundane reasoning. Accepting as we do, the validity of the *Vedas*, let us readily admit the origin of space.

We should understand the true purport of the *Upaniṣads* properly, cogitate on it and attain the *summum bonum* of life. Sage Vyāsa and Bhagavatpāda have expounded the true purport of the *Upaniṣads* and bountifully graced us. Let us venerate them.

॥ हर नमःपार्वतीपतये । हर हर महादेव ॥

Knowledge, the Cause of Liberation, Not Action

Invocation

वक्तारमासाद्य यमेव नित्या सरस्वती स्वार्थसमन्विताऽऽसीत् ।
निरस्तदुस्तर्ककलङ्कपङ्का नमामि तं शङ्करमर्चिताङ्घ्रिम् ॥

(*Saṁkṣepa-śārīraka* 1.7)

[I pay obeisance to Śāṅkara whose feet are worshipped by the seekers of the Truth and who is that exponent of the scripture on attaining whom the Veda, the eternal word, became free from the mire of fallacious logic and connected with its true meaning.]

The Highest Goal and Its Immediate Means

The scriptures point out that virtue, wealth, desire and liberation are the four objectives of human life¹ and that among these, liberation, which is the most covetable², is the ultimate goal. The definitive denouement of the

¹ The objective is basically to be happy or to avoid sorrow. Virtue results in worldly and heavenly happiness. Wealth includes other possessions and is primarily that meant for the performance of virtuous actions. The desire spoken of is primarily that which prompts one to engage in virtue, for sinful longing yields unwanted sorrow.

² This is because everyone seeks happiness or freedom from sorrow and liberation is characterized by absolute bliss and the total cessation of sorrow. Liberation is not dwelling in any divine realm but is abidance in one's true nature as *Brahman*.

Upaniṣads is that emancipation can be attained only by realizing the Self, which is but the Supreme, and not in any other way whatsoever.

तमेव विदित्वाऽतिमृत्युमेति नान्यः पन्था विद्यतेऽयनाय ॥

(*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.15)

[*Only upon knowing Him, one transcends death; there is no other path to liberation.*]

This *śruti* asserts: Only he who realizes *Brahman* goes beyond the ocean of transmigratory existence; there is no other means to deathlessness.

Sage Vyāsa has, accordingly, concluded in the *Brahmasūtras* that knowledge alone results in liberation:

पुरुषार्थोऽतः शब्दादिति बादरायणः ॥ (*Brahmasūtra* 3.4.1)

[*Bādarāyaṇa*¹ deems that liberation results from the knowledge of the Self, since the *Upaniṣads* so teach.]

Bhagavatpāda has comprehensively enunciated this in His *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya*.

¹ Bādarāyaṇa, whose name appears in some of the aphorisms, is the composer of the *Brahmasūtras* and he is traditionally identified with Vyāsa, the author of the *Mahābhārata* and the codifier of the *Vedas*.

***Mīmāṃsakas'* Contention: Liberation through Actions**

The *Mīmāṃsakas'* take exception to the aforesaid view of *Vedānta* and contend, 'Though you insist that final freedom is effected exclusively by knowledge, the fact is that it can be secured without the latter.' They proceed to delineate on the following lines the scenario that they envision.

The essence of liberation is the absence of rebirth. One is born since one has to experience the fruits of one's past actions; happiness is the fruit of having performed what is ordained for one by the scripture, while sorrow is the consequence of having done what is prohibited by it. The actions touched upon by the scripture are of four types:

(1) Actions ordained to be performed regularly. *Sandhyā-vandana* (a worship that is to be done before daybreak, at midday and prior to sunset by one invested with the

¹ *Mīmāṃsā* is one of the six traditional schools that regard the *Veda* as authoritative. The aphorisms of Sage Jaimini constitute its primary text and they arrive at how *Vedic* passages should be interpreted. A tenet of this ritualistic school, whose votaries are called *Mīmāṃsakas*, is that the *Vedas* are centred upon injunctions and prohibitions.

sacred thread and which involves the offering of water and the chanting of the *Gāyatrī-mantra*) and *Agnihotra* (a rite to be performed every dawn and dusk by a duly initiated householder and involving a sacred fire) are instances of this variety.

(2) Actions that are decreed to be executed on specific occasions. The bath and the offerings to the manes that are occasioned by eclipses are examples.

(3) Actions prescribed as optional for the fulfilment of specific desires. These include the *Kārīrī-īṣṭi*, a rite that may be performed by one who is desirous of rain, and some sacrifices done motivated by a desire for heaven.

(4) Actions that are proscribed. Killing a priest, drinking wine and stealing gold are cases of prohibited actions.

He who desires liberation should, says the *Mīmāṃsaka*, avoid actions aimed at fulfilling desires and those that are proscribed since these would entail that he take births to experience their pleasurable and painful fruits. He should, however, unfailingly perform those actions that are decreed to be performed regularly as also those that are required to be performed on specific occasions.

This is because their non-performance causes sin.¹ For instance, sin is the price of even inadvertently omitting *Sandhyā-vandana* on even a single dawn or dusk. By consistently carrying out the regular and occasional actions enjoined upon him, he who seeks liberation can avoid the sin that would have accrued to him had he ever omitted to do them and can, thereby, steer clear of having to be reborn to experience the fruit of such demerit.

As regards the actions of his past lives that have begun to fructify and are responsible for his present birth, he exhausts them by experiencing their fruits in the form of pleasure and pain, till the time of death.

Upon the fall of his body, such a person would not be reborn. This is because the actions of his past would have already borne fruit over the course of his life and he would have, by performing the ordained regular and

¹ According to the *Mīmāṃsakas*, non-performance of any of these enjoined actions itself gives rise to sin but their performance is fruitless except in that it precludes the sin of omission.

occasional actions, by not doing scriptural actions to fulfil desires and by totally avoiding prohibited actions, precluded the accrual of demerit and merit that would have necessitated rebirth. There is, thus, no need for a person to hear about the Truth from a *Guru*, reflect upon It through reasoning and steadily mediate upon It and, thereby, realize It in order to become freed from rebirth.

The *Mīmāṃsaka's* prescription for emancipation is, in a nutshell:

मोक्षार्थी न प्रवर्तेत तत्र काम्यनिषिद्धयोः ।

नित्यनैमित्तिके कुर्यात्प्रत्यवायजिहासया ॥

(*Ślokavārtika, sambandhākṣepa-parihāra*, 110)

[He who is desirous of liberation should not engage in actions that are prompted by desire and those that are prohibited. Desirous of avoiding sin, he should do the prescribed, regular and occasional actions.]

The import is that to secure liberation, one should not do actions that are prompted by longing and those that are prohibited but should do the compulsory, regular and occasional actions in order to avoid the sin that would arise because of failing to do them.

‘You err,’ says the *Mīmāṃsaka* to the *Vedāntin*, ‘when you insist that knowledge of the Supreme is necessary and sufficient for liberation; what is called for is not such knowledge but, as seen, action, duly done or avoided.’

Bhagavatpāda’s Rebuttal

Bhagavatpāda has thoroughly refuted this contention in His *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya* and also in His *bhāṣyas* on the *Bhagavadgīta* and the *Upaniṣads*.¹ His refutation is on the following lines.

Firstly, what you have postulated about how liberation is secured is bereft of a scriptural basis; it finds no mention in the scripture, be it some *Upaniṣad* or even a text on *dharma*. Your conclusion follows from your conjectures. However, surmises, however ingenious, that are without a scriptural underpinning are impotent to determine such matters, which lie squarely and wholly in the realm of the scripture.

¹ *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya*, discussion following the exposition of *Brahmasūtra* 4.3.14; *Bhagavadgīta-bhāṣya*, discussion after the explanation of verse 18.66; *Taittirīya-upaniṣad-bhāṣya*, Introduction.

Next, you presume that a person experiences without residue the fruits of his past actions in his present life itself; therefore, you claim that if he can avoid acquiring fresh merit or demerit now, upon his death, he will not be reborn. Your presumption is unrealistic. In his earlier lives, he would have performed a host of acts, virtuous and sinful, some so virtuous as to have enjoyment in heaven as their fruit and some so sinful as to call for punishment in hell. When the fruits of some his past actions are mutually antagonistic and incompatible with a human state, those acts cannot fructify in his present life and must remain dormant to bear fruit later. Many scriptural passages make known that just a subset of one's past acts are exhausted in a life and the rest remain¹ and bear fruit only in future lives, in suitable circumstances, places and times. So, even if a person seeking liberation were, as advocated by you, to avoid all actions that are prompted by desire and those that are prohibited and were to faithfully carry out his regular and occasional scriptural duties to preclude the sin of

¹ For instance, it is said: 'Afterwards, by virtue of a remainder of merit, he obtains a body...' (*Āpastamba-dharmasūtra* 2.1.2.3)

omission, still, he would necessarily have to take future births due to his remaining past actions.

Objection: The performance of the obligatory *Soma*-sacrifices, such as *Jyotiṣṭoma*, which are elaborate and extend for days, is taxing; the doer is, for instance, left with no choice but to put up for long with the assault on his nostrils by the smoke issuing from the sacrificial fire. We may well regard the suffering involved in performing the ordained, regular and occasional rites to itself be the experience of the results of all the residual past actions. Alternatively, we can take it that the obligatory regular and occasional rites nullify all the residual actions.¹

Vedāntin: Such disposal of the residual actions is out of line with several scriptural pronouncements. Even if we accept that the pain involved in the performance of the regular and occasional rites or their very performance can exhaust past actions, only the sinful actions of the past can be dispensed with but not the virtuous deeds.

¹ This is the only alternative referred to in the *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya* and the *Taittirīya-upaniṣad-bhāṣya*. Both the alternatives are presented in the *Bhagavadgītā-bhāṣya*.

This is because suffering, even if it be that associated with the fulfilment of what the scripture ordains, cannot be the fruit of virtuous deeds of the past; after all, joy is the fruit of virtue. Also, since there is no contradiction between a virtuous action – a prescribed deed – done in the past and any action ordained as obligatory and done now, the performance of obligatory, regular and occasional actions cannot neutralize the virtuous deeds of the past. Thus, the residual virtuous deeds of the past would necessarily remain intact and preclude the person who follows the path to liberation favoured by you from becoming free from rebirth.

Incidentally, Bhagavatpāda's tentative admission of the opponent's contention is in keeping with the maxim:

तुष्यतु दुर्जनः (Maxim¹)

[*Let the wicked one be pleased.*]

Next, you require that in order to become liberated, a person should, throughout his life, wholly abstain from

¹This maxim has been explained thus: It applies when one magnanimously admits a disputant's position, though flawed, and considers just some other difficulty with it.

actions that are prompted by desire or are prohibited. The fatal flaw here is that such unconditional avoidance is unfeasible.

न चासति सम्यग्दर्शने सर्वात्मना काम्यप्रतिषिद्धवर्जनं जन्मप्रायणान्तराले
केनचित्प्रतिज्ञातुं शक्यम्, सुनिपुणानामपि सूक्ष्मापराधदर्शनात् ।

(*Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* on *sūtra* 4.3.14)

[*Further, without the right knowledge of the Self, nobody can guarantee his total avoidance of actions that are prompted by desire and of proscribed actions, right from the time of birth up to the time of death; this is because subtle faults are seen even in the very competent.*]

The import of these words of Bhagavatpāda is that none can affirm that ‘*janmaprāyaṇāntarāle*, in the period from birth until death’, one has never done a single optional or proscribed act, ‘*sūkṣmāparādha-darśanāt*, because subtle lapses are seen’ ‘*sunipuṇānām api*, even in those who are highly competent’.

We cannot, for example, say that we have never killed a mosquito. Killing any living being, even if it be an irksome mosquito, is a transgression of the following prohibition that one should not harm any living being:

न हिंस्यात्सर्वा भूतानि

(Cited as a *Vedic* passage in the *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya* on *sūtra* 2.3.48; source-text not extant)

[*One should injure any being.*]

Not just knowingly but unknowingly too, we do, at times, what is disallowed. Such transgressions too are sinful.

