

PREFACE

Brahmanirūpaṇa (also called *ātmanirūpaṇa*) and *Brahmamīmāṃsā* are the two facets of Vedāntic teaching. *Brahmanirūpaṇa* unfolds and ascertains the true nature of Brahman (identical with *ātmā* – the true ‘I’), the means to know Brahman and the result thereof. *Brahmamīmāṃsā* analytically establishes the exact and authentic nature of Brahman, the means to gain *Brahmajñāna* and the result of such knowledge. It is worth noting that a *mumukṣu* (a spiritual aspirant) with steadfast *sādhana* *catuṣṭaya-saṃpatti* (the requisite fourfold qualities) can gain *Brahmajñāna* even without taking to *Brahmamīmāṃsā*. However, the *Brahmasūtra*, a book dealing with *Brahmamīmāṃsā*, is one of the three canonical texts of Vedānta, as it satisfies the doubting and questioning human mind.

In the entire gamut of English Vedāntic literature to date, topics of vital importance such as the exact nature of *aparokṣa ātmajñāna/Brahmajñāna*, *Brahmasākṣātkāra*, *mokṣa* (liberation), the source and the nature of the Veda as *svataḥ-pramāṇam*, the *modus operandi* of Vedānta *pramāṇa*, the defectless *sāmagrīs* (prerequisites) necessary for the Vedānta *pramāṇa* to function, an analysis of when a *pramāṇa* fails to function, the role and the criterion of correctness of Vedāntic *prakriyās* (modes of teaching) are rarely described comprehensively with scriptural authenticity and corroboration. On the contrary, several wrong notions about these are found freely floating around based on mere hearsay. This lacuna prompted me to write this commentary, which is an outcome of thorough research. Moreover, I deem this to be

an opportunity for me to sharpen my own knowledge and resolve my doubts. To paraphrase the Vedāntic master Sureśvarācārya,

..... स्वबोधपरिशुद्ध्यर्थं ब्रह्मविन्निकषाशमसु ।

‘(This work has been composed by me) for the purpose of purifying my knowledge by testing it on the touchstone of the knowers of Brahman’ (*Nai.Si.* 1-6).

BRAHMAN

All Upaniṣads unequivocally declare that everything is Brahman. They also emphasize there is nothing other than Brahman. This is in direct contradiction with the universal experience of the world of multiplicity. The Vedas – the source of all the Upaniṣads – are the final *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge). The Vedas cannot be wrong. Both common experience and the pluralistic view of the world are therefore erroneous. This has to be set right. The *Brahmasūtras* provide the basis and means for rectifying the misapprehension (*bhrama*) regarding our universal experience of multiplicity.

What is Brahman? The following verse succinctly describes Brahman.

अशुभानि निराचष्टे तनोति शुभसन्ततिम् ।
स्मृतिमात्रेण यत्पुंसां ब्रह्म तन्मंगलं परम् ॥

Brahman is that, the direct knowledge of which frees us totally from all sorrows. It reveals the eternal limitless happiness (which is one's nature). It is the supreme good absolutely free from the limitations of time, space and objects.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF LIFE

Brahman is the independent self-existent, self-revealing, limitless happiness. It is free from all trace of sorrow. Without exception, all living beings seek only happiness (*sukhaprāpti*) and freedom from sorrows (*duḥkhanivṛtti*) in life. Given this fact, the direct cognition of Brahman becomes the *paramapurusaṛtha* – the ultimate goal in life.

An ignorant person may not appreciate the necessity of the pursuit of *Brahmajñāna* (the direct cognition of Brahman) since life offers a variety of avenues both to obtain enjoyment as well as freedom from sorrows - however fleeting. A mature person, however, realizes on closer scrutiny that there is neither permanent joy (*sukhaprāpti*) nor a total freedom from sorrows (*duḥkhanivṛtti*) through the known methods of *sādhanasādhyā* – achievement through action.

i) THE NATURE OF *MOKṢA* – LIBERATION

The following is a concise definition of liberation.

औपनिषदाः, तु भगवता नीलाचलनायकेन नारायणेनानुगृहीताः,
निरतिशयानन्दबोधरूप आत्मा, एव, अनाद्यविद्यानिवृत्त्युपलक्षितो
मोक्षः, इति, आचक्षते । अविद्यायाश्च सर्वदुःखोपादानत्वात्,
तन्निवृत्त्या, आत्यन्तिकदुःखनिवृत्तिरप्युपपद्यते ।

(वेदान्तकल्पलतिका – श्री मधुसूदन सरस्वती)

Tr. ‘The followers of Upaniṣads blessed by Lord Nārāyaṇa declare *mokṣa* as *ātmā* – the limitless happiness (*ānanda*) being the self-evident knowledge-principle – itself known directly without a trace of self-ignorance

(*avidyā*). The beginningless self-ignorance (*avidyā*) of one's true nature is the root cause of all the sorrows of *samsāra*. Its termination therefore duly results in the total cessation of all sorrows'.

Ādi Śaṅkarācārya has defined *mokṣa* as follows.

- a) *Svātmani avasthānam* – abidance in one's true nature (*Taittirīya, Kena.Bh.*);
- b) *Brahmabhāvaḥ mokṣaḥ* – *Brahmasvarūpa* is *mokṣa* (*Br.Sū.Bh.* 1-1-4);
- c) *Brahma eva muktyavasthā* – Brahman itself is the state of *mukti* (*Br.Sū.Bh.* 3-4-52).

Vārtikakāra Śrī Sureśvarācārya, an eminent disciple of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, describes *mokṣa* as the state of perfect absorption (*sthānam*) in the true nature of *ātmā* (*Br.U. Saṃbandha-vārtika* - 109).¹¹

ii) MEANS (*SĀDHANĀ*) TO GAIN *MOKṢA*

Here is a description of *mokṣasāadhanā* and its status.

तस्य च स्वरूपे साधनानपेक्षत्वेऽपि व्यञ्जकतया
महावाक्यकरणकः, तत्स्वरूपसाक्षात्कारः, एव
प्रतिबन्धचतुष्टयरहितः, मोक्षसाधनम्, इत्युपचर्यते ।

(वेदान्तकल्पलतिका)

as the object of desire to know) is in keeping with this *sūtra* provided the (aforesaid) genitive is accepted in the sense of the object case. Therefore the genitive in the word *Brahmaṇaḥ* (of Brahman) is in the sense of the object case.

The *śruti* passage (*Tai.U.* 3-1) quoted in the *bhāṣya*

¹¹ स्वरूप आत्मनः स्थानमाहुर्निःश्रेयसं बुधाः । (बृ.उ.सं.वा. १०९)

exhorting the *mumukṣu* to take to *Brahmajijñāsā* has the same object of inquiry viz. Brahman as this first *sūtra* provided the genitive case is taken in the sense of the accusative. This concludes the findings on the use of the genitive in the context of the first *sūtra*. The genitive in this *sūtra* indicates Brahman as the object of inquiry, and not something related to Brahman.

BRAHMĀVAGATIḤ (DIRECT COGNITION) OF BRAHMAN

The components of the word *jijñāsā* are the verb '*jñā*' (to know) and the desiderative suffix '*san*'. Their meaning is now being defined.

भा. ज्ञातुं इच्छा जिज्ञासा । अवगतिपर्यन्तं ज्ञानं सन्वाच्यायाः इच्छायाः कर्म, फलविषयत्वात् इच्छायाः । ज्ञानेन हि प्रमाणेन अवगन्तुं इष्टं ब्रह्म ।

Bh.Tr. *Jijñāsā* is the desire to know. The grammatical object of the desire expressed by the desiderative (*san*) is the knowledge (*jñānam*) culminating in the direct cognition of Brahman called *avagati*, because the subject-matter of any desire is its very result. Brahman is accepted to be revealed by the *pramāṇa* of *jñāna* – the *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* conforming to Brahman which confers its direct cognition. (vide pg. 127, fn. 46)

Jijñāsā means the desire to know. Any desire presupposes a knowledge of the object of the desire. It is not possible to entertain a desire for an unknown object. In the case of *Brahmajijñāsā* (the desire to know Brahman), the object of the desire is *Brahmajñāna*, the knowledge of

Brahman. Again, *Brahmajñāna* is the result of this desire. This throws up the question: how can one and the same *Brahmajñāna* be both the cause and the result of the desire indicated by the desiderative suffix (*san*) in the word *jijñāsā*? The answer in a nutshell is that there is a difference between the actual knowledge that prompts the *mumukṣu* to take to *Brahmajijñāsā* and the knowledge of Brahman accomplished as a result of *Brahmajijñāsā*. The *bhāṣya* first describes the second, namely, the exact nature of the *Brahmajñāna* that is gained as the result. Thereafter, some light is thrown on the first, namely, the meagre knowledge regarding Brahman that prompts the *mumukṣu* to take to *Brahmajijñāsā*.

Avagati is *Brahmasākṣātkāra* (the direct cognition of Brahman) wherein *caitanya* (pure awareness) – totally free from self-ignorance, the veiling (*āvaraṇa*) born of ignorance and its effects – becomes manifest or, in other words, directly known. It is the culmination of the *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) in the form of *jñāna* – the *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* conforming to the true nature of Brahman called *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti**. This *vṛtti* confers *Brahmasākṣātkāra* (the direct cognition of Brahman). In the *avagati* of Brahman, the ignorance of Brahman along with its veiling (*āvaraṇa*) and the entire gamut of its effects get totally terminated in addition to the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* and the *cidābhāsa* (reflection of *caitanya*) in it.

Generally, the object of an action differs from its result (*phala*). For instance a destination – a place – is the object of travel while reaching the destination is the result. Hence a doubt is raised: how can one and the same *Brahmajñāna* or *avagati* of Brahman be both the object and the result of the

desire in the case of *jijñāsā*? The *bhāṣya* resolves this by pointing out that the object of desire of any desire (*icchā*) is itself the intended result of that desire. It is true that there is a distinction between objects and results, in case of other actions, but the same does not hold true in the case of desire. *(*Anubhūti-Prakāśa*, Ch. XIII - 214 to 216)

Another doubt arises based on the fact that both *jñāna* and *avagati* actually mean knowledge. Being synonyms, *avagati* cannot be a final result having *jñānam* as its means. Therefore it is improper to draw a distinction between the two by describing *avagati* as the culmination of *jñāna*. The answer becomes clear if the exact nature of the word *jñānam* – as used here – is considered. According to Vedānta, the knowledge (*jñānam*) of any given thing is the *cidābhāsa* obtained in the *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* when the *antaḥkaraṇa* conforms to the thing. For practical purposes, this *vṛtti* itself is taken as the *jñānam* (knowledge) of the thing*. It is for this reason that the *bhāṣyakāra* refers to the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* – the *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* conforming to the true nature of Brahman – as *jñānam* in the phrase *jñāna-pramāṇa*. This *vṛtti* endowed with *cidābhāsa* destroys the ignorance of Brahman and serves as the means to achieve the culmination of *Brahmajñāna* called *Brahmāvagati* or *Brahmasākṣātkāra* (the direct cognition of Brahman). This is why the *bhāṣya* affirms that Brahman is required to be revealed by a *pramāṇa*, namely, the *jñāna* that confers the direct cognition of Brahman. In fact, Brahman is always manifest in its true nature without a trace of ignorance or its effects. It is our vision that is veiled by ignorance. When the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* called *jñāna-pramāṇa* eliminates ignorance along with its effects, we say

Brahman is manifested or revealed. It is like saying ‘the sun shines now’ when the wind has driven away the covering clouds. The sun always shines. It is only the obstruction that hindered our vision of the sun that was eliminated, enabling us to see the shining sun.

It is imperative that the *mumukṣu* first understands clearly what is the *Brahmajñāna-svarūpa* – the nature of *Brahmajñāna* – or what is called *Brahmāvagati*. To do so, it is advisable to investigate the modality of gaining *Brahmajñāna* in greater detail. The nature of general experience (*anubhava*) and knowledge and the relation between the two need to be understood properly. In this respect, the modality of gaining perceptual knowledge (*pratyakṣa-jñāna*) can be of assistance. (* vide pg. 127, fn. 46)

Life is a continuous series of experiences. To experience is to be aware of something – to be conscious of something. Not a single moment passes without specific experience during the waking or dream states. And there is experience during the deep sleep state as well. During deep sleep, there is no specific cognition, including cognition of oneself as ‘I’. Yet, the recollection (*pratyabhijñā*) – ‘I slept well, I did not know anything’ – on waking reveals the experience of the non-cognizance of the world during sleep, including the individual notion of ‘I’. The recollection shows that the object of experience during sleep was awareness of a homogeneous nothing. This is equally applicable to the states of swoon and anaesthesia. The basis of all *vyavahāra* – action in the world – is experience. No person can exist without an experience at every moment. The specific experiences during both the waking and dream states are produced by *sthūla-*

vṛttis (gross thoughts) in the *antaḥkaraṇa*. Experience during deep sleep is produced by *sūkṣma-avidyā vṛttis* (the subtle *vṛttis* of ignorance).

All *vṛttis* are inert. They are illumined – brought to the level of consciousness/cognition of the individual as knowledge – by *caitanya-svarūpa ātmā*. *Ātmā* – pure awareness – is the self-evident cognitive principle. It is *anubhava-svarūpa* – self-experiencing in nature. It is also *jñapti-svarūpa* – the self-knowing principle. It is *svaprakāśa* – self-revealing – as well. *Ātmā* enables all varieties of experience and knowledge.

DEFINITION OF ANUBHAVA (EXPERIENCE)

The word *anubhava* (experience – as ‘to be aware of’) is derived from the verbal root *bhū* – to be; to become; to be born; to happen; to exist etc. The verb *bhū* takes the prefix *anu* in the sense of ‘corresponding to’, ‘similar to’, or ‘like’. Further, a suffix *ap* (अप्) is added to *anubhū* to form the abstract noun *anubhavaḥ*. An abstract noun is a noun that denotes a quality, condition or something intangible rather than a concrete object. Derived as above, the word *anubhava* (experience) signifies a state of conforming with or becoming (or being, existence) similar to that of a given thing (that is experienced). *Anubhūti* is a synonym of *anubhava*. It is defined as *vṛttipratibimbita caitanya* – pure awareness principle reflected in a *vṛtti* (a thought)⁴⁴. *Anubhava* is *māyāvṛttyārūḍha-cidābhāsaḥ* – the *cidābhāsa* (reflected *caitanya*) obtained in *māyāvṛtti* (*māyā* modified as a

⁴⁴ श्री वासिष्ठमहारामायणतात्पर्यप्रकाशकव्याख्या by परमहंस-
श्रीमदानन्दबोधेन्द्रसरस्वती on योगवासिष्ठः 6-3-6 (पूर्वार्ध) ।

thought)⁴⁵.

DEFINITION OF *JÑĀNAM* (KNOWLEDGE)

The word *jñānam* (a state of cognizing or being aware of with decisiveness) on the other hand is an abstract noun derived from the verbal root *jñā* – to know; to ascertain; to comprehend; to experience; to recognise etc. The suffix *lyut* (ल्युट्) is added to *jñā* to derive the noun *jñānam*. It means knowledge; knowing; understanding; proficiency; conscience; the means of knowing; the intellect (*buddhi*); *caitanya*; *Brahmātmaikya-jñānam*. *Jñānam* as knowledge means cognition true to the nature of the thing to be known when it is used in the case of *Brahmajñāna* or direct perception (*pratyakṣa*).

PRAMĀ (THE CORRECT KNOWLEDGE)

In the normal course, both *anubhava* and *jñānam* (in the case of direct knowledge) signify experience or knowledge which is *yathārtha* – true to the nature of the entity involved. At times, both can be *ayathārtha* – at variance with the entity involved – due to some defect or limitation in the means of experience or knowledge. Thus an experience or knowledge can be correct or incorrect. Correct experience is conclusive in nature. There is no rule that an experience is invariably inconclusive. Incorrect knowledge is called *bhrama* – erroneous knowledge. A sea-shell perceived as a piece of silver is an example of erroneous perceptual knowledge. In Vedāntic terminology, *pramā* is correct knowledge (*yathārtha jñānam*). Correct perceptual

⁴⁵ श्री वासिष्ठमहाराजमायणतात्पर्यप्रकाशकव्याख्या by परमहंस-
श्रीमदानन्दबोधेन्द्रसरस्वती on योगवासिष्ठः ६-३-७ (पूर्वार्ध) ।

knowledge is defined as *caitanya* (pure awareness) itself.⁴⁶ Here, what is meant by *caitanya* is not *śuddha-caitanya* (the pure awareness principle free from all *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛttis*), but *caitanya* reflected or manifest in a specific *vṛtti* (thought) conforming to the nature of the thing to be known. Such a *vṛtti* is called *viṣayākārāntaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti*, or *tattadākāra-antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* in general. For practical purposes, the *viṣayākārāntaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* is called *jñānam* (knowledge). It is called so secondarily because it qualifies the *caitanya*, enabling the knower to cognize the characteristic features of the entity to be known. *Śuddha caitanya* by itself cannot ever be *pramā* since it cannot terminate the ignorance of a given thing. A *vṛtti* is always directly (*aparokṣatayā*) cognized. If a *vṛtti* were indirect (*parokṣa*), it could not end ignorance or erroneous notion (*bhrama*), which is directly experienced.⁴⁶ It is noteworthy that according to Vedānta, both *jñānam* and *anubhava* are basically *cidābhāsa* produced in the related *vṛttis*. The *vṛttis* impart the features of the entity known or experienced to the *cidābhāsa* contained in them.

SIX TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

Valid knowledge can be classified into six types depending on the six different *pramāṇās* – means of knowledge – employed. They are:

⁴⁶ प्रत्यक्षप्रमा च अत्र * चैतन्यमेव । यत्साक्षादपरोक्षाद् ब्रह्म इति श्रुतेः । (वे.प.भा.) (*चैतन्यमेव = वृत्तिप्रतिबिम्बितचैतन्यं वृत्त्यभिव्यक्तचैतन्यं वा प्रमा । न तु शुद्धचैतन्यं, तस्य अज्ञानानिर्वर्तकत्वेन प्रमात्वायोगात् ।) (compare अनुभवः मायावृत्त्यारूढचिदाभासः, अनुभूतिः वृत्तिप्रतिबिम्बितचैतन्यम् । pg. 126) ज्ञानावच्छेदकत्वात् च वृत्तौ ज्ञानत्वोपचारः । तदुक्तं विवरणे-अन्तःकरणवृत्तौ ज्ञानत्वोपचारात् (वे.प.भा.) । तच्च ज्ञानं (वृत्तिः) अपरोक्षरूपम् । परोक्षत्वे अपरोक्षभ्रमनिर्वर्तकत्वानुपपत्तेः (वे.प.भा.) ।

- i) Knowledge through direct perception.
- ii) Knowledge by inference.
- iii) Knowledge based on similarity.
- iv) Knowledge gained by the word or *āgama* (the Vedas).
- v) Knowledge based on presumption.
- vi) Knowledge of the absence of a thing.

Not all of the above six types of knowledge involve a direct experience of the entity concerned. In perceptual knowledge, for example, the direct experience of a perceptible object is possible through the contact of the senses with sense objects. The ‘I’ – *aparokṣa ātmā* –, whose knowledge is gained through means of the Vedas, is always experienced directly without the intervention of the senses. This is possible because it is *anubhava-svarūpa* – self-experiencing in its nature. An experience conforming to the thing to be known forms the basic constituent or prerequisite of both direct perceptual knowledge (*pratyakṣam*) and direct self-knowledge (*aparokṣa-jñāna*). More on this will be seen later.

MODALITY OF GAINING DIRECT PERCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE (*PRATYAKṢAM*)

Let us go into how exactly perceptual knowledge takes place. Water in a lake assumes the shape of a field when it flows out through an opening such as a canal and enters a field. Similarly the *antaḥkaraṇa* made up of *sattvagūṇa* capable of acquiring knowledge assumes the form of a sense object such as a pot when it emerges through sense-organs such as the eyes and envelops the sense object, thereby assuming the form of the pot. This state of the *antaḥkaraṇa* is called *viṣayākāra-vṛtti* – a thought conforming to the object to be known

(*Ve.P.B.*)⁴⁷. This mode whereby the *viṣayākārāntaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* endowed with *cidābhāsa* objectifies the thing (*viṣaya*) to be known by assuming its form is called *vṛtti-vyāpti*. The term *vṛtti-vyāpti* means *vṛtti-viṣayatvam*⁴⁸ or *vṛtti-karmatvam* – *viṣayākārāntaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* permeated by *cidābhāsa* which assumes the form of the thing to be known. This *vṛtti-vyāpti* removes the ignorance of the thing to be known. The *cidābhāsa* (the reflection of *caitanya*) in the *viṣayākārāntaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* is called *phala*. The *phala* illumines the inert object to be known. This modus operandi is called *phala-vyāpti*, wherein the *phala* objectifies the thing to be known in order to reveal it.⁴⁹

The correct knowledge of a thing directly perceived necessarily corresponds to an experience true to the nature of that thing; but it is not so in the case of erroneous knowledge. The same rule applies to the knowledge of *ātmā* which is always *aparokṣa* – the most direct, revealing as the very ‘I’. The *aparokṣa-jñāna* of *anubhava-svarūpa ātmā* necessarily requires its *yathārtha anubhava* – true to the nature of *ātmā* – free from all the *anātmā* that is superimposed on it. The knowledge that *ātmā* is identical to Brahman is of the nature of

⁴⁶. यथा तडागोदकं छिद्रान्निर्गत्य कुल्यात्मना केदारान् प्रविश्य तद्देव चतुष्कोणाद्याकारं भवति, तथा तैजसं अन्तःकरणमपि चक्षुरादिव्यापारं निर्गत्य घटादिविषयदेशं गत्वा घटादिविषयाकारेण परिणमते । स एव परिणामो वृत्तिः इत्युच्यते । (वे.प.भा.)

“अयं घटः” इति घटाकाराकारितचित्तवृत्तिः अज्ञातं घटं विषयीकृत्य तद्गत अज्ञाननिरसनपुरःसरं स्वगतचिदाभासेन जडं घटमपि भासयति । (वेदान्तसार)

⁴⁶. वृत्तिव्याप्तिः – वृत्तिविषयत्वम् (सर्वतन्त्रसिद्धान्तपदार्थलक्षण संग्रहः By भिक्षु गौरीशङ्करः)

⁴⁶. फलव्याप्तिः – स्वाकारवृत्तिप्रतिबिम्बितचौतन्यविषयत्वम् (सर्वतन्त्रसिद्धान्तपदार्थलक्षण संग्रहः By भिक्षु गौरीशङ्करः)

direct (*aparokṣa*) cognition. If it is indirect (*parokṣa*) knowledge, it cannot remove the erroneous notion regarding oneself (*ātmā*) which is always directly (*aparokṣatayā*) experienced.⁵⁰ The knowledge of a thing that is directly perceived or of *aparokṣa ātmā* is as true as the thing to be known. Therefore the rule is that correct knowledge unconditionally requires *yathārtha-anubhava* – an experience true to the thing to be known, whether it is a directly perceptible thing (*pratyakṣa-vastu*) or *aparokṣa ātmā*. This is so because the entities to be known in both cases are directly available for experience, unlike things to be known indirectly (*parokṣataḥ*).

In his Pañcapādikā, Śrī Padmapādācārya establishes a rule: ज्ञानं तु परोक्षे अनुभवानारूढोऽपि संभवति (पंचपादिका)

Tr. *Parokṣajñāna* – indirect knowledge – is possible even without an experience true to the nature of the thing to be known.

MODALITY OF GAINING *BRAHMAJÑĀNA*

While the modality of gaining *Brahmajñāna* is somewhat similar to that of gaining perceptual knowledge, there are certain differences. The following passages from ‘Vedāntasāra’, an introductory Vedāntic text by Sadānanda Saraswatī that is traditionally accepted, describes vividly how *Brahmajñāna* takes place.

अथ अधुना “अहं ब्रह्म अस्मि” इति अनुभववाक्यार्थः
वर्ण्यते । एवं आचार्येण अध्यारोपापवादपुरःसरं तत्त्वं पदार्थं
शोधयित्वा वाक्येन अखण्डार्थं अवबोधिते अधिकारिणः अहं

⁵⁰ तच्च ज्ञानं अपरोक्षरूपम् । परोक्षत्वे अपरोक्षभ्रमनिवर्तकत्वानुपपत्तेः । (वे.प.भा.)

नित्य-शुद्ध-बुद्ध-मुक्त-सत्यस्वभाव-परमानन्दानन्ताद्वयं
ब्रह्मास्मीति अखण्डाकाराकारिता चित्तवृत्तिरुदेति । (वे.सार)

Tr. ‘After the ascertainment of the *Tat twam asi* (You are that Brahman) *mahāvākya*, the meaning of the sentence *Ahaṃ Brahmāsmi* (I am Brahman) which reveals the experience of I (*ātmā*) as *Brahmasvarūpa* is now being described. When a teacher reveals the identity between the words ‘*tat*’ (Brahman) and *twam* (you the *ātmā*) in accordance with the earlier teaching by the sentence *tat twam asi*, after ascertaining the *nirupādhika* nature of *tat* and *twam* (nature free from *upādhis*) by the method of superimposition (*adhyāropa*) and its negation (*apavāda*), there arises in the mind of a competent *mumukṣu* a specific thought termed *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*. This thought is of the nature “I am Brahman”. It conforms to the nature of Brahman, the ever-existent principle, free from ignorance and its effect, the very knowledge-principle, free from all *upādhis*, indestructible in nature, limitless happiness, free from all limitations, and nothing but non-dual *caitanya*.’

सा तु चित्प्रतिबिम्बसहिता सती प्रत्यगभिन्नं अज्ञातं परं ब्रह्म
विषयीकृत्य तद्गताज्ञानमेव बाधते । तदा पटकारणतन्तुदाहे
पटदाहवत् अखिलकारणे अज्ञाने बाधिते सति तत्कार्यस्य
अखिलस्य बाधितत्वात् तदन्तर्भूताखण्डाकाराकारिता चित्तवृत्तिरपि
बाधिता भवति । (वे.सार)

Tr. ‘That specific *vṛtti* is endowed with *citpratibimba* – the reflection of *caitanya* called *cidābhāsa*. It

objectifies the hitherto unknown Brahman that is identical to *ātmā*. The *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* (endowed with *cidābhāsa*) destroys the ignorance pertaining to Brahman. Just as a cloth is burnt when its constituent threads are burnt, so also do all the effects (*kārya*) of self-ignorance – the entire Creation – get totally destroyed (terminated) when ignorance, their cause, is terminated. The *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*, which too is part of Creation, also gets verily dissolved.’