It is said:

अनिच्छयाऽपि संस्पृष्टो दहत्येव हि पावकः ॥

(*Bṛhannāradiya Upapurāṇa* 11.99)

[*Even when touched unwittingly, fire definitely singes (the one who comes into contact with it).*]

The import of this is that fire burns even the hand that is thrust into it unwittingly. As in the case of fire touched accidentally, even if one unknowingly does something proscribed, one incurs sin. The case of optional acts done on account of desire is on a similar footing, for people are not born with intense dispassion and have the inclination to fulfil their desires.

To sum up, the proposed means is out of line with the scripture, cannot neutralize all past actions and is partly impracticable; liberation is unachievable through it.

Enlightenment and the Neutralization of Actions

The actual means to liberation is that specified by the scripture and this is enlightenment. Knowledge puts an end to one's store of actions that would have entailed one's rebirth. An affirmation of the Lord in this regard is:

ज्ञानाग्निः सर्वकर्माणि भस्मसात्कुरुते तथा ॥ (*Bhagavadgītā* 4.37)

[*Similarly (like a blazing fire reducing firewood to ashes), the fire of knowledge reduces all actions to ashes.*]

Likewise, Vyāsa has settled in the *Brahmasūtras* that:
तदधिगम उत्तरपूर्वाघयोरश्लेषविनाशौ तद्व्यपदेशात् ॥

(*Brahmasūtra* 4.1.13)

[*When Brahman is realized, there occurs the absence of contact with subsequent sins and the annihilation of the sins committed earlier; this is because the scripture has declared thus.*]

This, together with the next aphorism¹ that extends what is said here about sins to virtuous deeds, conveys that when we realize Brahman, our past actions will perish and actions done after enlightenment will not stick to us.

¹ इतरस्याप्येवमसंश्लेषः पाते तु – Likewise, there is no contact with virtue. Liberation definitely occurs upon the fall of the body. (*Brahmasūtra* 4.1.14)

It is, holds Vyāsa, on the authority of the *Upaniṣads* that we know for certain that knowledge dissipates actions. For example, they say:

क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन्दृष्टे परावरे ॥

(*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 2.2.8)

[*When the Self, which is superior as the cause and is inferior as the effect, is realized, one's actions perish.*]

Enlightenment alone eliminates any possibility of rebirth because of actions and unfailingly ensures liberation. What the scripture says is final and this is what it avers and that too, repeatedly.

Encomium of Enlightenment

There appears to be a conundrum here. The past merits and demerits of a person who has attained knowledge do not have any effect upon him. However, the norm is that acts must fructify. So, what happens to the fruits of the actions done by an enlightened person in his past lives?¹ To a query so posed, a *Vedic* response is:

¹ This query proceeds on the assumption that enlightenment frees a person from the effects of his past deeds but spares the potency of the actions themselves. The answer is given in accordance with the premise of the question.

तस्य पुत्रा दायमुपयन्ति सुहृदः साधुकृत्यां द्विषन्तः पापकृत्याम् ॥

(Cited in the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* on *sūtra* 3.3.26
as a *śruti* of the *śātyāyanins*; source not extant)

[(*On the death of an enlightened person*), *his sons get his possessions, his well-wishers his good deeds and his haters his sins.*]¹

The results of the good deeds done by an enlightened person in his past lives pass on to those who served and were devoted to him. The effects of his wrongs accrue

¹ Bhagavatpāda has explained the significance of this *Vedic* passage as follows: विद्यास्तुत्यर्थं त्वनयोः संकीर्तनम् । इत्थं महाभागा विद्या यत्सामर्थ्यादस्य विदुषः सुकृतदुष्कृते संसारकारणभूते विधूयेते ते चास्य सुहृद्दुर्हृत्सु निविशेते इति...विद्यास्तुत्यर्थत्वाच्चास्योपायनवादस्य कथमन्यदीये सुकृतदुष्कृते अन्यैरुपेयेते इति नातीवाभिविष्टव्यम् - The discarding of virtue and vice by the knower and their acceptance by others are mentioned only for eulogising knowledge thus, 'So glorious is the knowledge of *Brahman* that by its power, good and evil that are the causes of transmigration are shaken away from the knower and enter into the enlightened one's well-wishers and foes respectively.'...Since the statement about the taking up of virtue and vice by others is only meant for praising knowledge, one need not be much bothered about how at all the good and evil of one can be taken up by another. (*Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya* on *sūtra* 3.3.26)

The authoritative gloss *Ratnaprabhā* clarifies that it is not that the merits and demerits of the knower are themselves transferred to others upon the knower's passing away; those who have served him obtain (due to their service) merit equivalent to the knower's past merit while those who despised him acquire (because of their hatred) sin equivalent to that of the knower's past sin.

to his despisers. Therefore, we should never scorn any realized one.

A *Vedic* hymn uttered during a *Kūśmāṇḍa-homa*¹ is:
 इन्द्राग्नी मित्रावरुणौ सोमो धाता बृहस्पतिः । ते नो मुञ्चन्तु एनसो यदन्यकृत-
 मारिम ॥

(A *mantra* chanted during the *Kūśmāṇḍa-homa*
 followed by the offering of an oblation into fire.)

[*Indra, Agni, Mitra, Varuṇa, Soma, Dhātā and Bṛhaspati*
 – may they free us from the sin that was committed by
 another and which we have acquired.]

The deities Indra, Agni, Mitra, Varuṇa, Soma, Dhātā and Bṛhaspati are requested to liberate us from the sin performed by another which is sticking to us. While the rule is that one is afflicted only by the sin that one has committed, the situation referred to here is an exception.

¹ *Kūśmāṇḍa-homa* is an optional rite prescribed in the *Taittirīya-āraṇyaka* (2.7; 2.8) to be performed by a person who thinks that he might have become impure (because of sin). It serves as an expiation for various sins. Sages, such as Jamadagni and Bodhāyana, have detailed the performance of this rite. They have prescribed the inclusion of some *mantras* in addition to those of the *Taittirīya-āraṇyaka*. The *mantra* cited here is one such. The rite is termed *Kūśmāṇḍa-homa* not because it involves a pumpkin (*kūśmāṇḍa*) but because the Vedic *Kūśmāṇḍa-mantras* are chanted in it.

An explanation that has been proffered about how the sin of another accrued to us is that we were ill-disposed towards a knower of *Brahman* and it was his past sins that stuck to us; the prayer is for freeing us from them. A lesson that we learn from even this *mantra* is that we should never be disdainful towards any realized one.

Such is the power of realization that it frees one from all one's good and bad deeds and the price of hating the person who has secured it is heavy, while the rewards of serving him with devotion are great. He who has not realized *Brahman* has to inevitably experience the fruits of his own actions; his merits and demerits decidedly do not pass away from him to another. Knowledge, which alone can free one from all the bonds of actions, is the sole and certain means to liberation; actions can neither fully nullify one's past actions nor result in liberation. All this is revealed by the scripture and there is no room for doubt here; independent conjectures amount to little.

यच्छब्द आह तदस्माकं प्रमाणम् । (*Mahābhāṣya, Ahnika 1*)

[*Whatever the Veda says is authoritative for us.*]

We unreservedly accept whatever the scripture reveals.

The Role of Actions in the Path to Emancipation

Bhagavatpāda has said:

चित्तस्य शुद्धये कर्म न तु वस्तूपलब्धये ।

वस्तुसिद्धिर्विचारेण न किञ्चित्कर्मकोटिभिः ॥ (*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 11)

[Action is for the purification of the mind and not for the realization of the Truth. The Truth is known by means of enquiry and not by means of even crores of actions.]

While actions cannot result in liberation, when done in a spirit of dedication to God, without expectation of fruits, they purify the mind; among the four kinds of actions, obligatory, regular and occasional actions are the ones that should be done. Only he whose mind is pure is fit to tread the path of knowledge. One should become pure-minded through the proper performance of one's duties in the right spirit, resort to a *Guru*, hear the Truth, reflect upon It through reasoning, steadfastly meditate upon It and, thereby, realize the Truth and become liberated. This is the path made known by the scripture. May all of you understand it, duly tread it and attain blessedness.

हर नमः पार्वतीपतये हर हर महादेव

Role of Repeated Practice in Realisation

Invocation

कलां विभर्ति क्षणदाकरस्य यः प्रकाशिताशां शिरसा गभस्तिभिः ।
नमोऽस्तु तस्मै सुरवन्दिताङ्घ्रये समस्तविद्याप्रभवाय शम्भवे ॥

(*Mahābhāskarīya* 1)

[*Prostrations to Śiva, the giver of happiness, who is the source of all knowledge, whose feet are worshipped by the Devas and who bears, in His crest, the crescent moon whose beams brighten the directions.*]

Meditation on the Supreme

The settled conclusion of *Vedānta* is that knowledge of *Brahman* alone results in liberation from transmigratory existence. A question that arises in this regard is, 'What should one practice to attain that liberating knowledge?'
अहमेव परं ब्रह्म...इत्येवं समुपासीत (Brahmānucintana 3)

[*He should persistently meditate, 'I am decidedly the Supreme Brahman.'*]

Bhagavatpāda's answer is that one should steadfastly maintain the notion that one is the Supreme *Brahman*. This is technically termed '*brahmābhyāsa*'.

Issues in Equating God and the Soul

Two entities with disparate attributes such as light and darkness cannot be equated with each other. So, God, who has no '*kartr̥tva*, agency', '*bhoktr̥tva*, state of being an enjoyer', attachment, aversion, pleasure and pain, and the *jīva*, soul, who has these, cannot be one. Thus, how could one maintain, without erring, that one is the Supreme and, thereby, realize this and attain liberation?

There is another problem. If it be that the *jīva* is God, the scripture would be superfluous for, God being ever free and the soul being God, there would be none to turn to the scripture and adopt, for becoming emancipated, the means prescribed therein such as '*śravaṇa*, hearing scripture and ascertaining its primary purport'. On the other hand, if it be that God is the transmigrating *jīva*, there will be no Supreme Being to create the world or for the *jīva* to realize and become liberated. In this case too, the scriptures would be useless.¹

¹ ईश्वरस्य च संसार्यात्मत्वे ईश्वराभावप्रसङ्गः ; ततः शास्त्रानर्थक्यम् । संसारिणोऽपीश्वरात्मत्वे अधिकार्यभावाच्छास्त्रानर्थक्यमेव... ।

- If God is one with the transmigrating soul, there would be no God and, thus, the scripture will become pointless. If the transmigrating soul were one with God, as there will be none to turn to the scriptures, they would be useless. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 4.1.3)

***Veda*, the Ultimate Authority, Equates God with the Soul**

The *śruti* itself definitively teaches the oneness of the Supreme and soul in the '*mahāvākya*, great sentence':

तत्त्वमसि । (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7)

[*You are That (Supreme).*]

We ought not to question the validity of the *śruti*. One of the important traits that a disciple should possess is steadfast faith in the *śruti*. Otherwise, one cannot truly become a disciple and the *Upanishadic* Truth cannot be imparted to such an individual. Of course, if the doubt is posed by a disciple in earnest for comprehending the teaching, it would be in order and deserve a clarification.

Disparate Qualities of God and the Soul are Unreal

If two entities truly possess contrasting attributes, they decidedly cannot be held to be one and the same. If, however, the traits are falsely superimposed on them, then the two can be equated. Let us suppose that one sees a rope in dim light and mistakes it to be a snake. The rope and the false snake are not distinct entities. A real rope and snake are, of course, different. People fear a real snake as it can bite them but not a rope!

No change occurs in a substratum when qualities alien to it are superimposed on it. An imagined snake does not affect the real rope wherein it is seen. Whether one flees from the rope mistaking it to be a snake, or, on the contrary, feels relieved that it is not a serpent, the rope undergoes no change. If a man with an eye-defect were to see two moons in the place of one, the result is not two real moons. Likewise, the attributes such as agency that mark out the *jīva* as a limited being distinct from the Supreme are those superimposed on *Brahman* due to ignorance. The *jīva* and God are, actually, just one pure consciousness. Bringing out their unity, the *śruti* says:

त्वं वा अहमस्मि भगवो देवतेऽहं वै त्वमसि भगवो देवते ॥

(*Jābālas' śruti* as per the *bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 4.1.3)

[*O, Divinity, decidedly, I am you; you are, for sure, me.*]

A *mahavākya* of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is:

अहं ब्रह्मास्मि (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10)

[*I am Brahman.*]

The appropriate way to comprehend the teaching of the *śruti* about the unity of God and the *jīva* is to recognize the fact that their incompatible qualities are unreal.¹

¹ विरुद्धगुणताया मिथ्यात्वोपपत्तेः ।

- The reason is that the dichotomy in qualities is false. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 4.1.3)

Thus, Bhagavatpāda has emphasized as follows that one should meditate that one is *Brahman*.

ब्रह्मैवाहं न संसारी मुक्तोऽहमिति भावयेत् । (*Brahmānucintana* 18)

[*I am Brahman only. I am not caught in the cycle of birth and death. I am free. He should contemplate thus.*]

It was objected that if the *jīva* were God, there would be none to resort to the *śruti* and strive for liberation and if God were the *jīva*, there would be no Creator and no Supreme to be known for liberation. A short reply is that creation, bondage, liberation, etc., have just provisional, empirical validity and stand negated when one realizes the Supreme. Thus, Gauḍapādācārya has written:

न निरोधो न चोत्पत्तिर्न बद्धो न च साधकः ।

न मुमुक्षुर्न वै मुक्त इत्येषा परमार्थता ॥ (*Gauḍapāda-kārikā* 2.32)

[*There is no dissolution, no creation, none bound, none striving or aspiring for freedom and none liberated. This is the highest truth.*]

From the highest standpoint, there is none trapped in transmigratory existence, intent on freedom, striving for liberation or emancipated; there is no cosmic creation or dissolution either. There is only *Brahman*; no duality.

Advaitins do not deny the existence of God or His act of creation in the empirical state. They only hold that the lowly attributes such as sufferance as also lordly ones such as creatorship that distinguish the soul and God are superimposed on *Brahman*. When ignorance, which is responsible for the appearance of diversity, ends with the realization of *Brahman*, all duality becomes sublated.

Whose is this ignorance? Bhagavatpāda's reply to this posed question was, 'It pertains to you who ask this.' The questioner objected, 'The *śruti* has said that I am the Supreme'; he implied that if he were the Supreme, he could not be ignorant. Bhagavatpāda replied, 'If you have realized this, then ignorance is just non-existent; there is none who is unenlightened.'¹ All the differences between the soul and the Supreme have just empirical validity and pertain to the realm of ignorance; in reality, they are non-different.

¹ कस्य पुनरयमप्रबोध इति चेत् यस्त्वं पृच्छसि तस्य त इति वदामः । ननु अहमीश्वर एवोक्तः श्रुत्या — यद्येवं प्रतिबुद्धोऽसि, नास्ति कस्यचिदप्रबोधः ।

- (Objection:) Whose, then is this ignorance? (Reply:) It is yours, who ask this. (Objection:) It is said by the *śruti* that I am God indeed (Reply:) If you have realized this (that you are the Supreme then) none has ignorance. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 4.1.3)

Repetition of Hearing and the Like

The next query is whether the stipulated meditation is to be done just once or it is to be repeated. The *śruti* says: आत्मा वा अरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यः

(*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.5)

[The *Ātman* should be realised; It should be heard of, reflected on and meditated upon.]

The means taught for realising the Truth are '*śravaṇa*, hearing about It', '*manana*, logically reflecting upon it' and '*nididhyāsana*, meditating upon It.' Each of the three is stated once. So, it needs to be done just once. This is the prima facie view. Consider the *Vedic* instruction: ज्योतिष्टोमेन स्वर्गकामो यजेत (Cited as *śruti* in the *Śabarabhāṣya*)

[He who desires heaven should perform the *Jyotiṣṭoma*.]

Repetition of the desire-prompted *Jyotiṣṭoma* sacrifice spoken of here is superfluous. Likewise, repeating the triad is uncalled for. This is what a disputant contends.

An interim response is given in the form of an example. On hearing a person complain of pain in his chest, we learn that the individual is suffering but do not explicitly feel his pain. Likewise, when we hear the *mahāvākya*,

'*Tattvamasi* (You are the Supreme),' we get a general knowledge of the form, 'The *Jīva* and *Brahman* are one.' The triad needs to be repeatedly resorted to in order to get the liberating, direct realisation of *Brahman*.

The opponent refutes this tentative answer thus. 'Direct knowledge of *Brahman* that has not arisen from the *śruti* and allied reasoning in the first instance cannot possibly be gained by repeatedly resorting to them. In any case, there are no general or special features in *Brahman*, for the Supreme is said to be devoid of any attributes. So, I do not see any use in repeatedly engaging in *śravaṇa* and the rest for knowing *Brahman's* special features.'

Rare Ones do not Need Repetition; Others Do

The *Vedāntin's* view is as follows:¹ Repetition is not at all needed for a rare, great soul who becomes enlightened on hearing the *mahavākya* just once from his *Guru*.

परिपक्वमतेः सकृच्छ्रुतं जनयेदात्मधियं श्रुतेर्वचः ।

(*Mādhavīya-śaṅkaravijaya* 10.95)

¹ भवेदावृत्त्यानर्थक्यं तं प्रति यः तत्त्वमसि इति सकृदुक्तमेव ब्रह्मात्मत्वमनुभवितुं शक्नुयात् । Repetition is pointless for him who is able to realize that he is Brahman when told just once 'You are That.' (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 4.1.2)

[*To the one of ripe intellect, hearing of the words of the śruti but once results in the realisation of the Ātman.*]

He who has acquired excellent mental impressions by his adequate recourse to the triad in his previous births becomes enlightened when he hears the *mahāvākya* once from his *Guru*. In the case of others:¹

परिमन्दमतेः शनैः शनैः गुरुपादाब्जनिषेवणादिना ॥

(*Mādhavīya-śaṅkaravijaya* 10.95)

[*In him who is not sharp, knowledge arises gradually by the service of the Guru's lotus-feet and such else.*]

They should serve the *Guru* for long and dwell upon the Truth taught.

Repetition Helps in Progressive Understanding

It is not that direct knowledge that does not arise upon hearing the *mahāvākya* once cannot arise even after repeated efforts, for this is contradicted by experience.

न हि दृष्टेऽनुपपन्नं नाम । (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 4.1.2)

[*There is no question what is seen being impossible.*]

¹ यस्तु न शक्नोति, तं प्रति उपयुज्यत एव आवृत्तिः ।

- But for him who is unable to immediately realize the Truth, repetition of the means is valuable. (*Bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra* 4.1.2)

What is explicitly seen cannot be denied as impossible. A person approached an astrologer and sought to know how long he would live. On analysing his horoscope, the astrologer averred, 'You must have died five years ago. I cannot accept that you are still alive.' The client said, 'How can you say that? I am quite alive and in front of you.' The astrologer mulishly stuck to his view! What is directly experienced cannot be set aside as unfeasible. Disciples have told me, 'We heard the discourse of Your Holiness but we could not comprehend the subject at once. We then repeatedly listened to a recorded version of the same and now our understanding is much better.' The speech's content is the same whether it is heard once or multiple times. But, as the experience of these disciples confirms, one may, by repeated hearing, gain the clear understanding that eluded one the first time. The triad, whose final member is *nididhyāsana*, focus on the Supreme, must be repeatedly practised till such time as the direct knowledge of the Supreme dawns.

Repetition for Removing Erroneous Notions

It was pointed out by the opponent that repetition of the triad to discern the special features of the Supreme and

convert a general understanding into an intimate one is useless as *Brahman* is bereft of attributes. The reply is that while *Brahman* has no attributes, various are our erroneous notions that have to be dispelled to realise It and repetition of the triad serves to progressively do so. Entities have origin, temporary existence, modification, growth, decay and destruction but the Supreme is free from these, known as '*bhāva-vikāras*'. The *śruti* states: अस्थूलमनण्वहस्वमदीर्घम् (Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad 3.8.8) [It is not gross, not minute, not short and not long.]

The upshot is that *Brahman* has no qualities.

People mistake themselves to be the body, the senses, *prāṇas*, the mind, and the intellect. One should repeat the triad to dispel these false notions in order to realise that one is *Brahman*. Bhagavatpāda has advised us to contemplate as follows to counter habitual false notions:

नाहं देहो न च प्राणो नेन्द्रियाणि तथैव च ।

न मनोऽहं न बुद्धिश्च नैव चित्तमहङ्कृतिः ॥

नाहं पृथ्वी न सलिलं न च वह्निस्तथाऽनिलः ।

न चाकाशो न शब्दश्च न च स्पर्शस्तथा रसः ।

नाहं गन्धो न रूपञ्च ...

(*Brahmānucintana* 21-23)

[I am not the body, life-breath, the senses, the mind; the intellect, the locus of memories, and the ego. I am not the element earth, water, fire, air or space. I am not sound, touch, taste, smell and form.]

In the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, He has delineated three major faults that one needs to eradicate:

अभावना वा विपरीतभावना संभावना विप्रतिपत्तिरस्याः ।
संसर्गयुक्तं न विमुञ्चति ध्रुवं विक्षेपशक्तिः क्षपयत्यजस्रम् ॥

(*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* 117)

[Sense of impossibility (about the non-dual Truth), doubt and the mistaken idea (that there is duality) never leave the one who is affected by the ignorance's concealing power. Its projecting power ever afflicts him.]

‘*Abhāvanā*’, referred to here, is the impression that the unity of *jīva* and *Brahman* and the unreality of the world taught by the scriptures cannot be a fact. ‘*Sam̐bhāvanā*’ means doubt. It does not mean here the money that we offer to priests! The third defect ‘*viparītabhāvanā*’ is the rise, by habit, of wrong ideas such as, ‘I am the body.’ To get rid of these three impediments, one should again and again resort to the triad, headed by *śravaṇa*, hearing.

***Upaniṣad* Teaches Efficacy of Repetition**

There is a story in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* in which Śvetaketu is taught the *mahāvākya* 'Tattvamasi (You are That)' nine times. It is because, each time his father Uddālaka imparted the *mahāvākya*, he came up with a different doubt. The father had to progressively dispel all his doubts and, in the process, taught him the same *mahāvākya* nine times. Let none think that hearing it nine times is emphasised; it is not. Practice of hearing, reflection and meditation till realisation dawns is what the scripture advocates. Thus, Bhagavatpāda says:

यावज्जीवं सदाऽभ्यासाज्जीवन्मुक्तो भवेद्यतिः। (*Brahmānucintana* 21)
 [By constant practice throughout one's life time, the aspirant becomes liberated even when alive.]

That is, one should constantly practice meditation for life. If one were to contemplate, 'I am the Supreme' for a short while and soon thereafter, become unduly restless about mundane things such as one's bank balance, one will not make headway. One should acquire the requisite qualifications, such as dispassion, hear the Truth, reflect on It and remain focussed on It until one attains 'jīvan-mukti, liberation while living.'

Bhagavatpāda has extensively elucidated this topic in His *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* so that no one may have any doubt in this regard. May you thoroughly comprehend the teaching, engage in constant contemplation on the Supreme and make your lives fruitful.