तत्र प्रतिबिम्बितं चैतन्यमपि यथा दीपप्रभादित्यप्रभाव-
भासनासमर्था सती तया अभिभूता भवति तथा
स्वयंप्रकाशमानप्रत्यगभिन्नपरब्रह्मावभासनानर्हतया तेन अभिभूतं
सत् स्वोपाधिभूताखण्डचित्तवृत्तेः बाधितत्वात् दर्पणाभावे
मुखप्रतिबिम्बस्य मुखमात्रत्ववत् प्रत्यगभिन्नपरब्रह्ममात्रं भवति ।
(वे.सार)

Tr. ‘Just as the light of a lamp overpowered by sunlight is unable to illumine the sun, so too the *caitanya* reflected in the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* – overpowered by the same (Brahman) – is rendered incapable of illumining the self-evident Brahman identical to *ātmā*. Due to the destruction of its *upādhi* viz. the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*, that reflected *caitanya* becomes Brahman that is non-different from *ātmā*. It is similar to the reflection of a face in a mirror remaining as the face itself when the mirror is broken’.

The *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* conforms to the true nature of Brahman (identical to *ātmā*). It is indispensable for destroying self-ignorance and gaining *Brahmajñāna*. Its function is similar to that of the *viśayākārāntaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* required for

the direct perceptual knowledge of sense objects. According to Vedānta, *vṛtti-vyāpti* – the objectification of the thing to be known by the *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* – is common to both the perceptual knowledge of sense objects and to *Brahmajñāna*. Here, objectification stands for the assumption by the *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* of the form of the thing to be known.

A pertinent doubt can arise at this juncture. Brahman / *ātmā* is the self-luminous (*svaparakāśa*) knowledge-principle (*caitanya*). It should not need any other knower-principle since it itself is of the nature of the self-luminous knowledge-principle. How then can it be the object of an *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* as specified in *vṛtti-vyāpti*? It is true that Brahman and *ātmā* are identical and the self-luminous (*svaparakāśa*) knowledge-principle. However, this knowledge is covered by self-ignorance (*avidyā*). Therefore to dispel the ignorance, a *vṛtti* conforming in content to the true nature of Brahman such as 'I am Brahman' is indispensable. This *vṛtti-vyāpti* removes the ignorance. Thereafter, the *cidābhāsa* in the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* called *phala*, though present in it, is not necessary to make the self-luminous Brahman known. The *phala* is ineffective in illumining Brahman. It is redundant. This is in contrast to the mode of gaining perceptual knowledge, where *phala* is indispensable for revealing an inert object.

Śrī Vidyāraṇya Muni highlights this point in his text Pañcadaśī. ‘*Vṛtti-vyāpti* is necessary to destroy the ignorance of Brahman; but Brahman being the self-luminous knowledge-principle, the *cidābhāsa* (*phala*) is not useful’. (*P.* 7-92).⁵¹ This is also the import of two paradoxical *Upaniṣadic*

⁵¹ ब्रह्मण्यज्ञाननाशाय वृत्तिव्याप्तिरपेक्षिता ।

स्वयंस्फुरणरूपत्वान्नाभास उपयुज्यते ॥ (पञ्चदशी 7-92)

statements. They are: ‘Brahman should be known by the well-prepared mind only’ (*manasā eva anudraṣṭavyam* – *Br.U.* 4-4-19). This shows the necessity of *vṛtti-vyāpti*. ‘Brahman cannot be known by the mind’ (*yanmanasā na manute* – *Ke.U.* 1-6). This shows the futility of *phala-vyāpti*.

In the culmination of *Brahmajñāna* called *Brahmāvagati*, ignorance with all its effects, including *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* and the *cidābhāsa* in it, stand terminated. In principle, the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* is necessary to terminate the ignorance of Brahman but not to make us know the self-evident Brahman. This direct cognition of self-revealing Brahman is called *Brahmasākṣātkāra*. It is *sakṣāt* (direct) because it is not mediated but is immediate as the self-revealing principle. In this cognition, there are no intervening factors such as the knower (*pramātā*), or the *antaḥkāraṇa-vṛtti* conforming to Brahman, or the *pramāṇavyāpāra* – the functioning of *pramāṇa*. All these have already played their roles and have disappeared. What is left is only Brahman – *caitanya* and *caitanya* alone. It manifests totally free of the veiling (*āvaraṇa*) born of ignorance. This is *Brahmāvagati*, the culmination of *jñāna*. This is how Brahman gets revealed by the *pramāṇa* of *jñāna* as stated in the *bhāṣya* (viz. ज्ञानेन हि प्रमाणेन अवगन्तुं इष्टं ब्रह्म ।).

THE REASON *BRAHMASĀKṢĀTKĀRA* IS A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

The Vedāntic definitions of *jñānam* and *anubhava* along with the role of the associated *tattadākāra-vṛttis*, the description of the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*, and the fact that *ātmā* is *anubhavasvarūpa* should make it very clear that gaining

Brahmasākṣātkāra is itself a distinct direct experience (*aparokṣānubhava*). To recapitulate:

- i) The *akhaṇḍākāra* / *ātmākāra* / *Brahmākāra-vṛtti*, conforming to *Brahmātmasvarūpa* endowed with *cidābhāsa*, is indispensable for terminating the ignorance regarding *ātmā*. The *bhāṣyakāra* describes this *vṛtti* as the *jñāna-pramāṇa* (vide pg. 124, 127 - fn. 46). It has to be *nirviśeṣa* (free from attributes), free from all the *adhyasta-upādhis* except its own form. It has to be a replica of *nirviśeṣa ātmā*.
- ii) Such a *vṛtti* terminates the ignorance of *ātmā* / Brahman. Subsequently, the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* itself gets dissolved along with the *cidābhāsa* in it.
- iii) What remains then is the self-evident Brahman in its true nature identical to *ātmā* totally free from all *adhyasta-upādhis*, including self-ignorance and the *tripuṭis*. This is the culmination of *Brahmajñāna* called *Brahmāvagati* or *Brahmasākṣātkāra*. It has to be a unique experience – *aparokṣa Brahmānubhava* / *ātmānubhava* – by virtue of the nature of Brahman alone, and not on account of the means employed. Brahman / *ātmā* is ever free by nature. But after the dissolution of the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*, it is free from ignorance (*avidyā*) and its effects (*avidyā-kārya*) from the stand-point of what was hitherto the *jīva*. This is *mokṣa* – *svātmani avasthānam* – as defined by the *bhāṣyakāra*. Śrī Madhusūdana Saraswatī defines *mokṣa* as *ātmā* itself known directly without a trace of *avidyā* or its effects.

THE NATURE OF *BRAHMASĀKṢĀTKĀRA*

The cognition of the perceptible Creation superimposed on Brahman (i.e. *adhyasta dr̥śya prapañca*) is absent in *Brahmasākṣātkāra*. It is *nirvikalpa* (non-dual), free from *tripuṭī* viz. the triple form of the knower, the known and the knowledge-*vṛtti*, or the experiencer, the experienced and the experience-*vṛtti* or the doer, the done and the act of doing. All that remains is *yathārthānubhava*, a single homogeneous experience in conformity with Brahman. It is *cinmātra* – nothing but *caitanya*. Even the *pramātā* (the knower) or the *anubhavitā* (the experiencer) who casts the *tripuṭī* is absent because the status of *ātmā* as knower or experiencer arises only on account of ignorance and the consequent *adhyāsa* of the *anātmā* on *ātmā*. Such *Brahmānubhava* or *ātmānubhava* is possible without an experiencer (*anubhavitā*) or knower (*pramātā*) because Brahman / *ātmā* is *anubhavasvarūpa* – the self-experiencing principle itself – without the need for any means. In the state of ignorance, the experiences of the *dr̥śya* world with its specific features, *pramātā* and of ignorance are possible only because of their basis – *anubhavasvarūpa ātmā* / Brahman. In the wake of knowledge, the *adhyasta dr̥śya* – *prapañca* resolves into its basis. The specific experiences of the three states of consciousness cease as a result, but not the self-revealing ever-existent *ātmā* / Brahman, the fundamental experience principle. Without such direct (*aparokṣa*) experience, the knowledge of Brahman is indirect (*parokṣa*) at best.

Ātmānubhava/Brahmānubhava is not available for fanciful imagination. It is precisely defined by the

akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti. This *vṛtti* is a replica of *ātmā* as long as it continues. As seen earlier, even this *vṛtti* drops off finally. What remains then is *ātmā* as described in the Upaniṣads. *Brahmānubhava/ātmānubhava* or *mokṣa* in its final stage is Brahman / *ātmā* itself, but totally free from *avidyā* and *avidyā-kārya*. This is *pramā* (the correct knowledge) of *ātmā* / Brahman without any room for doubt or interpretation. It is an *anubhava* (experience) without a subject – the *anubhavitā* (experiencer) or *pramātā* (knower) or *ahaṃkāra*. A subject (*ahaṃkāra*) is necessary for the experiences of the waking and dream states, which are not possible without this subject. In deep sleep, though *ahaṃkāra* is absent, *avidyā* is present. But in *ātmānubhava*, both the subject (*ahaṃkāra*) and *avidyā* are absent. *Ahaṃkāra* is an *anthaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti*. It is *dr̥śya* and therefore inert (*jaḍa*) in nature. *Ahaṃkāra* (the subject) cannot know *dr̥k-svarūpa ātmā*. There is not even a trace of *ahaṃkāra* in the final stage of *ātmānubhava*. It ends in *ātmānubhava*. *Ahaṃkāra* is not an intrinsic feature (*guṇa*) of *ātmā*.⁵² *Ātmānubhava* is *nirviśeṣa* (attributeless) without any trace of *avidyā*. Actually it is indescribable because *ātmā* is so. *Ātmā* is beyond the range of words. Words can describe only *jāti* (species), *guṇa* (attribute), *kriyā* (action) and *saṃbandha* (relation). *Ātmā* / Brahman is free from all these. Even so, the Upaniṣads define or describe *ātmā*/Brahman from the practical stand-point of a *mumukṣu*.

A doubt can arise at this point: how can an impermanent (*anitya*) experience produced by a transient

⁵² उपलभ्यमहंकरणं न भवेत्पुरुषस्य गुणः । (verse 22 – श्रुतिसारसमुद्धरणम् by तोटकाचार्य)

akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti be that of Brahman, which is *nityānanda* (absolute happiness) and *nityajñapti* (the absolute knowledge-principle)? The answer becomes clear when we consider the factor that establishes the permanence or impermanence of a thing. It is not the fleeting duration of an experience that is a criterion for establishing the impermanent nature of a thing experienced. It is the nature of the thing experienced that determines whether it is everlasting or not. The objects, beings or events of the empirical world experienced are necessarily transitory because the nature of the world is so. They are born; they perish. The world is not transitory because its experience is limited by time. *Ātmā*/Brahman is the ever-existent principle totally free from Creation. It cannot become transient because the *Brahmānubhava/ātmānubhava* is transient. The impermanence of such an experience is due to the specific condition of the *antaḥkaraṇa*, which is by nature constantly changing. The *Kaṭhapaniṣat* (2-3-11) cautions against the unsteadiness of this state.⁵³

As seen earlier, at the final stage of *ātmānubhava/Brahmānubhava*, the transitory *tripuṭī* also gets dissolved and what remains is only the experience (*anubhava*) of *nitya* (ever-existent) *ātmā* identical to Brahman. The *Kaṭhapaniṣat* (2-3-5) exhorts us to strive for this direct cognition of *ātmā* in this human embodiment, as the *ātmadarśana* (*ātmānubhava*) in a very pure and steady human intellect (*antaḥkaraṇa*) is as distinct as seeing one's face in a mirror.⁵⁴

⁵². योगो हि प्रभवाप्ययौ ॥ कठ ? २-३-११

⁵³. यथा आदर्शो तथा आत्मनि (स्वबुद्धौ आदर्शवत् निर्मलीभूतायां विविक्तं आत्मनः दर्शनं भवति इत्यर्थः) । कठोपनिषत् / भा. २-३-५

THE PRAMĀṆA OF AKHAṆḌĀKĀRA-VṚTTI

The terms *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*, *Brahmākāra-vṛtti*, *Brahmavṛtti* and *ātmākāra-vṛtti* are synonyms. A description of this *vṛtti* found in the text *Vedāntasāra* conforms to its description in the *Maṇḍalabrāhmaṇopaniṣat* (2-3)⁵⁵ (*Śuklayajurveda*), the *Tejobindūpaniṣat* (1-37)⁵⁶ (*Kṛṣṇayajurveda*) and the *Muktikopaniṣat* (2-53)⁵⁷ (*Śuklayajurveda*). The *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* corresponds to the *prajñā* of a *sṭhitaprajñā* described in Ch-2 of the *Bhagavadgītā*. This can be verified from the description of *prajñā* in the *Adhyātmopaniṣat* (42-44)⁵⁸ (*Śuklayajurveda*). In fact, the *Tejobindūpaniṣat* (1-43 to 46)⁵⁹ exhorts *mumukṣus* to develop the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*. It also terms skilful talk of Brahman without proper *vairāgya* and a steady *Brahmākāra-*

⁵⁵. समाधौ मृदिततमोविकारस्य तदाकारकारिताखण्डाकारवृत्त्यात्मकसाक्षिचैतन्ये प्रपंचलयः सम्पद्यते प्रपंचस्य मनःकल्पितत्वात् (मण्डलब्राह्मणोपनिषत् 2-3)

⁵⁶. निर्विकारतया वृत्त्या ब्रह्माकारतया पुनः । वृत्तिविस्मरणं सम्यक् समाधिरभिधीयते ॥ (तेजोबिन्दूपनिषत्, 1-37)

⁵⁷. ब्रह्माकारमनोवृत्तिप्रवाहोऽहंकृतिं विना । संप्रज्ञातसमाधिः स्यात् ध्यानाभ्यासप्रकर्षतः ॥ (मुक्तिकोपनिषत्, 2-53)

⁵⁸. स्थितप्रज्ञो यतिरयं यः सदानन्दमश्नुते ॥४२॥
ब्रह्मण्येव विलीनात्मा निर्विकारो विनिष्क्रियः ।
ब्रह्मात्मनोः शोधितयोरेकभावावगाहिनी ॥४३॥
निर्विकल्पा च चिन्मात्रा वृत्तिः प्रज्ञेति कथ्यते । (अध्यात्मोपनिषत्, 42-44)

⁵⁹. ये हि वृत्तिं विहायैनां ब्रह्माख्यां पावनीं पराम् ।
वृथैव ते जीवन्ति पशुभिश्च समा नराः ॥४३॥
ये तु वृत्तिं विजानन्ति ज्ञात्वा वै वर्धयन्ति ये ।
ते वै सत्पुरुषा धन्या वन्द्यास्ते भुवनत्रये ॥४४॥
येषां वृत्तिः समा वृद्धा परिपक्वा च सा पुनः ।
ते वै सद् ब्रह्मतां प्राप्ता नेतरे शब्दवादिनः ॥४५॥
कुशला ब्रह्मवार्तायां वृत्तिहीनाः सुरागिणः ।
तेऽप्यज्ञानतया नूनं पुनरायान्ति यान्ति च ॥४६॥ (तेजोबिन्दूपनिषत् 1-43 to 46)

vṛtti as sheer verbosity. These *mantras* are quoted by the *bhāṣyakāra* in another one of his texts – *Aparokṣānubhūti* (verses 130 to 133) as well.