॥ हर नमः पार्वतीपतये । हर हर महादेव ॥

Devas' Liberation Only Through Knowledge

Invocation

यस्येच्छयैव भुवनानि समुद्भवन्ति तिष्ठन्ति यान्ति च पुनर्विलयं युगान्ते ।
तस्मै समस्तफलभोगनिबन्धनाय नित्यप्रबुद्धमुदिताय नमः शिवाय ॥

(*Nyāyamañjarī* 3.173)

[*Obeisance to Śiva, the eternal, enlightened, blissful one, who causes beings to experience the fruits of all their actions, by whose mere wish, the worlds arise, abide and, at the end, become dissolved.*]

Liberation of the *Devas* Only through Enlightenment

In the previous discourse, I had articulated the scriptural view that one can attain liberation from transmigratory existence only through the realisation of *Brahman* and that, decidedly, nothing else is the direct means to it. The case of even the *devas*, says the scripture, is no different. While they experience grand delights in the course of their stay in heaven, that is not liberation. Knowledge of *Brahman* being essential for liberation, the *devas* too need to strive for and attain it if they are to become liberated. An averment of the *Upaniṣads* is:

तद्यो यो देवानां प्रत्यबुध्यत स एव तदभवत्तथर्षीणां तथा मनुष्याणाम्

(*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10)

[Among the *devas*, and, likewise among the seers and humans, only those who realised *Brahman*, became It.]

The purport is that only those *devas* who have acquired the knowledge of *Brahman* have become *Brahman*, and thus, liberated. Sage Vyāsa has ascertained this in the *Brahmasūtras*¹ and Bhagavatpāda has explicated it in His commentary thereon.

Corporality of the *Devas*

The *Mīmāṃsakas* disagree with this *Vedāntic* position. They do not admit that the *devas* the *Vedas* refer to are corporeal entities at all² and, so, object as follows: Only if one has a body, is it even possible for one to resort to means, such as hearing the Truth from a *Guru*, that would result in the dawn of liberating knowledge. As the *devas* have no body at all, there is no scope for these means being prescribed for them and, so, for their securing enlightenment.

¹ *Brahmasūtras* (1.3.26 – 1.3.33)

² The *Mīmāṃsakas* deem that Indra and the other *devas* invoked in sacrifices are not other than the pertinent *Vedic* words, such as Indra.

The *Vedāntin's* response is that the *devas* do have a body and that this is knowable from the *Vedas*, *Smṛtis*, *Itihāsas* and the *Purāṇas*. The *Veda* says:

वज्रहस्तः पुरन्दरः (*Taittirīya-brāhmaṇa* 2.6.7.2)

[*Indra has the thunderbolt in his hand.*]

How can Indra hold, as said here, the thunderbolt in his hand if he does not have a body in the first place? Thus, this *Vedic* utterance shows that Indra has a body.

देवासुराः संयत्ता आसन्

(*Taittirīya-saṁhitā* (in 11 places) 1.5.1.1;...7.2.5.3)

[*The devas and the asuras were engaged in battle.*]

The meaning of this statement that occurs in several places in the *Veda* is, 'The *devas* and the *asuras* began to join battle.' Were the *devas* to be bodiless, how could they have engaged in combat? One of the accounts that follows the *Vedic* statement considered is that as the *devas* prepared to fight with the *asuras*, they deposited their wealth with Agni for safe keeping, to be available to them later, even in the event of their defeat. However, Agni usurped it out of desire and absconded. The *devas* returned victorious and went after him. They finally caught him and forced him to give back their wealth.

According to another *Vedic* story, Agni had three elder brothers.

अग्नेस्त्रयो ज्यायाँसो भ्रातर आसन् ते देवेभ्यो हव्यं वहन्तः प्रमीयन्त

(*Taittirīya-saṁhitā* 2.6.6.1)

[*Agni had three elder brothers. They used to carry the sacrificial offerings to the devas and while engaged in this task, they died (of fatigue).*]

They were engaged in the task of carrying the oblations offered in the scriptural sacrifices to the *devas*. As they repeatedly conveyed the offerings, they were overcome by exhaustion and expired. Agni felt apprehensive that even he, who carried offerings like them, would die of fatigue. Hence, he fled from the *devas* and hid himself under water. The *devas* launched a search for him.

तं मत्स्यः प्राब्रवीत् तमशपद्धियाधिया त्वा वध्यासुर्यो मा प्रावोच इति तस्मान्मत्स्यं धियाधिया घ्नन्ति (*Taittirīya-saṁhitā* 2.6.6.1)

[*A fish exposed where Agni was. Agni cursed it, saying, 'You showed me. People shall kill you (fishes) in various ways (or at any time they want to do so).'* Thus, people kill fishes in various ways (or whenever they wish).]

A school of fishes in the water revealed Agni's place of hiding to the *devas*. Infuriated by this, Agni cursed the

fishes that they would be caught and killed. Accordingly, people keep catching and terminating the lives of fishes.

There are many such *Vedic* stories. We cannot make sense of them if we take it that the *devas* are bodiless. Not just *Vedic* narratives but even the numerous stories about the *devas* seen in the *Smṛtis*, *Itihāsas* and the *Purāṇas* demonstrate that the *devas* do have bodies.

Corporality and Concurrent Presence at Multiple Places

The *Mimāṃsakas* argue against the corporality of the *devas* as follows. During a scriptural rite, we offer an oblation to Indra saying:

इन्द्राय स्वाहा इन्द्राय इदं न मम

(Chant with which offerings are made for Indra.)

[Offered to Indra; svāhā! This is for Indra; it is not mine.]

Moreover, we even specifically call Indra to the site of the rite thus:

इन्द्रागच्छ (Taittirīya-āraṇyaka 1.12.3.58)

[O Indra! Do come here.]

Were a *deva* such as Indra to be an embodied entity, he would need to arrive physically at the spot concerned

to accept the sacrificial offerings. While this may appear unproblematic, suppose that while a person performs a sacrifice here, another person engages in that rite at Kashi, another in Kashmir and yet another at Sringeri. Then that *deva* would have to be bodily present at all these places at the same time. This is impossible. So, the *devas* cannot be beings with bodies.

Bhagavatpāda's response is as follows. Just because concurrent presence at diverse locations is unfeasible for you, why do you claim that this is impossible for a *deva* also? Even a human *yogin* who has acquired the extraordinary powers specified in the *Yoga-śāstra* by dedicatedly resorting to the means prescribed therein can, by taking up multiple bodies, be and function at various spots at the same time. It is said:

आत्मनो वै शरीराणि बहूनि भरतर्षभ ।

योगी कुर्याद्बलं प्राप्य तैश्च सर्वैर्महीं चरेत् ॥

प्राप्तुयाद्विषयान्कैश्चित्कैश्चिदुग्रं तपश्चरेत् ।

संक्षिपेच्च पुनस्तानि सूर्यो रश्मिगणानिव ॥

(Cited as *smṛti* in the *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya* on *sūtra* 1.3.

27. *Vāyu-purāṇa* 2.5.148-149 has similar wording.)

[Having got the power of yoga, a yogin can, O best of the Bharatas, form many bodies for himself and move around in the world with them. Through some, he may acquire objects; by means of some, he may engage in intense penance. And then he may withdraw all of them, like the (setting) sun its host of rays.]

By the power of his will, a *yogin* can form many bodies, simultaneously be and function independently at distinct locations through them and then withdraw them. When a *yogin* can do so, why should it be inconceivable that the *devas* can form multiple bodies for themselves and, through them, be simultaneously present physically at various places at the rites there?

Invisibility of the *Devas*

The *Mīmāṃsaka* then argues: If the *devas* are really corporeal entities who come to where sacrifices are performed, they should be perceived there. However, they are beheld by none.

Bhagavatpāda's response is: They are unperceived not because they are not bodily present but since they opt to be invisible by exercising their power to be so.

I recall remarking in a lighter vein some time ago that it makes sense for a *deva* such as Indra to not manifest himself before people because if he were to do so, they would not let him depart peacefully after accepting their offerings and would beleague him with a plethora of requests for favours!

To recapitulate, the *Vedāntin* rebuts the *Mīmāṃsaka's* objections against the *devas* being embodied beings by showing that the corporeality of the *devas* is no bar to their being present simultaneously at multiple places and by also accounting for their not being seen there.

Reliability of the Corroborative Passages about the *Devas*

Countered in his attempts to show that there would be problems if the *devas* are corporeal, the *Mīmāṃsaka* endeavours to deracinate the very basis on which the *Vedāntin* holds that the *devas* are corporeal entities. He contends as follows:

The *Vedic* accounts of the *devas* are but *arthavādas*, corroborative passages. As per the canons of *Vedic* interpretation, the primary purpose of any *arthavāda*

is to favour some *Vedic* injunction or prohibition and not to make known something on its own. Thus, you cannot rely upon the *Vedic* narratives, as you have done, to determine that the *devas* are corporeal entities.

Bhagavatpāda's response is: It is true that the stories are *arthavādas* and their primary purpose is something other than what they directly describe. Nevertheless, just because the primary purpose of an *arthavāda* is something else, it does not follow that what it makes known should be disbelieved. Suppose a man sets out to procure something and, on his way to the shop, sees a stone on the wayside. Should his perception of the stone be set aside just because this was not the primary aim of his going out? Surely not. Though incidental, his perception is valid and one should accept that a stone does lie there. In like manner, though a *Vedic* narrative's primary purpose is something else, what it itself conveys may be accepted.

To this, the *Mīmāṃsaka* says: I concede that though perception of the stone was not the person's primary

goal, it must be lent credence. However, the example is inapt here, for, unlike perception that shows something on its own, an *arthavāda* conveys something valid only in conjunction with a *Vedic* injunction or prohibition and not as separate from the latter. Consider, for instance, the statement, ‘If one wishes to go to hell, one should drink wine.’ It would surely be incorrect to separate the portion, ‘One should drink wine’ from, ‘If one wishes to go to hell’ and understand that drinking is prescribed here. The correct sense can be arrived at only from the sentence as a whole. Similarly, an *arthavāda* and an injunction mean something as a unit but you view an *arthavāda* separately and conclude something from it about the *devas*; this is on par with directing attention to just the sentential segment, ‘One should drink wine.’

Bhagavatpāda’s reply is: Unlike a sentence’s elements, an injunction and an *arthavāda* are syntactically distinct and do have appropriate meanings of their own. For instance, consider the following *Vedic* passage:

वायव्यं श्वेतमालभेत भूतिकामः वायुर्वै क्षेपिष्ठा देवता वायुमेव स्वेन भाग-
धेयेनोपधावति स एवैनं भूर्तिं गमयति (*Taittirīya-saṁhitā* 2.1.1.1)

[*He who desires prosperity should touch a white goat, dedicated to Vāyu. (The implicit injunction is that he should perform a sacrifice with Vāyu as its deity.) Vāyu is the swiftest deity. The sacrificer quickly approaches Vāyu with the latter's special offering. Vāyu surely makes him attain prosperity.*]

The injunction 'vāyavyam śvetam ālabheta bhūtikāmaḥ' (He who is desirous of prosperity should touch a white goat, dedicated to Vāyu)' is a separate sentence and the *arthavāda*, 'Vāyur vai kṣepiṣṭhā devatā' (Vāyu is the swiftest deity)' is another complete sentence and both have independent meanings; the implied meaning of the former is that one should perform a sacrifice with Vāyu as its deity, while the latter points out that Vāyu moves very swiftly. Next, while you insist that the words of an *arthavāda* must be united with those of an injunction or prohibition, not only do the *arthavāda* and the injunction being considered have apt meanings of their own, their words do not gel with one another. For instance, if the verb in the injunction and a noun in the *arthavāda* were read together, one would have, 'vāyuh ālabheta - Vāyu should touch or (by implication) Vāyu should perform

a sacrifice.’ Alternatively, one would have, ‘*kṣepiṣṭhā devatā ālabheta* - The fastest deity should touch or (by implication) the fastest deity should perform a sacrifice.’ Clearly, both these combinations are gratuitous here. Thus, unlike your claim, an *arthavāda* does have its own meaning and its words do not form a syntactically apt single sentence with the words of the injunction.