According to the *Muktikopaniṣat*, there are 1180 Upaniṣads in all. The *śākhās*, the traditional recensions of all the four Vedas, are 1180 in number and each of these 1180 *śākhās* contains one Upaniṣad. The principal among these Upaniṣads number 108. They are enumerated in the *Muktikopaniṣat*. This Upaniṣad also lists the Veda to which each belongs and its *Śānti-mantra*. Unfortunately, many *śākhās* of the Vedas are lost and so too are the Upaniṣads contained in them. The principal 108 Upaniṣads are available, as are a few others.

Repeated reference to the term *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* is found in the sixth *aṃśa* of Śrī Śivarahasyam – popularly known as *Ribhu Gītā*. The teaching of the *Ribhu-Gītā* has originated from none other than Lord Śiva himself.

INDISPENSABILITY OF *BRAHMĀKĀRA-VṚTTI*

Some scholars are of the view that a specific *Brahmākāra-vṛtti* is not required to know Brahman. If a *vṛtti* is required to know Brahman just as it is required to know objects (*viśayas*), Brahman will become just another external object distinct from ‘I’ (*ātmā*), and will also be inert like other objects.

If the knowledge of Brahman that these scholars allude to signifies actual *Brahmasākṣātkāra*, the *Brahmākāra-vṛtti* is certainly not required any more, since we have already seen, the *Brahmākāra-vṛtti* or *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* itself gets extinguished once it has accomplished its function of

destroying ignorance resulting in *Brahmasākṣātkāra*. However, if it is insisted that this *vṛtti* is not necessary for destroying ignorance, contenders have to clarify how ignorance gets terminated. *Caitanya* is the *adhiṣṭhāna* (basis) of superimposed ignorance and hence cannot end it. Again no *pramāṇa* can produce *pratyakṣa* (directly perceptible) or *aparokṣa* knowledge without the specific *tattadākāra-vṛtti* – the *vṛtti* conforming to the *pratyakṣa* or *aparokṣa* entity – which destroys ignorance. This *vṛttivyāpti* is indispensable for terminating ignorance.

The nature of any *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* is to take the form of the entity it comes across (i.e. to become *tattadākāra*). It does so without actually objectifying the entity as distinct from itself. It is the *pramātā* who objectifies the entities as distinct from oneself. Brahman is the true nature of the *pramātā*, and in fact his very nature. The *pramātā* ceases to exist in *Brahmasākṣātkāra* where Brahman and Brahman alone exists after the removal of ignorance and a second entity is absent. Therefore, in the absence of the *pramātā* in *Brahmasākṣātkāra*, the occasion for Brahman to become an external object does not arise at all.

As shown earlier with reference to inert objects (*viśayas*), inert objects are characterized by the fact that they become known through *phalavyāpti* – the *cidābhāsa* reflected in the *viśayākāra-vṛtti*. Though the *cidābhāsa* is present in the *Brahmākāra-vṛtti*, it is incapable of illumining its very source, the self-evident knowledge-principle that is Brahman. This shows that the *cidābhāsa* or *phalavyāpti* is superfluous in knowing Brahman. In other words, *vṛttivyāpti* by itself can

destroy the ignorance of Brahman. Since *phalavyāpti* does not play a role in gaining the knowledge of Brahman, Brahman does not become inert merely because of the *Brahmākāra-vṛtti*.

BRAHMĀKĀRA-VṚTTI IS POSSIBLE

The role, relevance and possibility of a *vṛtti* conforming to Brahman or *ātmā* will become clearer from the following excerpts from the *Bhagavadgītā-bhāṣya* (Ch. 18-50).⁶⁰

भा. निष्ठा पर्यवसानं परिसमाप्तिरित्येतत् ।

कस्य?

ब्रह्मज्ञानस्य या परा ।

कीदृशी सा?

यादृशं आत्मज्ञानम् ।

कीदृक् तत्?

यादृशः आत्मा ।

कीदृशः असौ?

यादृशः भगवता उक्तः उपनिषद्वाक्यैः न्यायतश्च ।

भा. पूर्वपक्षः – ननु विषयाकारं ज्ञानम् । न विषयः, नापि आकारवान् आत्मा इष्यते क्वचित् । तस्मात् आत्माकारं ज्ञानं इति अनुपपन्नम् । कथं तर्हि आत्मनः ज्ञानम्? सर्वं हि यद्विषयं ज्ञानं तत् तत् आकारं भवति । निराकारश्च आत्मा इति उक्तम् । ज्ञानात्मनोश्च उभयोः

⁶⁰. भ.गीता १८-५० सिद्धिं प्राप्तो यथा ब्रह्म तथाऽऽप्नोति निबोध मे ।

समासेनैव कौन्तेय निष्ठा ज्ञानस्य या परा ॥५०॥

भाष्य – सिद्धिं प्राप्तः = स्वकर्मणा ईश्वरं समभ्यर्च्य तत्प्रसादजां कायेन्द्रियाणां ज्ञाननिष्ठायोग्यतालक्षणां सिद्धिं प्राप्तः ; यथा येन प्रकारेण ब्रह्म परमात्मानं आप्नोति तथा तं प्रकारं ज्ञाननिष्ठाप्राप्तिक्रमं मे निबोध । अनेन या ब्रह्मप्राप्तिः प्रतिज्ञाता तां इदंतया दर्शयितुं आह निष्ठा ज्ञानस्य या परा इति ।

निराकारत्वे कथं तद्भावनिष्ठा?

भा. सिद्धान्तः – न, अत्यन्त निर्मलत्व-स्वच्छत्व-सूक्ष्मत्वोपपत्तेः आत्मनः, बुद्धेश्च आत्मसमनैर्मल्याद्युपपत्तेः आत्मचैतन्याकारा-भासत्वोपपत्तिः ।

..... सर्वत्र हि बुद्ध्यादि देहान्ते आत्मचैतन्याभासता आत्मभ्रान्तिकारणं, इत्यतः नामरूपाद्यनात्माध्यारोपणनिवृत्तिरेव कार्या । तस्मात् अविद्याध्यारोपणनिराकरणमात्रं ब्रह्मणि कर्तव्यं । बाह्याकारभेदबुद्धिनिवृत्तिः एव आत्मस्वरूपालम्बने कारणम् ।

Tr. In order to directly demonstrate *Brahmaprāpti* (the gaining of Brahman), Lord Kṛṣṇa describes it as *jñānasya parā niṣṭhā* – the most exalted final state of knowledge or steadfastness in *mokṣa* – in *Bhagavadgītā* (Ch 18-50). *Parā jñānaniṣṭhā* is explained by the *bhāṣyakāra* in the following discussion.

Question (Q): What is meant by *niṣṭhā* ?

Answer (Ans.): *Niṣṭhā* is culmination, steadfastness. It signifies both the final point (*paryavasānam, parisamāptih*). as well as the firmness, stability or *sthairyam* (of the mind in *ātmā-svarūpa*).⁶¹

Q: Culmination of what ?

Ans: The acme (final point) or most exalted final state of *Brahmajñāna*.

Q: What is the nature of this culmination (*niṣṭhā*) ?

Ans: This *niṣṭhā* is in conformance with *ātmajñāna* – the knowledge of *ātmā*.

⁶¹. ज्ञेयनिष्ठत्वं ज्ञेये स्थैर्यम् – योगवासिष्ठ नि.पू. 74-27 तात्पर्यप्रकाशव्याख्या ।

Q: What is the nature of *ātmajñāna*?

Ans: *Ātmajñāna* is a replica of *ātmā* (i.e. in the form of an *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* corresponding to or conforming to the nature of *ātmā*, and referred to secondarily as *jñāna*).

Q: What is the nature of *ātmā*?

Ans: The nature of *ātmā* is as described by Lord Kṛṣṇa, *Upaniṣadic* sentences and reasoning.

Q: But knowledge (*jñānam*) is always in conformance with the form (*ākāra*) of an object (*viśaya*). Nowhere is *ātmā* accepted either as being an object or having a form. It is therefore improper to say that *ātmajñāna* has the form of *ātmā*. Since knowledge of any object (in the form of *vṛttis*) conforms to that object, and *ātmā* is not an object, how is *ātmajñāna* possible at all? *Ātmā* is described as formless. If both *ātmā* and its knowledge are formless, how is it ever possible to gain steadfastness (*niṣṭhā*) in contemplation (*bhavanā*) on *ātmajñāna*?

Ans: It is not so. *Ātmā* is completely *nirmala* (pure – free from all that is *adhyasta* / superimposed), *svaccha* (clear – completely unconnected to the virtues and vices of all the *dṛśyas* illumined by it) and *sūkṣma* (subtle – *nirguṇa* – free from the *guṇas*). It is possible for the *buddhi* (i.e. *antaḥkaraṇa*) to assume a form that is exactly like *ātmacaitanya* because it is capable of conforming to the nature of the absolute purity, clarity and subtlety of *ātmā*. The cause of the erroneous ‘I’ notion in the *buddhi* down to the gross body is due to

their semblance to *ātmacaitanya*. Hence to gain the knowledge of *ātmā*, what has to be accomplished is simply the withdrawal (*nivṛtti*) from all the superimposed *anātmā* characterised by name and form. . . . All that is required for *Brahmajñāna*, therefore is the *nirākaraṇam* of *avidyādhyāropana*, namely, termination of the ignorance and its effect. The means to abide in the true nature of *ātmā* is verily the withdrawal (*nivṛtti*) of the mind from the distinct pluralistic cognitions alien to *ātmā* (*B.G.Bh.* 18-50). In short the knowing of *ātmā* is to end the superimposed ignorance with its effects (*Bṛ.U.Bh.* 1-4-10)’. . . .

This state of mind described above, free from the superimposed *nāmarūpātmaka dṛśya*, is described as yoga in the *Kaṭhopaniṣat* (2-3-9 to 11). In his *bhāṣya*, the *bhāṣyakāra* also affirms that *ātmā* abiding in its true nature – free from the superimposition of entities effected by ignorance – can be directly known only in that state.⁶²

In his *Vivaraṇa-prameya-saṅgraha*, Śrī Vidyāraṇya Muni quotes certain verses from a Purāṇa to describe *Brahmajñāna* – the direct cognition of Brahman. The

^{62.} न संदूशे तिष्ठति रूपमस्य न चक्षुषा पश्यति कश्चनैनम् ।
हृदा मनीषा मनसाऽभिक्लृप्तः* य एतद्विदुरमृतास्ते भवन्ति ॥ कठ – २-३-९
*आत्मा ज्ञातुं शक्यते इति वाक्यशेषः । (भाष्य)
यदा पंचावतिष्ठन्ते ज्ञानानि मनसा सह ।
बुद्धिश्च न विचेष्टति तामाहुः परमां गतिम् ॥ कठ – २-३-१०
तां योगमितिक्ष् मन्थन्ते स्थिरामिन्द्रियधारणाम् ।
अप्रमत्तस्तदा भवति योगो हि प्रभवाप्ययौ ॥ कठ – २-३-११
is for योगं. एतस्यां हि अवस्थायां अविद्याध्यारोपणवर्जितस्वरूपप्रतिष्ठः आत्मा
(ज्ञातुं शक्यते is अध्याहारः इत्यद्भाष्य २-३-९)

quotation confirms that the preponderance of the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*, termed *jñāna* in the *sūtrabhāṣya*, is the means (*pramāṇa*) to gain *Brahmāvagati* – *Brahmasākṣātkāra*. The quoted Purāṇic verses are as follows.

‘A pure *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti* (free from the cognition of all *drśya*), is born in the mind of a *mumukṣu* who practises *sādhana-caṭuṣṭya-sampatti* and pursues the means of the *Mahāvākya*. This provides access to the knowledge of the identity between *jīva* and Brahman. The *Śāṅkarī cit* – the manifestation (or reflection) of the self-existent *cit* (pure awareness) which is *Brahmasvarūpa* reflected in that *vṛtti* – is itself *Brahmajñāna*. That alone destroys the ignorance of *ātmā* (and reveals *jīva-brahmaikya*)’.⁶³

The Bhāmatī gloss provides the meaning of *avagati* as *sākṣātkāra*, which as seen earlier, is revealed through the final steadfastness of the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*.

ONLY BRAHMĀNUBHAVA ENDS ADHYĀSA

In his Pañcapādikā, Śrī Padmapādācārya defines *avagati* as *sākṣāt anubhavaḥ* – the direct experience of Brahman / *ātmā*. In this work, Śrī Padmapādācārya concludes his comments on the *adhyāsabhāṣya* by stating that the elimination of *adhyāsa* – the cause of calamitous *samsāra* – is possible only by gaining self-knowledge (*jñānam*)

⁶³ इयद्स्व विवरणप्रमेयसंग्रह by विद्यारण्य
ततः सर्वाङ्गनिष्ठस्य प्रत्यग्ब्रह्मैकगोचरा ।
या वृत्तिर्मानसी शुद्धा जायते वेदेवाक्यतः ॥८॥

तस्यां या चिदभिव्यक्तिः स्वतः सिद्धा च शांकरी ।
तदेव ब्रह्मविज्ञानं तदेवाज्ञाननाशनम् ॥९॥

culminating in *Brahmānubhava*.⁶⁴

WHY ĀTMĀNUBHAVA IS THE CULMINATION OF ĀTMAJÑĀNA

The following reflections throw more light on the *sākṣādanubhava* (or direct experience) of *ātmā*.⁶⁵

Q: What does the word *sākṣāt* (direct) in the phrase *sākṣādanubhava* of *ātmā* mean?

Ans: *Sākṣāt* means *avyavahitam* (i.e. not separated by anything intervening – *Br.U.* 3-4-1 *bhāṣya*), immediate, or not mediated, by virtue of the fact that it takes place without the operation/presence of any intermediaries such as the sense-organs, mind, intellect, *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti*, knower (*pramātā*), or even the *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge).

⁶⁴ एवं अहंकर्तृत्वप्रमुखः क्रियाकारकफलात्मकः लोकव्यवहारः अध्यस्तः नित्यशुद्धबुद्धमुक्तस्वभावे आत्मनि । अतः तादृक् ब्रह्मात्मानुभवपर्यन्तात् ज्ञानात् अनर्थहेतोः अध्यासस्य निवृत्तिरुपपद्यते इति तदर्थविषयवेदान्तमीमांसारम्भः उपपद्यते । (पंचपादिका)

⁶⁵ Based on श्रीवासिष्ठमहारामायणतात्पर्यप्रकाशव्याख्या by परमहंस श्रीमदानन्दबोधेन्द्रसरस्वती दह योगवासिष्ठः, वैराग्यप्रकरणं सर्गः ३, श्लोकः ६. दृश्यं नास्तीति बोधेन मनसो दृश्यमार्जनम् । संपन्नं चेत्तदुत्पन्ना परा निर्वाणनिर्वृतिः ॥६॥ यो. वा. वै. प्र. 3-6
व्याख्या – अनुभूयते इति उक्तः (stated in earlier verse जगद् भ्रमोऽयं दृश्योऽपि नास्त्येवेत्यनुभूयते) अनुभवः किं आत्मचैतन्यं एव उत अन्यः । न तावदन्यः । चिद्व्यतिरिक्तस्य जडतया विषयतया च अनुभवत्वायोगात् । आत्मा एव चेत् सः पूर्वम् एव अस्तीति किं शास्त्रेण इति आशङ्क्याह – दृश्यमिति । सत्यं, आत्मैवानुभवः, तथाप्यसौ दृश्यसहकृतः न तदनुभवः किन्तु मनसो वृत्तिरूपेण आत्मतत्त्वसाक्षात्कारबोधेन अविद्यानाशात् तदुपादानकदृश्यमार्जनं दृश्यं कालत्रयेऽपि नास्ति एवंरूपं संपन्नं चेत् नित्यसिद्धात्मरूपापि परा निर्वाणनिर्वृतिः तस्मात् तत्त्वज्ञानात् उत्पन्ना इव भवति इति केवलः तद्द्वारा स्वरूपभूतः अपि अनुभवः शास्त्रफलं इत्यर्थः ।

Q: In that case, how is a direct experience of *ātmā* ever possible, since all experiences take place through the instrumentality of some of the above mentioned intermediaries?

Ans: *Ātmā* is *anubhavasvarūpa* – *anubhava* (experience) is the very nature of *ātmā*. It is a self-experiencing principle.

Q: Is the experience in the so called *ātmānubhava* (free from *dṛśya*) that of *ātmacaitanya* or of something else? If it is the experience of something else (other than *ātmacaitanya*), that something else has to be *dṛśya*, inert (*jada*) and a sense object (or *viśaya*, binding in nature), since everything apart from *cit* (*caitanya*) is *dṛśya*. Now to talk about a distinct experience of *dṛśya* is meaningless. *Dṛśya* does not need a separate experience, since we experience the *dṛśya-jagat* incessantly. We do not need the *śāstra* (Vedānta) for its knowledge. On the other hand, if it is the *anubhava* (experience) of *ātmā* alone that is sought, the experience is already available since *ātmā* itself is *anubhava-svarūpa*, the self-experiencing principle. We experience *ātmā* in and through and concurrent with each experience of every object. Where then is the need for a separate *ātmānubhava*? Is a distinct *ātmānubhava* even possible? Why do we need the *śāstra* (Vedānta) for *ātmānubhava* when *ātmā* itself is *anubhavasvarūpa*?

Ans: Yes, it is true; *ātmā* is experience itself (i.e. *anubhava-svarūpaḥ*) – the self-experiencing principle. Yet, what is experienced in the state of ignorance is *ātmā*

intermixed with the *adhyasta* (superimposed) *dṛśya-jagat*. This experience is *sopādhika*, and not the correct (*yathārtha*) experience of *nirupādhika ātmā* in its true nature.

Q: What then is the correct (*yathārtha*) experience of *ātmā*?

Ans: Firstly, *avidyā* (ignorance) has to be destroyed by *jñāna-pramāṇa* (vide pg. 122, 127-fn.46). The true nature of *ātmā* gets directly revealed thereby, namely, *ātmattva-sākṣātkāra-bodha* is gained. It is gained by means of the *ātmākāra-vṛtti* (i.e. *manasaḥ vṛttirūpeṇa*). As a result of this *vṛtti*, all effects of ignorance in terms of the *adhyasta* (superimposition) on *ātmā*/Brahman, or *dṛśya-prapañca*, disappear from the range of experience. Even though *ātmā* exists forever in its true nature and never changes, it is only when the *ātmākāra-vṛtti* is gained that the experience of *ātmā* in its limitless *ānandasvarūpa* appears as if born through the knowledge of *ātmā*. The experience involving the *ātmattva-sākṣātkāra* of *ātmā* is free from all that is *adhyasta* or *dṛśya*, in contrast to the state of ignorance, where the experience is intermixed with the *adhyasta*. Thus despite being one's true nature, the experience of *ātmā* appears to be born as a result (*phala*) of the *śāstra* (Vedānta) through the knowledge in the form of *ātmattva-sākṣātkāra* (the direct cognition of *ātmā*) gained through the *ātmākāra-vṛtti*, also known as *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*, occurring in a pure (*śuddha*) and steady (*niścala*) mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*).

Q: Why is it necessary to completely stop the *adhyasta* or

drśyaprapaṅca from one's range of experience, when the *śāstra* (Vedānta), the ultimate *pramāṇa*, throughout declares that everything is Brahman and the entire *adhyasta anātmā* is *mithyā* (false) in nature?

Ans : Yes, everything – the entire *mithyā adhyasta anātmā* – is Brahman. Such statements are ornamental after gaining *Brahmajñāna*. But to simply quote these in the state of ignorance to refute the means that is indispensable is untimely, premature and disastrous (*Yogavāsiṣṭha*, *Utpatti* 67-60 and 61). Everything is indeed Brahman, to the extent that the superimposed *prapaṅca* has no independent existence without its *adhiṣṭhāna* (basis) – Brahman. It is an equation of *bādha-sāmānādhikaranyam* (juxtaposition with inherent negation), as seen in the illustration of the *sthānurayam puruṣaḥ* – “the post is a man”, a post in the darkness being mistaken for a thief. In this case, the basis – post – has to be known directly devoid of the superimposed entity – the thief. The *bhāṣyakāra* says that the *sāmānādhikaranyam* – viz. everything is Brahman (*sarvam Brahma*) – is intended for the dissolution (*praviḷāpanārtham*) of Creation (*prapaṅca*, – *Sūtrabhāṣya* 1-3-1).⁶⁶ The *śruti* statement – *sarvam Brahma* – does not intend to confer the status of *nirvikārī* (changeless) Brahman to the *vikārī* (ever changing) *mithyā jagat*.

Therefore *aparokṣa Brahmajñāna* should be free from all the *adhyasta*. The *bhāṣyakāra* highlights this aspect when he says : The means to abide in the true

⁶⁶. सर्वं ब्रह्म इति तु सामानाधिकरण्यं प्रपंचप्रविलापनार्थम् ।

nature of *ātmā* is verily the withdrawal (*nivṛtti*) of the mind from the distinct pluralistic cognitions alien to *ātmā* (*B.G.Bh.* 18-50). *Dvaita jagat* and *advaita Brahma* cannot be known simultaneously. ‘The *Brahmajñānī* absorbed in Brahman does not perceive the *jagat*, whereas the individual engrossed in the *jagat* does not know Brahman, just as a sleeper does not know dream, and a dreamer knows not sleep’⁶⁷.

Sage Vāsiṣṭha, in considering the nature of *aparokṣa Brahmajñāna*, provides the rationale for this prerequisite. He states: ‘This too is the unique nature of *tattvajñāna* (*ātmajñāna*), namely the *ahaṅkāra* which is false (erroneous), having known its true nature, merges in *ātmā*. The complete extinction of seer (*draṣṭā*) and seen (*drśya*) is the highest *nirvāṇa* (*mokṣa*)’. ‘*Drśya* with its accompanying *tripuṭī* is absent in *nirvāṇa* (*mokṣa*). *Mokṣa* is (also) not present in *drśya* and *tripuṭī*. *Mokṣa* and *drśya* / *tripuṭī* cannot co-exist, like light and darkness’⁶⁸. Sage Aṣṭāvakra warns : O son ! You may learn or even teach different *śāstras* many a time. Nevertheless, your mind will not get absorbed in *ātmā* unless you withdraw from all *drśyas*[#].

⁶⁷. ब्रह्मात्मा वेत्ति नो सर्गं सर्गात्मा ब्रह्म वेत्ति नो ।
सुषुप्तो वेत्ति नो स्वप्नं स्वप्नस्थो न सुषुप्तकम् ॥ (यो.वा.नि.उ. ४०-९)

⁶⁸. एष एव स्वभावो यद् द्रष्टृदृश्यक्षयोऽखिलः ।
ज्ञात्वाऽस्तत्या विनिर्वाणमहंतात्मनि गच्छति ॥८॥
निर्वाणे नास्ति दृश्यादि दृश्यादौ नास्ति निर्वृतिः ।
मिथोऽनयोरनुभवो न च्छायातपयोरिव ॥९॥ (यो.वा.नि.उ.सर्ग ३७)

#. आचक्ष्व श्रुणु वा तात नानाशास्त्रण्यनेकशः ।
तथापि न तव स्वास्थ्यं सर्वविस्मरणादृते ॥ (अष्टावक्रगीता १६-१)

Sureśvarācārya highlights the above fact: a *jñānī* whose mind is absorbed steadfastly in *ātmā* does not perceive the *dr̥śya-jagat*⁶⁹.

From the stand-point of the *paramārtha svarūpa* (true nature) of *jagat* free from the *adhyasta upādhis* of names and forms, the statement “Everything is Brahman” is de jure (a legitimate statement). But given that the attributes of *jagat* are vivid, the statement is not de facto (not founded in fact). The *Pratīkādhikaraṇa* (*Br.Sū.* 4-1-4) implies this truth when it says that *pratīkās* (symbols) such as the sun, mind, space, name etc. with their *upādhis* of names and forms cannot be Brahman by themselves, but are Brahman *paramārthataḥ* (in their true nature) free from *adhyasta upādhis*. What holds good for a *pratīka* is true of the entire *jagat*. The *jagat* with its names and forms as it presently obtains is not Brahman in and of itself. It is so only in its true nature free from *upādhis*. A mere repetition of the statement “Everything is Brahman” without *Brahmasākṣātkāra* cannot do away with the need for *prapañca-pravilāpana* as a means.

Direct knowledge is true to the thing to be known. An *anṭhakarāṇa-vṛtti* not true to the nature of *ātmā* – not free from *adhyasta prapañca* – cannot remove its ignorance. It should be a replica of *ātmā* / Brahman, i.e. *ātmākāra* / *Brahmākāra* – free from the experienced *mithyā prapañca*. A mere verbal denial of

adhyasta claiming it to be *mithyā* (apparent) is only a consolation. Such verbal denial is not capable of dissolving the *adhyasta saṃsāra*, which is *anubhavasiddha* – established by direct experience. The termination of the vivid experience of *saṃsāra* should also be *anubhavasiddha*. Problem and solution have to have the same degree of reality. The absence of perception of the *adhyasta dr̥śya* in deep sleep does not bring the experience of *saṃsāra* to an end. The root cause of *saṃsāra*, viz. the *adhyāsa* of ignorance, is present in deep sleep. It is not a state entirely free from *adhyāsa*. *Aparokṣa Brahmajñāna* is not possible without the direct cognition of *ātmā*/Brahman in its true nature free from the *adhyasta dr̥śya prapañca*. That is why the *bhāṣyakāra*, in concluding the *adhyāsabhāṣya*, emphasizes the need to abandon (*prahāṇa*) the calamitous *adhyāsa* with its root cause (vide pg. 90).