The connection between the *arthavāda* and injunction under consideration comes to light as follows. First their individual imports – ‘Vāyu is the swiftest deity’ and, ‘He who desires prosperity should perform a sacrifice with Vāyu as its deity’ – are apprehended. The question then arises as to what the purpose of the statement about Vāyu’s swiftness is? The answer is that its purpose is to eulogise the injunction about performing a sacrifice in honour of Vāyu by presenting the notable nature of Vāyu and, thereby, commending the prescribed rite as one with a distinguished deity. As Vāyu is presented as the swiftest deity, it could be conceived that he who performs the prescribed sacrifice with Vāyu as its deity will obtain his desired fruit of prosperity quickly. Thus,

an *arthavāda* does have a meaning of its own and it is through this meaning, which can well involve the *devas*, that it serves to corroborate an injunction or prohibition¹.

Arthavādas are of three kinds. Some state what runs counter to what is known through some other means of valid knowledge such as perception; this kind of *arthavāda* is termed '*guṇavāda* (an attributive or a figurative statement)'. An example is:

¹ A *Vedic* story was referred to earlier about Agni fleeing with the wealth deposited with him for safekeeping by the *devas* and of their catching up with him and forcing him to part with it. The continuation of the narrative is that Agni wept, the tears that fell from his eyes became silver and that as silver arose from his tears, there is weeping before the passing of a year in the house of any one who gifts silver in a *barhis* sacrifice. This *arthavāda* is followed by the prohibition that silver should not be gifted (in the sacrifice). The purpose of this *arthavāda* is to favour the scriptural prohibition; nonetheless, it has a meaning of its own and its words do not syntactically combine with those of the prohibition to form a unitary sentence.

Another story that was mentioned was that of Agni hiding in water as he was afraid that he too would, like his three elder brothers, die of fatigue owing to repeatedly carrying sacrificial offerings to the *devas* and of a fish exposing him to the *devas*. The continuation of the narrative is that Agni agreed to resume his work upon the *devas* agreeing to his condition that any offerings that fall outside the boundary of the sacrificial fire should go to his brothers. What follows is the injunction that one should put a boundary (around the sacrificial fire with three faggots). While the aim of the *arthavāda* is to favour the injunction, it does have a meaning of its own and its words and those of the injunction are not the syntactical constituents of one sentence.

आदित्यो यूपः (*Taittirīya-brāhmaṇa* 2.1.5.2)

[*The sacrificial post is the sun.*]

It is stated that the sacrificial post is the sun. Perception, however, reveals that the solar orb in the heavens and the sacrificial post are not identical. Such statements of the *Veda* are figurative.

Another type of *arthavāda* comprises *Vedic* statements that convey what is independently known by means of some other means of valid knowledge, such as direct perception; this is called '*anuvāda* (restatement)'. An illustration of this is:

अग्निर्हिमस्य भेषजम् (*Taittirīya-saṁhitā* 7.4.18.2)

[*Fire is a remedy for frosty weather.*]

The import is that in the proximity of fire, chillness is not felt. This is known to us without the *Veda* telling us.

The third kind of *arthavāda* expresses what is neither contradicted by another means of knowledge, such as perception, nor is a reiteration of what is known; this type is labelled '*bhūtārthavāda*'. The *arthavādas* that point to the *devas* being corporeal beings are of this type.

Bhagavatpāda points out that as what is made known by these is not at odds with what is known through any other means of knowledge, it is but proper that it be accepted. Thus, the *arthavādas* of the kind seen about Vāyu and Indra do prove the existence of corporeal *devas*.

Direct Interaction with the *Devas* by Sages

Scriptural texts like the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* report that great sages such as Vyāsa directly dealt with the *devas*. This confirms that the *devas* do have bodies, for, were they to be bodiless, such contacts could not have occurred.

The *Mīmāṃsaka*'s rejoinder to this is: These accounts must be viewed as fictional, for we do not come across interactions with the *devas* of the kind that Vyāsa and some others are supposed to have had with them in the days of yore.

The counter to this is: People of the present times like you lack the competence to apprehend and commune

with the *devas*. Just because you are unable to directly interact with them, how can you conclude that none could have done so at any time?

According to the *Dharma-śāstra*:

गर्भाष्टमेषु ब्राह्मणमुपनयीत ॥ (*Vasiṣṭha-dharmasūtra* 11.49)

[*One should perform the upanayana (investiture with the sacred thread and initiation into the Gāyatrī-mantra) of a Brāhmaṇa in the eighth year after conception.*]

Parents now ignore this scriptural instruction that they should invest their sons with the sacred thread at the age of eight years, counted from the time of conception. Seeing this, would you conclude that this was always the case? If so, it would follow that, as far as you are concerned, the scriptural instruction about the time of investiture is itself redundant. The norm now is: People do not study their branch of the *Veda* as ordained. That, surely, does not imply that the study of the *Veda* was ever neglected like this. In general, people nowadays disregard the scriptural dicta about *dharma*. Because of this, would you decide that this was ever the case? If so, it would be tantamount to your viewing the very

scriptural commandments as largely uncalled for. That would be improper indeed. Similarly, based on your not having seen and conversed with the *devas*, you ought not to dismiss the accounts in the scriptural texts like the *Mahābhārata* about the interactions of great sages such as Vyāsa with them. Their perception substantiates the corporality of the *devas*.

The *Yoga-śāstra* and Common Belief about the *Devas*

The *Yoga-śāstra* teaches that:

स्वाध्यायादिष्टदेवतासंप्रयोगः ॥ (*Yogasūtra* 2.44)

[As a result of study (that consists of the perusal of texts on liberation or the repetition of a holy mantra), there is communion with the desired deity.]

As a result of the intense repetition of a *mantra*, one can see and talk with one's desired deity. The communion involves a *deva* physically appearing before the *yogin*.

Further, common belief, which should not be summarily poo-h-pooed if its validity is probable, is that the *devas* do have forms. Thus, artists depict Indra as holding a thunderbolt in his hand and Varuṇa as bearing a noose.

Quest for Knowledge of the *Devas*

As the *Vedas* make known that the *devas* are embodied beings and this is supported by scriptural texts such as the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*, by the *Yoga-sāstra* and by common belief, obdurate denial of this should be eschewed and their corporality accepted as a fact. Since they have bodies, they are in a position to resort to the means, such as hearing the truth from a *Guru*, to attain the realisation of *Brahman*.

A possible objection is: As divine enjoyments are ever theirs, there is no question of their thirsting for and, so, pursuing the knowledge of *Brahman*.

It is feasible for a *deva*, who possesses intelligence, to someday or the other, become disenchanted with the glut of heavenly pleasures because of his recognising, 'These enjoyments are but transient and finite and my stay in heaven is itself temporary. It is only the bliss of liberation that is unending and infinite. Thus, only that is worthwhile.' With the dawn of firm dispassion through right understanding, he would turn away from the

pleasures and, becoming intent upon liberation, strive for realisation, its sole means.¹

That there is no way to get liberation except through the knowledge of *Brahman* is made clear by the *Veda* as follows:

नान्यः पन्था विद्यतेऽयनाय ॥ (Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 6.15)

[*There is no other path to liberation.*]

This is a rule without exceptions. Referring explicitly to the *devas*, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* declares:

तद्यो यो देवानां प्रत्यबुध्यत स एव तदभवत्

(*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10)

[*Whoever among the devas realised Brahman, became Brahman.*]

The import is that only the *devas* who realised *Brahman* attained liberation.

Exhortation

When the exalted *devas* themselves have to secure the knowledge of *Brahman* to become liberated and to do

¹ The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (8.7.1 - 8.12.6), for instance, states that Indra sought Prajāpati to know the Self, served him for 101 years as a celibate pupil and became enlightened.

so have to dedicatedly practise the means for the said knowledge to dawn, need it be said that humans too need to do so?

Having heard Me speak about knowledge being vital for liberation, people have asked me to tell them some shortcut to become enlightened and liberated in a trice. There is no such way. Realization is not something that can be had at the drop of a hat and, in the case of one, who is at the beginning of the path to it, many lives of effort are required. Thus, the Lord has said:

अनेकजन्मसंसिद्धस्ततो याति परां गतिम् ॥ (*Bhagavadgītā* 6.45)

[Perfected in the course of many lives, he attains the supreme goal.]

If we begin to duly and diligently strive to advance in the path to realization, which alone results in liberation, we will reach the goal at least after several births; sans effort, however, liberation will not be ours even after aeons. May all of you understand the path well and, by conducting yourselves suitably, attain blessedness.

हर नमः पार्वतीपतये हर हर महादेव

Light on the Path to Enlightenment

Invocation

ममाद्यदेवो वटमूलवासी कृपाविशेषात्कृतसन्निधानः ।
ओङ्काररूपामुपदिश्य विद्यामाविद्यकध्वान्तमपाकरोतु ॥

(Bhagavatpāda's *Dakṣiṇāmūrti-stotra* 5)

[Out of extreme compassion, the primeval God who dwells at the base of a fig tree (that is, Śiva in the form of Dakṣiṇāmurti) has manifested before me. May He impart to me knowledge that is characterized by 'Om' and remove my darkness of ignorance.]

The Path to Emancipation

One should duly perform the actions ordained for one by the scripture and acquire purity of the mind, then one should approach a *Guru*, hear about the Truth, reflect upon It through reasoning, steadfastly focus on It and, thereby, realize It and become emancipated; this is the settled view of the scripture. Several possible doubts that might arise in this regard have been tersely raised and resolved by Sage Vyāsa and dealt with in depth by Bhagavatpāda.

A Query on the Eligibility to Secure Knowledge

The triad beginning with the hearing of the Truth is the proximate means to realization. One becomes fit for it only after acquiring purity of mind; mental purity stems from the diligent performance of one's duties, ordained by the scripture. Such being the case, a question arises about those who are ineligible to perform the scriptural rites. Can they strive for and obtain enlightenment or not? This is enquired into and ascertained in the *Brahmasūtras*.¹

The scriptures stipulate that only a *gṛhastha*, a married man with a living wife, can perform *yāgas*, sacrifices; wealth and relevant resources are also needed. So, those who do not belong to any of the four *āśramas*², stages of life, such as widowers, and householders too

¹ अन्तरा चापि तु तद्दृष्टेः - And those standing between two stages of life are also entitled to knowledge, as such cases are met with in the *Upaniṣads* (*Brahmasūtra* 3.4.36). अपि च स्मर्यन्ते - Moreover, the *smṛtis* too mention such cases (*Brahmasūtra* 3.4.37)

² The four *āśramas* are (a) *brahmacarya-āśrama*, the stage of a celibate, of one invested with the sacred thread and dwelling with and learning from a preceptor (b) *gṛhastha-aśrama*, the stage of a householder (c) *vānaprastha-aśrama*, the stage of one who has retired to a forest and (d) *saṁnyāsa-aśrama*, the stage of a monk.

who are bereft of wealth and other resources cannot engage in *Vedic* sacrifices. Is it possible for such people too to attain salvation? Or are they are completely unfit for the path of liberation? This is the issue.

Alternative Means to Acquire Purity of the Mind

The opponent deems widowers and others who cannot perform *Vedic* sacrifices to be ineligible. Conversely, Vyāsa and Bhagavatpāda have taken exception to this extreme position and categorically stated that despite their disqualification to perform sacrifices, they too can definitely practise certain alternative means such as the repetition of a *mantra*, fasting and the worship of God. As these means do confer mental purity and can be resorted to by all, the path to knowledge and, thus, liberation is not ruled out for those ineligible for *Vedic* sacrifices.

Efficacy of Repeating a *Mantra*

The scripture lauds the efficacy of repeating a *mantra*:

जप्येनैव तु संसिध्येद्ब्राह्मणो नात्र संशयः ।

कुर्यादन्यन्न वा कुर्यान्मैत्रो ब्राह्मण उच्यते ॥ (Manu-smṛiti 2.87)

[A Brāhmaṇa attains perfection through the repetition of a mantra itself; there is no doubt about this. Let him engage in rites or let him not. He is said to be a friend of beings (as this does not involve injuring any being).]

When one repeats a *mantra* with faith and firmness, one's mind becomes pure, regardless of whether one can and does engage in rites and such else or not. Becoming pure-minded, such a person surely qualifies for taking up the means to knowledge, such as hearing about the Truth. Like the repetition of a *mantra*, fasts and worship of God too are purifiers of the mind and can be universally resorted to and everyone can engage in them on one's own.

However, as noted, to engage in sacrifices, a person needs to have his spouse by his side. The rule is:

स्त्रीपुंसयोः सहाधिकारः

(*Śābara-bhāṣya* on *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* 6.3.12)

[A man and his wife have joint eligibility for a sacrifice.]

This implies that a widower is unfit to perform *Vedic* sacrifices. Nevertheless, as there is no restriction on

widowers and such others who do not belong to any of the four *āśramas* to repeat a *mantra*, fast or engage in the worship of God, they too can, through such means, acquire purity of the mind and qualify for the path of knowledge. The scripture does not shut the door upon them; contrariwise, in keeping with one's competence, it presents every one with spiritual practices by means of which one can cleanse one's mind and move ahead.

Wisdom of People Outside the Four Stages of Life

It can be discerned from the *Upaniṣads* that even some of those who did not belong to any of the four *āśramas* were knowers of *Brahman*.

For instance, as per the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*,¹ when Sage Yājñavalkya was being tested by savants in King Janaka's court on his knowledge of the Truth, a lady named Gārgī, the daughter of Vacaknu, challenged him with a pair of deep questions about *Brahman*; she told the assembled scholars that were he to be able to answer her queries, they would have to admit that none

¹ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (3.8.1 - 3.8.12)

could best him in the exposition of Brahman. While he was able to convincingly answer her, what is pertinent here is that she was able to so quiz him about the Truth and that too in the assembly of those who were highly knowledgeable about scriptural matters. Obviously, she must have been rather conversant with Brahman to even dare to do so. Now, Gārgī was a spinster; the *Upaniṣad* does not state or hint that she had a husband. Thus, she did not belong to any of the four *āśramas*. Not being a member of any *āśrama*, she was ineligible to tread the path of scriptural rites and thereby acquire the purity of mind needed to tread the path of knowledge. Yet, as she did have scriptural wisdom, it may be presumed that she must have, through diligent recourse to some other means, become possessed of the mental purity needed for her to know *Brahman*. The case of Gārgī is an instance met with in the scripture of a person outside the *āśramas* who, nonetheless, became knowledgeable about *Brahman*.

The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* speaks of a sage named Raikva who imparted the *saṁvarga-vidyā* (a specific

meditation on two places of merger) to King Jānaśruti.¹ Raikva (who was associated with a cart) did not belong to any *āśrama*; he was not a celibate pupil learning from a preceptor or a householder or one retired to the forest or a monk. Nonetheless, he was a knower of the Truth and it may be presumed that he must have earlier resorted to means other than sacrifices and the like for which he was ineligible.

To sum up, a question was taken up in the *Brahma-sūtras* as to whether those who do not belong to any of the four *āśramas* specified by the scripture are eligible to engage in spiritual practices for enlightenment. The prima facie view was that they are not eligible, while the final position was that they are. The conclusion relied upon instances encountered in the scripture of some persons who did not belong to any *āśrama* but were, knowers of *Brahman* and upon the scripture having prescribed means such as the repetition of a *mantra* which purify the mind and are widely accessible.

¹ *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (4.1.3 - 4.3.4)

Prohibition of Reversion to an Earlier *Āśrama*

Another issue pertaining to the stages of life is taken up in a subsequent section of the *Brahmasūtras*.¹ A spiritual aspirant takes up *saṁnyāsa* to hear the Truth, reflect upon it through reasoning and steadfastly focus upon It and, thereby, become enlightened. After all, it is only a *saṁnyāsīn* who can invest the maximum time and effort in the pursuit of knowledge, unlike a *grhastha* who has many ordained rites to perform and familial responsibilities to fulfil. Thus, a scriptural prescription is:

संन्यस्य श्रवणं कुर्यात् (Cited in works such as the
Yatidharma-prakāśa; source not extant)

[*Having renounced, one should resort to hearing the Truth.*]

Ostensibly, a person took up *saṁnyāsa* in the pursuit of enlightenment. Unfortunately, however, he developed second thoughts about his new stage of life. He mused, 'I could not perform all the sacrifices that I wished to

¹ तद्भूतस्य तु नातद्भावो जैमिनेरपि नियमात्तदूपाभावेभ्यः - But for one who has become a monk, there can be no reversion to an earlier stage of life on account of restriction, the absence of sanction by a scriptural text and the absence of good precedents. This is the view (of not only Bādarāyaṇa but of) Jaimini also. (*Brahmasūtra* 3.4.40)

when I was a *gr̥hastha*. So let me revert to being a householder to punctiliously perform more *Vedic* rites.’ Another, who became a *saṁnyāsin* contemplated on reverting to the stage of a householder as he missed worldly enjoyments. In the *Brahmasūtras*, it is settled whether a monk has the option to revert to the stage of a householder. Vyāsa and Bhagavatpāda spell out that there is no such choice available to a *saṁnyāsin*.

The scripture does not permit a *saṁnyāsin* to become a *gr̥hastha* again, whether due to his desire to perform rites or to a longing for worldly pleasures. Its instruction is:

ब्रह्मचर्यं (परि)समाप्य गृही भवेत् गृही भूत्वा वनी भवेत् वनी भूत्वा प्रव्रजेत् ।

(*Jābāla Upaniṣad* 4)

[*Completing the stage of celibacy, he should become a householder. Having been a householder, he should go to the stage of a forest-dweller. After being a forest-dweller, he should renounce (and live as a monk).*]

First, one should become a *brahmacārin*, then go on to be a *gr̥hastha*, then become a *vānaprastha* (one who has retired to the forest) and, finally, take recourse to *saṁnyāsa*. While the scripture explicitly sanctions, as

in the passage cited, ascent to the next stage of life, it never permits reversion to an earlier stage, such as from that of a *samnyāsin* to that of a householder. Even the conduct of noble persons of the past is not at all in favour of one turning back to an earlier *āśrama*.

What is prescribed by the scripture constitutes one's *dharma* and not what merely appeals to one. Here is a worldly example. Three students who were studying in class two, seven and nine appeared for an examination conducted in a school. At the examination hall, all the three were given their respective question papers. The ninth-standard lad found his paper difficult to answer. He took the question paper from the seventh-standard student and answered all the questions extremely well. When the results were announced, the ninth-standard boy was shaken to find that he had failed. Disappointed, he lamented to his parents, teachers and others, 'How unfair! I answered all the questions so very well and, yet, the examiner has failed me'. All were perplexed why a student who supposedly answered all the questions correctly did not pass. An enquiry was conducted and it

came to light that while the boy had indeed answered all the questions well, what he had answered were not those from his question paper but from the one given to the student of the seventh standard and that is why he had been assigned zero marks and failed. The student was strictly told that he cannot pick up any question paper at will and answer it because he is comfortable with it; he must answer only the question paper meant for him.

Similarly, a person in any stage of life will stand to gain only if he adheres to what is prescribed for him in the scripture; he cannot backpedal from his current *āśrama* to an earlier one on a whim. The Lord has declared:
 श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् । (Bhagavadgītā 3.35)
 [One's own duty, though lacking in merit, is superior to the well-discharged duty of another.]

Even though you may not be able to follow to the last letter what is prescribed for you by the scripture, you will do well to perform your own *dharma*, to the extent possible. Performing the *dharma* of another even well will do you no good. The scripture is the final authority

for us when it comes to deciding what is righteous and what is not. By doing what one is not entitled to do, one would not only not profit, one would incur sin. By quitting the *saṁnyāsa-āśrama* for domestic life, one would get only demerit.

To recapitulate, Vyāsa has stated and Bhagavatpāda has explicated that a *saṁnyāsīn* cannot defect from monasticism and revert to the *gṛhastha-āśrama* even due to a desire to perform *Vedic* rites; this is because while the scripture sanctions progression from one to the next of the four *āśramas*, it nowhere allows descent from an *āśrama* to an earlier one; the conduct of the noble ones of the past is also not of this kind.

A Knower's Childlike State

The *Brahmasūtras*¹ clarify how a person who has learnt the Truth well from his *Guru* and the scripture should conduct himself. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* says:

¹ अनाविष्कुर्वन्नन्वयात् - (The word 'bālya, childlike state' in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* means that a knower should, like a child, behave) without any ostentation, for this is what accords with the context. (*Brahmasūtra* 3.4.50)

तस्माद्ब्राह्मणः पाण्डित्यं निर्विद्य बाल्येन तिष्ठासेत् ।

(*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.5.1)

[Therefore, he who has known about the Truth from the scripture and the Guru should, having mastered scholarship (about the Self), seek to remain like a child.]

The teaching of the *Upaniṣad* here is that after hearing the Truth repeatedly and comprehending the essence of *Vedānta* clearly, one should remain like a child. A babe consumes anything that attracts it and answers the calls of nature anywhere and whenever it feels an urge to do so. It is unconcerned with and unfettered by any rules about what to eat and what not to and about urinating and defecating. When the *Upaniṣad* says that a knower should be like a child, does it mean that he should, like a child, behave in an unrestrained manner? 'Yes,' is the prima facie view considered by Vyāsa and Bhagavatpāda. Its crux is that the word 'bālyā (the state of a child)' employed by the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* suggests unregulated conduct.

A pseudo-*vedāntin* argues: 'Injunctions and prohibitions are only for the ignorant. Having repeatedly heard the

Truth, I know It and, therefore, am beyond them. The scripture itself has laid down that that a knower should be akin to a child and so, I ought to behave like a baby, with no care about any regulation.'

The Lord has said in the *Bhagavadgītā*:

या निशा सर्वभूतानां तस्यां जागर्ति संयमी ।

यस्यां जाग्रति भूतानि सा निशा पश्यतो मुनेः ॥ (*Bhagavadgītā* 2.69)

[In that which is night to all beings, the self-restrained one is awake. That wherein beings are awake is night to the sage who sees.]

A person mistakenly understood the import of this verse as, 'A knower must sleep when others are wide awake and be awake when others are asleep'¹ and decided, 'Engaged as I am in assimilating the knowledge of the Truth, I will, henceforth, sleep during the day, for that is when others are awake.' What can we say about such a misinterpretation and conclusion? Even a dog keeps

¹ The correct import of the verse: The self-restrained man is awake in the Truth, which, being beyond the range of vision of those who are devoid of wisdom, appears to be night, as it were, to the unenlightened ones. That night of ignorance, in which the creatures are awake, like in a dream, is night to the sage who perceives the Truth, because that night is ignorance by nature.

awake during the night and rests during the day. The Lord is not advocating that a wise man should be like it. The *prima facie* view mentioned earlier, and illustrated through the words of a pseudo-*Vedāntin*, is a gross misinterpretation of the teaching of the *Upaniṣad*, much like the misinterpretation of the teaching of the Lord just considered.

Bhagavatpāda has, in the *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya*, refuted the false view that the instruction, ‘*bālyena tiṣṭhāset*, he should seek to remain in a childlike state’ prescribes childlike, unregulated conduct. He has also spelt out, in consonance with the words of Vyāsa, its correct import. A baby is free from ostentation and pride. The knower too should not give room to ostentation and pride; he should not flaunt his wisdom and virtuousness. It is said:
 जानन्नपि च मेघावी जडवल्लोक आचरेत् ॥ (Padma-purāna 5.110)
 [Though knowledgeable, a wise man should conduct himself like one who is dim-witted.]