To explain it differently, when a rope is mistaken for a snake in the dark, the absence of a snake can be ascertained only upon direct perception of the rope, and the consequent non-presence of the snake under light. The snake or rather the erroneous impression of a snake concealed the rope. The rope cannot be known if the snake continues to be perceived without catching the sight of the actual rope at least once. The same is true with *ātmā*. *Ātmā* / Brahman apparently concealed by the features of the *adhyasta* (superimposed) embodiment and by perception is not

⁶⁹ आत्मन्येवारूढभावो जगदेतन्न वीक्षते ॥५६॥ (पंचीकरणवार्तिकम्)

available for direct cognition as ‘I’ in its true nature.⁷⁰ If *ātmā* free from the *adhyasta dṛśya* is not directly appreciated, the superimposed (*adhyasta*) delusion ‘I am a *saṃsārī*’ will persist as a direct experience. In that case, ‘I am Brahman’ will become a matter of *śraddhā* (faith) similar to the existence of the heavens and Vedānta will be reduced to a non-verifiable *pramāṇa* similar to *dharmajijñāsā*. This is not the case.

The *yathārthānubhava* (experience true to the nature) of whatever is experienced is the basic constituent – cardinal essence – of both direct perception (*pratyakṣa-jñāna*) and direct self-knowledge (*aparokṣa-jñāna* of *ātmā*). There cannot be *aparokṣa-jñāna* (direct self-knowledge) without *ātmānubhava/Brahmānubhava* (experience conforming to the true nature of *ātmā*/Brahman), which is the unconditional requirement. Statements such as ‘I am Brahman’ drawn from the Vedānta-*pramāṇa* but simply mouthed without gaining the *yathārthānubhava* of *ātmā*/Brahman as *paramānanda-svarūpa*, although supported by a level of reasoning, at best represent *parokṣa-jñāna* (indirect knowledge) which cannot destroy the *aparokṣa bhrama* (directly experienced delusion), ‘I am a *saṃsārī*’.

The notion ‘I am a *saṃsārī*’ is a *saṃvit* (*caitanya* conditioned by an *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti*). This

⁷⁰. एष सर्वेषु भूतेषु (ब्रह्मादिस्तंबपर्यन्तेषु) गूढः (संवृतः दर्शनश्रवणादिकर्मा अविद्यामायाच्छन्नः अतः एव) आत्मा न प्रकाशते (आत्मत्वेन कस्यचित्) ।
(Kṭ.U./Bh. 1-3-12)

saṃvit is subjective knowledge (*prātibhāsika*) during the period of the ignorance of *ātmā*, just like the knowledge ‘this is silver’ in the example of a sea-shell mistaken for silver. The existence of the notion ‘I am a *saṃsārī*’ cannot be negated without a direct experience in the form of ‘I am free from sorrowful *saṃsāra*’. It is similar to the mistaken impression of the existence of silver coming to an end through the experience that what exists is in fact a shell. Sage Vasiṣṭha vividly brings out the principle underlying this phenomenon. Some contenders object that experience alone cannot be the basis for the knowledge of the existence of an entity, as seen in the case of silver which, though experienced in the sea-shell, is found to be non-existent. In reply, the principle is enunciated: ‘any entity whatsoever known internally (subjectively – *prātibhāsikatayā*) by a *saṃvit* (by way of an *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti*) is experienced by it (*saṃvit*) exactly as known, irrespective of the fact that the knowledge of the entity is true or false. In short, what is known thus (subjectively), whether true or false, is established by experience’ (*Yogavāsiṣṭha, Nirvāṇa uttara, 79-31*)⁷¹. The outcome of this implies that any deeply rooted erroneous knowledge of an entity, which is subjectively experienced (e.g. the notion that ‘I am a *saṃsārī*’) cannot be terminated without the correct experience of that entity.

The distinction between the direct (*aparokṣa*)

⁷¹. यान्तर्वेत्ति यथा संवित्सा तथा नु भवत्यलम् ।
अस्तु सत्यमसत्यं वा सिद्धमित्यनुभूतितः ॥ यो.वा.नि.उ. 79-31

and indirect (*parokṣa*) knowledge of *ātmā* is based on the presence or absence of *ātmānubhava* / *Brahmānubhava* – the unique experience conforming to the true nature of *ātmā* / Brahman.

THE *BHĀṢYAKĀRA* EMPHASIZES TERMINATION OF *ĀTMĀNĀTMĀDHYĀSA*

It is noteworthy that in the following passages (*Gītā Bh.* 18-50), the *bhāṣyakāra* repeatedly emphasizes the need to eliminate (*nivṛttiḥ* or *nirākaraṇam*) of *ātmānātmādhyāsa*.

- i) नामरूपाद्यनात्माध्यारोपणनिवृत्तिः एव कार्या । (To gain the knowledge of *ātmā*, what needs to be accomplished is only the termination or withdrawal (*nivṛtti*) of all the superimposed *anātmā* characterised by name and form).
- ii) अविद्याध्यारोपनिराकरणमात्रं ब्रह्मणि कर्तव्यम् । (With respect to *Brahmajñāna*, all that is required is the *nirākaraṇam* of *avidyādyāropana* – shutting out of cognition all superimposed entities effected by ignorance).
- iii) बाह्याकारभेदबुद्धिनिवृत्तिः एव आत्मस्वरूपालम्बने कारणम् । (The means to abide in the true nature of *ātmā* is verily the withdrawal of the mind from the distinct pluralistic cognitions alien to *ātmā*).

TERMINATION OF *ĀTMĀNĀTMĀDHYĀSA* IS POSSIBLE

Adhyāsa is *sarvaloka-pratyakṣa* – directly experienced by one and all. It is *anubhavasiddha* – established by experience. The entire *adhyasta-dṛśya-prapañca* including *ajñāna* which encompasses all *antahkaraṇvṛttis* or

the three states of consciousness, is *anubhavasiddha*. Its total absence – never to return – should also necessarily be *anubhavasiddha*. There is no rule to the effect that *anubhava* (experience) is possible only in the presence of the *adhyasta ahaṅkāra* as *pramātā*, *anubhavitā* (experiencer) or *jñāta* (knower). *Nirvikalpa-samādhi*, in which the *tripuṭī* is absent, proves that the absence of the entire *adhyasta-prapañca* is experiential. *Samādhi* by itself is not *ātmajñāna*. It is one of the means to prepare the mind to gain *Brahmasākṣātkāra* / *aparokṣajñāna*. Lord Kṛṣṇa declares that the mind cleansed by *samādhi* is an indispensable means to gain self-knowledge when he says:

आत्मना (समाधिपरिशुद्धेन अन्तःकरणेन) आत्मानं (परं चैतन्यं) पश्यन् (उपलभमानः)..... (B.G./Bh. 6-20).

Tr. Directly knowing *ātmā* through the mind cleansed (purified) by means of *samādhi*.....

In fact, all experiences are possible due to *anubhavasvarūpa ātmā*. Even when the *ātmānātmādhyāsa* ends as in the case of a *jīvanmukta*, *anubhavasvarūpa ātmā* continues in terms of *svarūpānubhava*, *ātmānubhava*, *Brahmānubhava*. This vindicates the following definitions of *mokṣa*.

- i) *Ātmā* itself free from *avidyā* and its *kārya* (effect) is *mokṣa* (*Vedāntakalpalatikā*).
- ii) *Svātmani avasthānam* (the abidance in *ātmā*) is *mokṣa* (*Tai.U.Bh.* 1-12; *Ke.U. Pada Bh.* 2-4).

It cannot be contended that *adhyāsanivṛtti* (the termination of *dṛśya ātmānātmādhyāsa*) is not possible to

achieve. It is certainly possible. The different means such as *sādhana* *catuṣṭaya-saṃpatti*, *amānitvādi* (B.G. 13-7 to 11), *śravaṇa*, *manana*, *nididhyāsana*, *aṣṭāṅgayoga* or what is termed as *śraddhā-bhakti-dhyānayoga* (Kai.U. 1-2) or *adhyātmayogādhiḡamaḥ* (Kṭ.U. 1-2-12) culminate directly or indirectly in *adhyāsanivṛtti*. Take for instance *adhyātmayogādhiḡamaḥ*.

It is defined as –

विषयेभ्यः प्रतिसंहृत्य चेतसः आत्मनि समाधानं अध्यात्मयोगः,
तस्य अधिगमः (प्राप्तिः, Kṭ.U. Bh. 1-2-12) ।

Tr. The accomplishment (*adhiḡamaḥ*) of the absorption of the mind (*samādhānam* / *samādhiḥ*) in *ātmā* through a total withdrawal of the mind from sense objects (*viṣayas*) is *adhyātmayogādhiḡamaḥ*.

Ś r ī V i d y ā r a ṇ y a M u n i d e s c r i b e s *adhyātmayogādhiḡamaḥ* as *pratyagātma-samādhi-prāptiḥ* – the achievement of the state of total absorption of the mind in *ātmā* (*Jīvanmuktiviveka*, Ch.-2).

Sage Vālmīki, describing *jīvanmukti* to his disciple Bharadvāja based on his own direct experience, comments on the need to end the cognition of *drśya-jagat* or *adhyasta-prapañca*. ‘O good man, to forget the delusion of this *jagat* – experienced just like the (non-existing) blueness of the sky – such that it is not remembered again is what I consider an exalted accomplishment. It cannot be experienced without the knowledge that in reality there is no *drśya* at all. Even though *drśya* is perceived, it is certainly possible to experience its total absence. The unsurpassed happiness of *mokṣa* (*parā*

nirvāṇanivṛtiḥ) is born when the mind is cleansed of *drśya* by the knowledge (i.e. by the *jñāna-pramāṇa*, *ātmākāravṛtti* directly revealing *ātmā*) that it (*drśya*) does not exist (in the three periods of time)⁷², (*Yo. Vā, Vai*, 3-2 to 6).

DEFINITION OF *ĀTMĀNUBHAVA*

In his commentary on the next *sūtra*, the *bhāṣyakāra* specifies *ātmānubhava*/*Brahmānubhava* as the culmination of *Brahmajñāna* and draws a distinction between the modes of operation of the *pramāṇas* in the case of *Brahmajijñāsā* and in the case of *dharmajijñāsā*. The nature of *ātmānubhava* is defined clearly as ‘I am pure non-dual awareness free from all sorrows’ (*Br.Sū. Bh.* 4-1-2 सर्वदुःखविनिर्मुक्तैकचैतन्यात्मकोऽहं इति एषः आत्मानुभवः). I (*ātmā*), being self-evident (*svaprakāśa*; *svayamjyoti*), whatever is signified by the term ‘I’ – whether in the state of ignorance or of knowledge, whether in conjunction with *adhyasta* objects or not – is necessarily self-evident. So the experience of ‘I’ persists invariably at all times, whether true to its nature or otherwise. Total freedom from all sorrows is possible only when the experiential *adhyasta anātmā*, including ignorance, is completely eliminated (*nirākṛta*, *nivṛtta*) from one's cognition.

THE RESULT (*PHALA*) OF *BRAHMĀVAGATIḤ*

The end result of *Brahmāvagati* is now described:

71. भ्रमस्य जागतस्यास्य जातस्याकाशवर्णवत् ।
अपुनःस्मरणं मन्ये साधो विस्मरणं वरम् ॥
दृश्यात्यन्ताभावबोधं विना तन्नानुभूयते ॥
जगद्भ्रमोऽयं दृश्योऽपि नास्त्येवेत्यनुभूयते ॥
दृश्यं नास्तीति बोधेन मनसो दृश्यमार्जनम् ।
संपन्नं चेत्तदुत्पन्ना परा निर्वाणनिर्वृत्तिः ॥ (योगवासिष्ठः, वैराग्यप्रकरणम्, Ch. 3-2 to 6) vide page 144, footnote 65 also.

भा. ब्रह्मावगतिः हि पुरुषार्थः, निःशेषसंसारबीजाविद्याद्यनर्थनिर्बर्हणात्
तस्मात् ब्रह्म विजिज्ञासितव्यम् ।

Bh.Tr.The direct cognition of Brahman called *Brahmāvagati* is the highest human accomplishment because it destroys the entire *samsāra* and everything that is disastrous in nature, along with its root cause, *avidyā*. Therefore Brahman should be inquired into.

Human accomplishments (*puruṣārthas*) that are deemed worthwhile are grouped into four categories :

- i) *Dharma* : Accomplishment of the relative good in terms of sense-pleasures here and heavenly pleasures hereafter through the means of scriptural injunctions – scriptural do's and don'ts.
- ii) *Artha* : Acquisition of assets such as wealth, possessions etc.
- iii) *Kāma* : Fulfilment of desires not proscribed (*niṣiddha*) by the scriptures.
- iv) *Mokṣa* – Liberation : Abidance in one's true nature, which is forever free from all limitations and sorrows and is itself limitless happiness.

The *puruṣārtha* referred to here as *mokṣa* is the result of *Brahmāvagati*, in the face of which all other accomplishments lose their significance. The Pañcapādikā describes *Brahmāvagati* as *Brahmarūpatā-sākṣātkaraṇam* – the direct cognition of Brahman in its true nature. Having expounded on the meaning of the words in the *sūtra*, the import of the *sūtra* is now pronounced in a tone of command

exhorting one to undertake *Brahmavicāra* – the inquiry into the nature of Brahman. The eligibility of an individual to take to inquiry having been established by the words ‘*atha*’ and ‘*ataḥ*’ of this *sūtra*, *Brahmavicāra* is quite tenable.