Even by taking a cue from this verse, none of us should boast about our learning. There is so much more to be

learnt by us and God alone is all-knowing. Why then should we show off our knowledge, which is but little?

Reverting to the topic on hand, an infant is not smitten by lust nor does it harbour ill will towards anyone; one on the path to enlightenment too should be like that. Conceit is absent in a child and, it being detrimental, he should avoid it. Though truly knowledgeable, he should be unassuming. This is what the *Upaniṣad* indicates. Bhagavatpāda has, after setting aside the erroneous view, established the correct import of the passage and buttressed the final position by referencing several supportive, scriptural passages.

Would Liberating Knowledge Arise in This Life Itself?

A query that has been addressed in the *Brahmasūtras*¹ is about the time of fruition of the means to knowledge. Hearing the Truth, reflecting upon It through reasoning and steadfastly focusing upon It culminate in the dawn

¹ ऐहिकमप्यप्रस्तुतप्रतिबन्धे तद्दर्शनात् - The dawn of enlightenment occurs in this life itself if there is no obstruction to means adopted, because it is so seen from the scripture. (*Brahmasūtra* 3.4.51)

of enlightenment. The question referred to is whether knowledge would arise in the present life in which these means are properly taken up or only later.

The prima facie answer is that they must do so in the present life itself. After all, it is only to gain liberating knowledge now that anyone resorts to its means. No one does so with the aim, 'May knowledge arise in some future birth of mine.' A white umbrella is deemed to be an insignia of an emperor. No one who aspires to become a monarch in some future life would acquire the said umbrella in this birth itself, thinking, 'Though I cannot become a sovereign in this birth, let me procure the white umbrella now itself.' Similarly, none would resort to the means to knowledge in this birth to become enlightened in some future life. So, it must be admitted that enlightenment dawns in the very life in which the proximate means to it are practised.

The response in the *Brahmasūtras* to this objection is, 'If there are no impediments, a practitioner of the means to realization will attain it in this birth itself; else, he

will do so a subsequent birth only.’ How are we to know if there are obstacles to the dawn of realization? If a person attains enlightenment in this birth, it can be understood that the fruition of the means was not blocked by obstacles; if knowledge does not arise, then it can be discerned that there were impediments that precluded the means from fructifying.

There is no hard and fast rule that knowledge must arise in this life itself because one strives for it now. This is clear from the Lord’s words:

अनेकजन्मसंसिद्धस्ततो याति परां गतिम् ॥ (Bhagavadgītā 6.45)
[Perfected in the course of many lives, he attains the supreme goal.]

बहूनां जन्मनामन्ते ज्ञानवान्मां प्रपद्यते । (Bhagavadgītā 7.19)
[At the end of many lives, the man of mature knowledge attains Me.]

Though the example that none would procure a white umbrella now itself in anticipation of one’s becoming an emperor in a later life is valid, it does not fit the context. It cannot be said that one will never practise the means

like hearing about the Truth now because liberating knowledge may arise only in a future birth, for it would dawn in this very life if it were not strongly obstructed and one does not know beforehand whether there are such impediments or not. Hence, we should start practising the required means now itself and should never postpone doing so.

To sum up, Vyāsa's and Bhagavatpāda's answer to the query whether knowledge emerges in this very life in which its means are resorted to or whether it would do so in a later life is, 'Knowledge would arise in the present life, or in a subsequent one depending upon whether obstructions to its dawn are present or absent.'

Conclusion

In the *Brahmasūtras* and the *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya*, Vyāsa and Bhagavatpāda have kindly thrown light on various matters bearing on the path to enlightenment and the dawn of knowledge. Attaining emancipation by realizing *Brahman* should be our ultimate goal and, for this, we should practise, without laxity, the disciplines

that are appropriate to each of us. It is to enable us to finally reach the goal that Bhagavatpāda has blessed us with His *bhāṣyas* and resolved the possible doubts that might arise and answered the various objections that have been raised. We should familiarize ourselves with His expositions, assiduously adhere to our spiritual disciplines and make our lives meaningful.

हर नमः पार्वतीपतये हर हर महादेव

Enlightenment Ever Results in Emancipation

Invocation

उपासते यं मुनयः शुकाद्या निराशिषो निर्ममताधिवासाः ।
तं दक्षिणामूर्तितनुं महेशमुपास्महे मोहमहार्तिशान्त्यै ॥

(Bhagavatpāda's *Dakṣiṇāmūrti-stotra* 12)

[*For the quelling of the affliction of great delusion, we worship the great Lord in the form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti who is worshiped by the sages such as Śuka who are free from desires and the sense of 'mine'.*]

A Doubt about Enlightened Persons Reincarnating

An enquiry in the *Brahmasūtras* and the *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya* is aimed at substantiating the scriptural position that enlightenment consistently results in emancipation.

A detractor throws into question the *Vedāntic* dictum that the realization of *Brahman* ever results in liberation, which is characterized by freedom from rebirth. Viewing any doubt here as unwarranted, Bhagavatpāda points out, 'Your reservation is unfounded. It is inapt to have any misgiving about the genesis of an effect when its

cause is there in full force. When a cook confirms that all the materials and means for cooking are at hand, would anyone wonder if rice can be readied? When a person is already eating a sumptuous meal, would one be sceptical about his hunger being appeased? In like manner, there is no ground for even an iota of doubt that the realization of the Supreme results in liberation.'

The disputant says, 'I perused the *Purāṇas*, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* and it is only upon my doing so that I formed my view about the shakiness of the relationship between knowledge and liberation. If the inviolable rule is that when a person realizes *Brahman*, he becomes rid of any future births, how is it that we find instances in such authoritative texts of even realized souls being reborn? Hence, I contend that knowledge may or may not result in emancipation.' He proceeds to spell out the basis of his view as follows:

The *Mahābhārata* conveys that a seer, teacher of the *Vedas* and a knower of *Brahman* named Apāntarā-tamas was reborn at the close of the *Dvāpara-yuga* as

Vyāsa¹. Being a knower of the Supreme, he ought to have, if knowledge decidedly results in liberation, not been reborn. How then did he reincarnate as Vyāsa?

Similarly, the *Purāṇas* and the *Itihāsas* report that Sage Vaśiṣṭha, a knower of *Brahman*, moved on to another body; the metempsychosis of enlightened ones such as Nārada and Bṛgu too finds mention in the scripture.² Hence, it is apt to take it that enlightenment sometimes results in liberation and sometimes does not.

A Knower of Brahman with a mission may be reborn

Bhagavatpāda's comprehensive reply to the disputant that enlightenment reliably results in liberation is on the following lines:

Notwithstanding the instances you drew attention to of realized souls reincarnating, there is indeed no room for doubt as regards liberation inevitably ensuing from the

¹ *Mahābhārata* (12.337.38 – 12.337.57). The account is in the form of a recapitulation by Vyāsa. Viṣṇu, according to him, even specified to Apāntaratamas the details of his future life as Vyāsa.

² In several texts. Example: *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (9.13.1 – 9.13.5) - Vasiṣṭha lost his body due to a curse of King Nimi and took birth as the offspring of Mitrāvarūṇa and Ūrvaśī.

realization of the Supreme. You posed, for example, a question about Apāntaratamas, a knower of *Brahman* being reborn as Vyāsa, to substantiate your point that knowledge does not ever result in liberation. The reason for his reincarnation, however, was only that God had entrusted him with the sacred mission of codifying and promulgating the Vedas and it was to complete this God-given assignment that Apāntaratamas voluntarily took birth as Vyāsa.

One is reborn since one has to experience the fruits of one's good and sinful acts. Actions are grouped under three heads: '*sañcita-karma*, the host of actions done in the past that have not begun to bear fruit and will do so in future lives'; '*āgāmi-karma*, the actions done in future in this life and, in the case of an enlightened one, is the set of good and bad actions done after the rise of the knowledge of the Supreme'; and '*prārabdha-karma*, the set of actions of the past that have begun fructifying and account for the present life.' As per the scripture, with the dawn of enlightenment, the host of actions of the past that have yet to begin fructifying

are annulled; also, anything done in the present life after enlightenment is no more capable of causing rebirth. Those actions that have already begun to give rise to their results have to be exhausted by the knower by experiencing their fruits. With such actions finishing their job and the enlightened person's physical death, there is no other action to be experienced by him and, therefore, there is no occasion for him to reincarnate.

What about those who have not known *Brahman*? They have the host of past actions that have yet to bear fruit and also the merit and demerit acquired in the present life to ensure that they have future births. As in the case of the enlightened one, they exhaust the actions that gave rise to their present bodies by experiencing their results, up to the time of their passing away.

Apāntaratamas, like any other enlightened one, had no actions of the past left to cause rebirth, and did not accumulate any new merit or demerit either. Again, like any other knower of the Supreme, as also an ordinary person, he had to experience the fruits of and exhaust

those actions that had begun to bear fruit. A notable difference between him and other enlightened souls in general is that the actions that had begun to fructify did not end with the fall of his body but lasted till the completion of the task assigned by God. So, his case is no exception to the rule that knowledge liberates. The others referred to by you are on a similar footing.

I shall give you an example to help you appreciate this. A board put up in a school specifies the school's timings as 8.30 to 11 in the forenoon and 3 to 5 in the afternoon. So, no student or teacher needs to stay in the school premises beyond 5 p.m. However, a particular teacher continues to take classes for his students till 6 p.m. Let us suppose that, seeing this, a person complains, 'The timings displayed by the school authorities are false, for no teacher may actually leave the school at 5 p.m. This teacher is, after all, seen taking classes till 6 p.m. So, none should take the timings displayed seriously.' He would perhaps be told, 'You are mistaken. What has been specified in the board is correct. All may depart from the school at 5 p.m. As for the sole teacher who is

taking classes till 6 p.m., he is doing so to fulfil a task specially assigned to him by the headmaster; the latter has instructed him to complete the portions ahead of schedule. Apart from him, all the other teachers leave at 5 p.m. Since his staying late is for a specific purpose and is just temporary, you ought not to decide that the timings displayed are misleading.’ Like the headmaster of the example, God had entrusted the responsibility of codifying and promulgating the *Vedas* to Apāntarā-tamas and it was to complete the mission assigned to him by God that he took birth as Vyāsa. Moreover, he did so of his own volition and not helplessly because of any unspent actions of the past.

Astounding Powers of Great Souls

Persons entrusted with divine missions are capable of entering even many bodies simultaneously. The choice of entering the new bodies successively or concurrently is fully theirs. For instance, the scripture mentions that a great sage took up several bodies at the same time to rapidly exhaust the actions that had begun to bear fruit and were responsible for his birth.

In the *Śanti-parvan* of the *Mahābhārata*¹, it is reported that an exponent of the Supreme named Sulabhā, desired to converse with King Janaka. She travelled to Mithilā and presented herself before him as a mendicant. Refreshed and gratified by the hospitality offered to her, she, who possessed *yogic* powers, quit her gross body, entered Janaka's with her subtle body and started to converse with him. Janaka realized this and he too spoke with her internally. Perhaps as a rough parallel to this, you could think of present-day video-conferencing, where you are physically seated in one place but are virtually present and communicating with someone at a different place! After finishing her discussion with Janaka, Sulabhā told him, 'I shall remain inside your body tonight and return to mine tomorrow.' She did so like a guest expressing his desire to stay in our place overnight and leave for his own the next day!

Similarly, Apāntaratamas and such others specially entrusted with missions took up new bodies out of their

¹ *Mahābhārata* (12.308.4 – 12.308.191). The king of the story was Dharmadhvajajana, a disciple of Pañcaśikha, the great teacher of *Sāṅkhya*.

own volition, finished what God wanted them to do and then became disembodied once and for all and ever abided as just *Brahman*. As noted, even in their cases, emancipation did ensue directly from their knowledge of the Supreme.