BRAHMAN IS LIMITLESS (*ANANTA*) HAPPINESS (*ĀNANDA*)

Brahmāvagati is described as the highest human accomplishment. But does it not lack happiness, and is not the seeking of happiness the fundamental urge of all living beings? This doubt is born of ignorance of Brahman. The nature of Brahman is simultaneous ever-existence (*sat*), knowledge (*cit*) and happiness (*ānanda*) which is limitless (*ananta*). Brahman does not lose its intrinsic nature of *sat*, *cit* and *ānanda* (happiness) only because it is *ananta* (*Sarvasāropaniṣat*). The *ānanda* (happiness) that is universally experienced by the *jīva* in deep sleep or in sense-pleasure originates from the only primary source of happiness, viz. *ātmā* / Brahman / *Bhūmā* (*Kai.U.* 15, *Mā.U.* 5, *Br.U.* 4-3-32, *Ch.U.* 7-23-1). Scriptures use different synonyms for the word happiness (*ānanda*) to describe the nature of happiness of Brahman. Some of these are: *ānandam* (*Br.U.* 3-9-28, 4-3-32/33; *Tai.U.* 2-4, 2-7, 3-6), *sukham* (*Ch.U.* 7-23-1, *Kṛ.U.* 5-12, *Śv.U.* 6-12, *B.G.* 6-21/27), *kam* (*Ch.U.* 4-10-4/5), *rasaḥ* (*Tai.U.* 2-7), *priyam* (*S.R.U.* 58/59). Generally, words such as *ānanda* and *sukham* indicate *viśayānanda*, the limited sense-pleasure born of contact with sense objects. But when used to describe Brahman, these limitations are eliminated by qualifying *ānanda* etc. with words which specify limitlessness, eternity and exaltedness. Such words are: *Bhūmā* (infinite), Brahman, *anantam* (limitless), *śāśvatam*

(eternal), *ātyantikam* (endless), *parama* (primary, best), *uttamam* (exalted) etc. Thus unlike *viṣayānanda*, the words *ānanda*, *sukham* etc. used to specify Brahman indicate the unborn, self-evident (*svaparakāśa*), limitless happiness, the *svarūpa* of Brahman free from *tripuṭī* (*Br.U.Bh.* 3-9-28, 4-3-32).

The *Taittiriya* (2-8/*Bh.*) and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (4-3-33/*Bh.*) Upaniṣads contain an inquiry into the measure of *ānanda* (happiness – not *ananta*) enjoyed by beings in different species of embodiments. The inquiry starts with the happiness enjoyed by an ideal emperor as the basic unit, with a hundredfold increase in each successively higher embodiment upto the highest embodiment, *Hiraṇyagarbha*. The counting stops here. The *ānanda* (happiness) enjoyed in all these embodiments is akin to a drop in the ocean of happiness that is Brahman (*Br.U.* 4-3-32). Thus *Brahmānanda* is limitless happiness and non-dual in nature which is self-evident in *Brahmāvagati*. *Brahmāvagati* is therefore the highest human accomplishment.

BRAHMAVICĀRA IS VALID

Brahmavicāra and its result were elaborated in the context of the *adhyāsa* of the *jagat* on Brahman. Nevertheless a doubt remains, viz., whether Brahman is already known or unknown by anyone at any time. This topic is broached to show that Brahman is neither totally unknown nor completely known, indicating the necessity of *Brahmavicāra*.

and correctly deciphers instructions at every step of the way. It certainly takes intelligence and reasoning to decode the

instructions and take correct decisions along the way.

The *śruti* too expects the *mumukṣu* to make use of his intelligence and utilize reasoning to ascertain the purport of its statements. The condition of a *jīva* is similar to that of the person waylaid. Self-ignorance, desires and the results of actions have robbed him of his own nature, which is limitless happiness, and thrown him into the forest of *saṃsāra*. When taught by a compassionate *ācārya* (teacher) “you are not a *saṃsārī* but verily Brahman” (*Ch.U.* 6-8-7), an individual capable of ascertaining the purport of this statement can directly know his own true nature through due reasoning alone, and not in any other manner.

DIRECT EXPERIENCE (ANUBHAVA) IS INDISPENSABLE FOR GAINING BRAHMAJÑĀNA, BUT NOT FOR THE KNOWLEDGE OF DHARMA

Pūrvamīmāṃsā/dharmajijñāsā (inquiry into the nature of the *karmakāṇḍa* portion of the Veda) employs means of knowledge such as *śruti*, *liṅgam*, *vākyam*, *prakaraṇam*, *sthānam*, *samākhyā* alone. Some who have a bias in favour of *pūrvamīmāṃsā* contend that the above means of knowledge alone are sufficient for gaining *Brahmajñāna*, because Brahman, like *dharma* (*karma* / relative good), has been propounded in the Veda. They argue that it is inappropriate to talk of any other practices such as *manana* (reflection) and its accompanying reasoning, *nididhyāsana* (intense contemplation), or the direct cognition of Brahman (*Brahmasākṣātkāra*) termed as the experience of Brahman (*Brahmānubhava*), for the acquisition of *Brahmajñāna*. This is incorrect. The modes of gaining (or imparting) knowledge

in *dharmajijñāsā* and *Brahmajijñāsā* differ even though the *Veda-pramāṇa* is common. This is now taken up for clarification.

Here it is advisable to have a clear understanding of what *dharma* – the relative good – is in the context of the present discussion. The performance of good actions (*karma*) enjoined in the Vedas and the *smṛtis* yields an *adr̥ṣṭa* (unseen) result called *puṇya* or *dharma*. There are two schools of thought in *pūrvamīmāṃsā*, viz. those of *Bhātta* and *Prābhākara*. According to the *Bhātta* school, sacrifices, acts of charity and other good works are called *dharma* in the primary sense while their result *puṇya* is considered *dharma* in the secondary or implied sense. According to *Prābhākara*, the reverse holds true, where *puṇya* is *dharma* in the primary sense while sacrifices and the rest are *dharma* in the implied sense. Vedānta accepts *Bhātta*'s version in matters of *karmakāṇḍa*. The *bhāṣyakāra* therefore considers sacrifices etc. to be *dharma*.

भा. न धर्मजिज्ञासायां इव श्रुत्यादयः एव प्रमाणं ब्रह्मजिज्ञासायाम् ।
किंतु श्रुत्यादयः अनुभवादयः च यथासंभवं इह प्रमाणं,
अनुभवावसानत्वात् भूतवस्तुविषयत्वात् च ब्रह्मज्ञानस्य ।

Bh.Tr. For the inquiry into Brahman, *śruti* and the rest are not the only means of knowledge, unlike in the case of *dharmajijñāsā*. In addition to *śruti* (with *liṅgam* etc.), direct experience, (reflection and contemplation in accordance with *śruti*) are (also) the *pramāṇas* as appropriate (to the context required) because the knowledge of Brahman culminates in (direct) experience and concerns an

already existent entity.

In general, *śruti*, *liṅgam*, *vākyam*, *prakaraṇam*, *sthānam* and *samākhyā* are means of knowledge considered to be *pramāṇas* for the knowledge of both *dharma* and Brahman. In this context, the word *śruti* does not stand for the Vedas, but for Vedic passages independent of *liṅga*, *vākyam*, *prakaraṇam*, *sthānam* and *samākhyā*. *Liṅga* is the capacity to reveal the meaning of a word. *Vākyam* (sentence) represents the syntactical connections between a word and other appropriate words. The dependence of the principal sentence on its subsidiary sentences is called *prakaraṇam*. The mapping between a list of entities enumerated in a given sequence and a corresponding list of related entities that are also enumerated is *sthānam*. For example, ten sacrifices such as *Indreṣṭi*, *Agnīṣṭi* and so on are found in the Vedas ordered in a definite sequence. Ten *mantras* are also listed alongside these ten sacrifices. In such instances, the first *mantra* is to be employed for the first sacrifice, and so on. *Samākhyā* stands for a similarity of names. For example, *mantras* called *ādhvaryava* are to be employed for *karmas* called *ādhvaryava*.

The *bhāṣya* states that *anubhavādayaḥ* (experience etc.) are additional means of knowledge for gaining *Brahmajijñāna*. The word *ādi* (etc.) in *anubhavādayaḥ* signifies *manana* (reflection) and *nididhyāsana* (contemplation). *Manana* includes *anumāna* (inference).

Anubhava (experience) is *Brahmasākṣātkāra* or the *Brahmāvagati* referred to earlier in the *bhāṣya* on the first *sūtra*. It is also termed as *Brahmānubhava* of *jīvanmuktas* –

liberated here and now even while living. It is the direct (*sākṣāt*) experience or cognition of *ātmā* / Brahman, where the knower (*pramātā*) or experiencer (*anubhavitā*) ceases to exist as an entity along with the *pramāṇa* which has already served its purpose (*B.G.Bh.* 2-69)⁷³. This is neither the experience of an object/being/event in the transient Creation nor any experience during the waking, dream or deep sleep states. In it is absent the *tripuṭī* – in the form of separate entities – the experiencer, experienced and experience or the knower, known and knowledge*. It is the experience of *ātmāsvarūpa* / *Brahmasvarūpa* in its true nature – totally free from and independent of all entities superimposed on it which were hitherto experienced as intrinsic features of *ātmā* / Brahman. *Brahmānubhava* is unlike the experience of any *adhyasta* (superimposed) entity during the state of self-ignorance. Unlike in the state of ignorance, there is no cognition of superimposed entities whatsoever.

The experience of *ātmā* / Brahman in its true nature is timeless, wherein the notions of permanence (*nityatva*) and transience (*anityatva*) found in the relative world have lost their relevance. Even though Brahman is the unborn, indestructible, ever-existent principle whose nature is self-evident experience itself, the lasting nature of this experience during the term of the *prārabdha* of a *jīvanmukta* depends on his degree of *jñānaniṣṭhā* (steadfastness in knowledge). This seeming limitation in the period of experience of oneself as Brahman is due to the lingering embodiment, which continues till the *prārabdha karma* comes to an end. Such a sense of

⁷³. न हि आत्मस्वरूपाधिगमे सति पुनः प्रमाणप्रमेयव्यवहारः सम्भवति ।

प्रमातृत्वं हि आत्मनः निर्वर्तयति अन्त्यं प्रमाणम् ।

(**vṛtti*)

limitation can cease fully only in *videhamukti* – liberation free from embodiment.

To believe that no experience of *ātmā* / Brahman in its true nature – totally free from superimposed entities – is possible because it is already our *svarūpa* (true nature) is to defy the *svayamjyoti* (self-luminous principle) *śruti* (*Bṛ.U.* 4-3-9 and 14) and deny the very nature of *ātmā* as being ever *anubhava-svarūpa* synonymous with *jñapti-svarūpa* – the self-evident principle of experience identical with the knowledge-principle. Such a misconception can lead to the wrong conclusion that the nature of *ātmā* as *anubhava-svarūpa* (self-evident experience) is relative to the superimposed (*adhyasta*) *avidyākārya* (the effects of ignorance) including *avidyā* (self-ignorance) and it ceases to be of the very nature of experience when they are absent.

Two reasons are advanced in the *bhāṣya* for the need for such an *anubhava* etc. in accordance with *śruti* as *pramāṇa* in *Brahmajñānāsā*.

- i) *Brahmajñānasya anubhavāvasānatvāt : Brahmajñāna* culminates in experience. *Brahmajñāna* is only indirect knowledge (*parokṣa-jñāna*) and not direct (*aparokṣa*) knowledge until it culminates in *Brahmasākṣātkāra* – the direct experience or cognition of Brahman.
- ii) *Brahmajñānasya bhūtavastu-viśayatvāt ca* : Brahman is the ever-existent principle and not an entity yet to come into existence, and hence always available for experience unlike entities that are yet to come into existence (e.g. results of *karma*) or those which are

parokṣa – not available for direct experience.

To gain liberation, the *parokṣajñāna* born of *śruti pramāṇa* has to culminate in *sākṣātkāra* (direct experience) because Brahman – the object of *Brahmajñāna* – is verily the ever-existent self-evident ‘I’ (*ātmā*) and its *sākṣātkāra* is possible. *Manana* and *nididhyāsana* are indispensable means to *Brahmasākṣātkāra*.

On the other hand, *dharma* is something yet to be performed and produced in the form of a future result (i.e. *sādhya*) that is yet to come into existence. What is required for the *anuṣṭhāna* (performance) of *dharma* in the sense of scriptural *karma* (action) is only an ascertainment of the method of *anuṣṭhāna* in accordance with the *śruti*. Its experience (*anubhava*) is not required at the time knowledge of its method of performance is gained because it is not possible since the result of the *karma* has not yet come into existence.

It would be fallacious to draw an inference that the knowledge of Brahman does not call for reflection, contemplation and experience merely because just like *dharma*, it is *Vedārtha* (propounded by the Vedas). The reason (*hetu*) proposed, viz. ‘because Brahman is propounded by the Veda’ is not applicable. *Dharma* does not require to be experienced, because it is yet to be produced (*sādhya*) and is therefore unavailable for experience, and not because the Veda is its *pramāṇa*. In *tarka* (logic), a special cause for a general effect such as ‘*dharma* is unsuited for experience at the time its mode of *anuṣṭhāna* (performance) is determined’ is called *upādhi*. This definition of *upādhi* by logicians is

different from the word *upādhi* used in Vedānta. *Upādhi* in this context is either a special cause for a general effect or a particular thing which leads to *hetvābhāsa* – the semblance of reason or what is called a fallacious middle term. In logic, *upādhi* is that (e.g. ‘contact of fire with wet fuel’) which invariably accompanies *sādhya* (the thing to be proved, e.g. smoke) whereas it does not do so with respect to *sādhanam* (the *hetu* or the middle term, e.g. fire).⁷⁴

To clarify, let us consider a specific mode of an inference: There is smoke on the mountain because there is fire on it. In this inference, ‘contact with the wet fuel’ is the *upādhi*. The smoke is due to the contact of fire with wet fuel and not because of the fire itself. There is no rule that smoke invariably accompanies fire. For instance, no smoke is produced through the burning of iron. The *upādhi* ‘contact with wet fuel’ leads to the fallacious middle term (*hetu*) ‘because there is fire on the mountain’ while proving the presence of smoke on the mountain. Such a wrong inference is untenable.