***Veda*: Emancipation from Enlightenment Certain**

The scripture's word is final. An *Upaniṣadic* averment is:

तद्यो यो देवानां प्रत्यबुध्यत स एव तदभवत्तथर्षीणां तथा मनुष्याणाम्

(*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10)

[*Among the devas, and, likewise among the seers and humans, only those who realised Brahman, became It.*]

Whosoever has attained the Knowledge of *Brahman*, becomes liberated.

Another *Upaniṣadic* declaration is:

भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिश्छिद्यन्ते सर्वसंशयाः ।

क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन्दष्टे परावरे ॥

(*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 2.2.8)

[*When the Self, which is both superior and inferior, is realized, the knot of the heart gets untied, all doubts become solved and all one's actions perish.*]

When such is the unequivocal teaching of the *Veda* we have no right to be unsure about knowledge resulting in liberation in everyone's case, without any exception.

Emancipation Manifests Here and Now

At any rate, the liberation that is spoken of by the *Veda* is not something that the knower attains by taking a new body or by going to a different world; emancipation is accomplished here and now. The *Veda* imparts the vital teaching:

तत्त्वमसि (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.8.7)
[*You are that (Reality).*]

It says, 'You are *Brahman*.' This sentence does not mean, 'You will become *Brahman* after your death.' When you realize that you are indeed the Supreme, you become liberated. Since we do not have this realization now and are in the grip of ignorance, we have the false notion that we are bound. Even now we are *Brahman* only. What knowledge does is to dispel ignorance and not actually make one who is not *Brahman* now into *Brahman* and free one from real bondage. A standard example is worth citing at this juncture. A person was

sporting a rosary on his neck. Losing sight of the fact that it was right on his person, he thought that he had misplaced it. Worried, he kept searching for it all over. When someone pointed out to him that the string of beads was very much on his neck, he heaved a sigh of relief and joyfully exclaimed, 'Oh, I have now got back my rosary!' Where was the rosary misplaced in the first place for it to be traced again? It was very much there with him from the start. All that happened was that he lost sight of this fact and later realized it. Similar is the case of liberation through knowledge.

As stated, and this is worth repeating, we always are of the nature of *Brahman* but are now ignorant of this and, hence, are trapped, as it were, in the cycle of births and deaths. The moment the realization, 'I am *Brahman*' arises in us, we become liberated, as it were. We do not have to travel to any realm to become liberated. The case of going to heaven is different; it is not something that is attained here and now. So, a man of little faith may doubt if a *Vedic* sacrifice that draws to a close here will surely result in the sacrificer proceeding to heaven

after death. With regard to liberation, however, there is no room for any such uncertainty because the *Veda* asserts we are of the nature of *Brahman* even now and that emancipation is attained here itself, as the definite fruit of knowledge.

To sum up, enlightened ones such as Apāntaratamas reincarnate only to complete the missions entrusted to them by God. Until their missions are over, they move from one body to another with perfect liberty, without, as in the case of all knowers, accumulating new virtue or sin and with their entire store of past actions burnt up by the fire of knowledge. Only the actions that have already started to fructify that remain, as in the case of every knower of the Truth, till these finish yielding their results. The difference between other knowers and persons like Apāntaratamas is that such fructification ends not with the fall of their bodies, as in the case of the other knowers, but when their missions are over. They are then freed from a body once and for all, as is a normal knower upon death. Hence, even in these special persons, enlightenment does entail emancipation

and it is wrong to opine that the realization of *Brahman* may or may not liberate one. Vyāsa¹ and Bhagavatpāda have, in this manner, in brief and in depth respectively, thrown light on the liberation of the enlightened ones who are specially entrusted with great tasks by God.

Time of Death Immaterial for the Enlightened

We can now take up another issue. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, there are some verses that apparently talk about the significance of the time of death. The literal meaning of these verses is that a knower of *Brahman* who dies in the *uttarāyaṇa*, the six months of the northern solstice, does not return to the world. However, one who dies in the *dakṣiṇāyana*, the six months of the southern solstice, has to come back. The verses are:

अग्निर्ज्योतिरहः शुक्लः षण्मासा उत्तरायणम् ।

तत्र प्रयाता गच्छन्ति ब्रह्म ब्रह्मविदो जनाः ॥

धूमो रात्रिस्तथा कृष्णः षण्मासा दक्षिणायनम् ।

तत्र चान्द्रमसं ज्योतिर्योगी प्राप्य निवर्तते ॥

¹ यावदधिकारमवस्थितिराधिकारिकाणाम् – For those who have a mission to fulfil, there is corporeal existence till the completion of the mission (*Brahmasūtra* 3.3.32)

शुक्लकृष्णे गती ह्येते जगतः शाश्वते मते ।

एकया यान्त्यनावृत्तिमन्ययाऽऽवर्तते पुनः ॥ (*Bhagavadgītā* 8.24-26)

[Fire, light, day, the fortnight of the waxing moon, the six months of the northern solstice – going by this path after death, those who know Brahman attain Brahman. Smoke, night, the fortnight of the waning moon, the six months of the southern solstice – attaining through this path the lunar light, the yogin (the person who performs rites) returns (to the world after experiencing the fruit of his meritorious actions). These ‘white’ and ‘black’ courses of the world (so called because of the manifestation and non-manifestation of the knowledge of the Supreme) are indeed regarded as eternal. Through one, a person reaches the state of non-return (to transmigration); by the other, he returns again.]

Death is not in one’s control and a knower’s body may well fall off during the six months of the southern solstice. Since the Lord appears to have specified that a knower dying in the six months of the northern solstice will not reincarnate, the question arises as to whether he will be reborn were he to pass away in the other six months.

Next, because the Lord has spoken here of rebirth only with regard to death in the six months of the southern solstice, there is room for the query whether an ignorant men will attain liberation merely because he dies in the other six months. The answer to these questions is in the negative. These verses do not pertain to the person who has realized the Supreme *Brahman* and who is fit for immediate emancipation; the time of his death is immaterial in his case. [Bhagavatpāda has explained in His exegesis on the *Bhagavadgītā* that the terms ‘day (*ahas*)’, ‘night (*rātri*)’, ‘six months of the southern solstice (*dakṣiṇāyaṇa*)’, ‘six months of the northern solstice (*uttarāyaṇa*)’ and the like seen in these verses denote the deities presiding over these periods and not the times themselves; these presiding deities convey those who meditate on *Brahman* as qualified by attributes and those committed only to rites to their respective destinations after death.]

Rationale behind Bhīṣma Awaiting *Uttarāyaṇa*

In the *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya*, Bhagavatpāda has taken up this objection: If the time of death is not relevant in

the case of a knower of *Brahman*, why is it said in the *Mahābhārata* that Bhīṣma tarried for the advent of six months of the northern solstice to shed his body, though he was badly injured and was on a bed of arrows? He was clearly enlightened; his advices to Yudhiṣṭhira on the way to attain liberation in the *mokṣa-dharma* of the *Mahābhārata* evidence this. As he waited for the start of the northern solstice, it is apparent that the time of death is significant even for a knower of *Brahman*.¹

Bhagavatpāda's reply is as follows. There is no need for a knower to shed his mortal coil in the six months of the northern solstice to attain liberation. Bhīṣma's case is a special¹ one. When his father Śāntanu desired to wed Satyavatī, her father laid down two conditions. The first one was that Bhīṣma should not succeed his father to the throne and that the child born to Satyavatī and Śāntanu should alone become the ruler after Śāntanu. Bhīṣma agreed to this stipulation. The second condition was that not just Bhīṣma but his heirs too should not

¹ *Mahābhārata* (1.94.41 – 1.94.94)

stake any claim to the throne. Bhīṣma agreed to this too that he and vowed would not marry and, so, there would be no question of his children aspiring for kingship. Since both the conditions were unconditionally met by Bhīṣma, Satyawatī's father agreed to give his daughter in marriage to Śantanu. Greatly pleased with Bhīṣma's selfless conduct, Śantanu told him, 'You have given up all your pleasures for my sake. I possess the capacity to bestow boons and I now confer one on you. Death shall not approach you unless and until you choose to die.'

Death does not come to us at our will. However, Bhīṣma obtained the power to die whenever he wanted to by virtue of his father's boon. His waiting to die during the northern solstice was merely by way of showing respect to popular sentiment and for demonstrating the validity of his father's boon that his death would only be at a time of his choosing. It was certainly not because his liberation was contingent upon the time of his death. This discussion is found in Bhagavatpāda's exposition of Vyāsa's aphorism:

अतश्चायनेऽपि दक्षिणे ॥

(*Brahmasūtra* 4.2.20)

[For the said reason (that there is no need for any wait and as the fruit of knowledge is definite, one gets the result of knowledge) even when departing during the southern solstice.]

The northern and southern solstices are immaterial for an enlightened one to attain liberation.

My *Paramaguru*, Jagadguru Śrī Candraśekhara-bhāratī Mahāsvāmin, a great knower of *Brahman*, discarded His body in the month of *Bhādrapada*, which occurs in the six months of the southern solstice. Undoubtedly, He became liberated. Further, my own *Guru*, Jagadguru Śrī Abhinava Vidyātīrtha Mahāsvāmin, a pre-eminent knower of *Brahman* too shed His body in the month of *Bhādrapada*. Does this imply that He did not attain liberation? Not at all. The conclusion of the *Upaniṣads* is that the knower of the Supreme *Brahman* inevitably attains liberation.

Vyāsa, through the *Brahmasūtras*, and Bhagavatpāda, by His exhaustive and exquisite *bhāṣya* thereon, have

blessed us with details of all that we need to know about enlightenment, the path to it, and its fruit, liberation. It behoves us to benefit from them, acquire the knowledge of the Supreme and make our lives fruitful.

हर नमः पार्वतीपतये हर हर महादेव

The *Brahmasūtras* of Sage Bādarāyaṇa (traditionally identified with Sage Vyāsa) are one of the triad of canonical texts, the *Prasthāna-traya*, of the esteemed Vedānta school of philosophy. It would be no exaggeration to affirm that the *Brahmasūtras*, together with the *Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya*, the superb commentary thereon by Śrī Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda, occupy a pride of place in the system of *Advaita-vedānta*. Profound in thought, broad in scope, authoritative, invaluable for spiritual aspirants and a delight for scholars, the sutras and the *bhāṣya* have, from hundreds of years ago to this day, been traditionally taught and studied by monks and analysed and debated upon much in the assemblies of distinguished scholars of *Vedānta*.

His Holiness Jagadguru Śrī Bhārati-tīrtha Mahāsvāmin, the 36th Shankaracharya of the Dakshinamnaya Sringeri Sharada Peetham observed the *cāturmāsya-vrata* in Chennai from 3.7.2012 to 30.9.2012. Acquiescing to the prayers of His disciples, His Holiness delivered benedictory speeches on all Wednesdays, Sundays and on special occasions, except on *ekādaśī* days on which the Jagadguru observed silence. A nonpareil scholar of various *sāstras*, inclusive of *Nyāya* and *Vedānta*, His Holiness blessed His audience with 11 benedictory discourses on select portions of the *Brahma-sūtras* along with Bhagavatpāda's *bhāṣya* thereon. The talks were delivered in Tamil and each was of 30 minutes duration.

Notwithstanding the profundity and technicality of the subject matter, His Holiness, in His inimitable style, ensured that the import of the *sūtras* and the *bhāṣya* expounded by Him was easily intelligible to everyone who had the great good fortune of hearing Him. This book contains the aforesaid 11 speeches, edited and rendered into English. It is dedicated at the lotus feet of His Holiness, with *namaskāras* and apologies for the inadvertent errors in it.



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