The *upādhi* involving *dharma* does not apply to *Brahmajñāna*. Brahman is the self-evident ever-existing principle and so is available for experience both in the state of ignorance with all that is *adhyasta* (superimposed) on it as well as on gaining its direct knowledge minus the *adhyasta*.

In his gloss Pañcapādikā on the *Brahmasūtra bhāṣya*, Śrī Padmapādācārya, a direct disciple of the *bhāṣyakāra*, cites the following general rule while commenting on this portion.

सिद्धे वस्तुनि सम्भवति अनुभवः, तदवसाना आकांक्षानिवृत्तिः

⁷⁴ साध्यव्यापकत्वे सति साधनाव्यापकत्वं उपाधिः ।

यतः। –पंचपादिका

Tr. ‘Experience is possible in the case of an already existing entity, because of which the desire to know it ends with its experience’.

This rule draws the contrast between the modes of gaining knowledge in both *Brahmajijñāsā* and *dharmajijñāsā* even though their *pramāṇa* (the means of knowledge) is one and the same, the Veda. Experience is not possible in *dharmajijñāsā* whereas it is inevitable in *Brahmajijñāsā*. Further, the Pañcapādikā lays down a contrary proposition as an introduction to the *bhāṣya* passage that follows now:

Contrary proposition : ‘Complete knowledge to the point of result arises in *dharmajijñāsā* by simply taking to the *pramāṇa* of the *śruti* without experience. It does not require even an iota of reasoning. The same should be applicable to *Brahmajijñāsā* too because Vedāntic passages are also similarly the *pramāṇa* for *Brahmajijñāsā*. Lest one thinks so, the *bhāṣya* draws the distinction between the two’.⁷⁵

भा. कर्तव्ये हि विषये न अनुभवापेक्षा अस्ति इति श्रुत्यादीनां एव प्रामाण्यं स्यात् पुरुषाधीनात्मलाभत्वात् च कर्तव्यस्य । कर्तुं अकर्तुं अन्यथा वा कर्तुं शक्यं लौकिकं वैदिकं च कर्म, यथा अश्वेन गच्छति, पद्भ्याम् अन्यथा वा, न वा गच्छति इति । तथा ‘अतिरात्रे षोडशिनं गृह्णाति न अतिरात्रे षोडशिनं गृह्णाति’ ‘उदिते जुहोति अनुदिते जुहोति’ इति विधिप्रतिषेधाः च अत्र अर्थवन्तः स्युः, विकल्पोत्सर्गापवादाः च । न तु वस्तु एवं, न एवं, अस्ति, न अस्ति

⁷⁵ ननु धर्मजिज्ञासायां विना अपि अनुभवेन शब्दशक्त्यनुसरणमात्रेण एव निराकांक्षं फलपर्यन्तं ज्ञानं भवति, न तर्कगंधमपि अपेक्षते, तथा इहापि स्यात्, प्रमाणत्वाविशेषात् वेदान्तवाक्यानां इत्याशंक्य विशेषमाह । – पंचपादिका

इति वा विकल्प्यते । विकल्पनाः तु पुरुषबुद्ध्यपेक्षाः । न वस्तुयाथात्म्यज्ञानं पुरुषबुद्ध्यपेक्षम् । किं तर्हि वस्तुतन्त्रं एव तत् । न हि स्थाणौ एकस्मिन् स्थाणुः वा पुरुषः अन्यः वा इति तत्त्वज्ञानं भवति । तत्र पुरुषःअन्यः वा इति मिथ्याज्ञानम् । स्थाणुः एव इति तत्त्वज्ञानं, वस्तुतन्त्रत्वात् । एवं भूतवस्तुविषयाणां प्रामाण्यं वस्तुतन्त्रम् । तत्र एवं सति ब्रह्मज्ञानं अपि वस्तुतन्त्रं एव, भूतवस्तुविषयत्वात् ।

Bh.Tr. Experience is not required in the matter of the *vaidika karma* (actions) to be performed (or whose results are yet to come into existence) because *śruti*, *liṅga* and others alone serve as the means of knowledge; (after knowledge of their mode of performance) actual implementation depends on the effort (or will) of the individual. (For instance) it is possible to perform worldly or Vedic action, refrain from doing so, or to perform them in another manner. As for example, a person may take a horse, proceed by foot, or not travel (at all). So also ‘takes the sixteenth cup called *ṣoḍaṣī* in the *atirātra* sacrifice’, or ‘does not take the *ṣoḍaṣī* in the *atirātra* sacrifice’, ‘performs the sacrifice after sunrise,’ ‘performs the sacrifice before sunrise’. Thus injunction (*vidhi*), prohibition (*pratiṣedha*), alternative (*vikalpa*), general rule (*utsarga*), and exception (*apavāda*) are applicable in the case of *dharma* (the *karma* to be performed). But an existent entity is not subject to options such as, ‘it is of such kind’, ‘it is not of such kind’, or ‘it is’, ‘it is not’, because such an array of possibilities depends

on the notion (or will) of the individual. The knowledge of the true nature of a thing does not depend on the vagaries of the human intellect but depends on the thing itself. In a lone post, (the variegated notions that) it is a post, a man or something else cannot be its true knowledge. In the same (post, the notion) ‘it is a man or anything else’ is a misapprehension; ‘it is verily a post’ is its true knowledge because it is in accordance with the entity. Thus the correctness of the knowledge of an existent entity depends on that entity. This being the case, the knowledge of Brahman also depends on the entity (viz. Brahman) because it pertains to an existent entity (viz. Brahman).

The *śruti* with its auxiliaries alone is sufficient as a *pramāṇa* to know *dharma* or *kartavya* (the things to be done); experience is not required. The accomplishment of *dharma* depends on the efforts of the individual. Therefore, *śruti*, *liṅga* and others alone are the means of knowledge. If Brahman is considered similar to *dharma* in its nature, all things applicable to *dharma* such as ‘a thing produced by actions (*kṛtisādhyā*), injunction (*vidhi*), prohibition (*niṣedha*), option (*vikalpa*), general rule (*utsarga*) and exception (*apavāda*)’ will be equally applicable to Brahman. The *bhāṣya* proves that this cannot hold good. To begin with, the optional nature of *dharma* is brought out in the passages from *yathā aśvena gacchati* (‘as one rides a horse’) to the everyday illustration of reaching one's destination by employing different means of transport. Thereafter, the mode of performance of *dharma* with options and alternatives as laid down in the Veda is

explained in the phrases *tathā atirātre* (‘so also in the *atirātra* sacrifice’) etc. *Vidhi* is a scriptural injunction to do something, for example, ‘one should perform sacrifice’. *Niṣedha* is a prohibition exhorting an individual to desist from harmful, undesirable things; as for instance ‘do not drink liquor’. There are different kinds of *vikalpa* (option) declared in the scripture. ‘Grains of either rice (*vrīhi*) or barley (*yava*) can be offered’ is an instance of an alternate means. ‘Taking or not taking the *ṣoḍaṣī* in *atirātra* sacrifice’ is an instance of alternate means depending on the will of the individual, a volitional option. ‘Performance of sacrifice before or after sunrise’ is an option based on time of performance. ‘Offer the oblation in the *āhavanīya* fire’ is *utsarga* – a general rule. ‘Offer the oblation at every foot of the horse’ is *apavāda* – an exception to a general rule.

The applicability of all these to Brahman is refuted in the *bhāṣya* starting with ‘*na tu vastu evam*’ (‘but an existing thing is not subject to options’) up to *bhūtavastu-viṣayatvāt* (‘because Brahman pertains to an existing thing’). ‘Is this thing of such-and-such kind or not of such-and-such kind?’ ‘Is it a pot or is it cloth?’ These are doubts about its nature. ‘Does it exist or not’ is a doubt regarding its very existence. Some may argue that different schools of thought entertain various notions about the nature of *ātmā* and express doubts about its existence or non-existence. In answer, it is stated that all *vikalpanāḥ* (the variety of possibilities, notions and alternatives) are born of the human intellect giving rise to doubts and erroneous concepts at the mental level. These (*vikalpanāḥ*) are not valid knowledge.

Dharma, on the other hand, can be practised as laid

down in the scriptures to the extent of one's knowledge thereof. Therefore, all alternatives and possibilities based on the scripture that depend on the human intellect are indeed valid knowledge in their own context. The same norm cannot be applied to Brahman, because knowledge of an existent entity is not governed by the human intellect. It depends on the entity itself and is determined by the entity. If birth of the knowledge of an existent entity were to depend on the human intellect just as it does for actions to be accomplished, all doubts and alternatives about the existent entity would become available in reality, since such knowledge would correspond to the entity to be known, which is not the case. But the knowledge of an existent entity is not dependent on the human intellect; on the contrary, it is imparted by valid means of knowledge in accordance with the nature of the entity to be known. The nature of a given entity always remains the same. Therefore, only the knowledge of a given entity conforming to its nature alone is valid knowledge, while all remaining alternatives not in conformity with the true nature of the entity are clearly erroneous. This is explained by the illustration of a post. Once ascertained to be a post, all other notions about it get falsified.

Knowledge in conformity with an entity is its correct knowledge whilst all else conjectured by the human intellect at variance from its true nature is false knowledge. The validity of the knowledge of an existent entity depends on its conformity with the entity. This is a rule applicable to the knowledge of all existing entities. Brahman cannot be an exception. *Brahmajñāna* is about an existing entity, like knowledge of a post. Therefore knowledge in conformity with

Brahman alone is correct knowledge and does not depend on notions conjured up by the human intellect. Options and alternatives regarding things to be produced (*sādhyā*) depend on notions of the human intellect while it is not so in the case of an existing entity. In view of such a distinction, the mode of gaining the knowledge of Brahman and *dharma* cannot be similar. This proves the necessity of *manana*, *nididhyāsana* and *sākṣāt Brahmānubhava* for gaining *Brahmajñāna*.

Thus there is an essential difference between *Brahmajijñāsā* and *dharmajijñāsā*. In the case of *dharmajijñāsā*, the *śruti* is the sole *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) and lays down the *vidhis*, *pratiṣedhas* etc. for obtaining specific results. These results are something yet to come into existence and do not exist at the time of *anuṣṭhāna* – the performance of *karmas*. Therefore, no other means is available to verify the truth of these statements except *śraddhā* (attitude of trust) in *śruti*. But Vedānta *śruti* unfolds Brahman, an already existing entity which does not depend on human will or endeavour. Therefore there are roles for other means in gaining *Brahmajñāna* besides *śraddhā*. It is for this reason that there is room for means such as *manana* with its concomitant *anumāna*, *nididhyāsana* and *Brahmasākṣātkāra* in *Brahmajijñāsā*.

Two important texts, viz. *Pañcapādikā* and *Vivaraṇa-prameya-saṅgraha*, further corroborate the need for experience and reasoning in gaining *Brahmajñāna*.

In the following paragraphs, it is important to keep in mind that though the Veda is the common *pramāṇa* for the knowledge of both Brahman and *dharma*, there is a distinction

in their *avabodhana-prakāra* – their modes of gaining (or imparting) knowledge.

ANUBHAVA (EXPERIENCE) AND REASONING ARE INDISPENSABLE IN GAINING BRAHMAJÑĀNA – PAÑCAPĀDIKĀ

In commenting on this *bhāṣya* portion, Śrī Padmapādācārya justifies the indispensability of experience and reasoning for gaining *Brahmajñāna*.

कथम् ? कर्तव्यं हि कर्तव्यत्वात् एव असिद्धस्वभावं न अनुभितुं शक्यं इति न तदाकांक्षा, इह तु सिद्धस्य साक्षादूपेण विपर्यासगृहीतस्य सम्यग्ज्ञानेन साक्षात्करणमन्तरेण न मिथ्याज्ञानोदयनिवृत्तिः; द्विचन्द्रादिषु तथा दर्शनात् । न हि कर्तव्यसिद्धार्थनिष्ठयोः प्रमाणत्वसाम्यात् अवबोधनप्रकारेऽपि साम्यम् । यदि स्यात् पुरुषेच्छावशनिष्पाद्यत्वमपि स्यात् । ततो विधि-प्रतिषेध-विकल्प-समुच्चयोत्सर्गापवादबाधाभ्युच्चय-व्यवस्थितविकल्पादयोऽपि प्रसज्येरन् । न वस्तुनि युक्तमेतत् ; निःस्वभावत्वप्रसंगात् । तथा च एकस्मिन् वस्तुनि स्थाणु पुरुषो वा इति विकल्पः, न वैकल्पिकद्रव्यत्यागवत् सम्यग्ज्ञानं भवति स्थाणुरेव इति निश्चितैकार्थता परमार्थे । यतः वस्तुस्वभावपरतन्त्रं सिद्धवस्तुज्ञानं, न ज्ञानपरतन्त्रं वस्तु । यदि स्यात् शुक्तिरजतमपि तथा स्यात् । कर्तव्यज्ञानं पुनः वैपरीत्येऽपि सम्यगेव योषा वाव गौतम अग्निरित्यादिषु दर्शनात् ।

तत्रैवं सति ब्रह्मज्ञानमपि वस्तुतन्त्रमेव भूतवस्तुविषयत्वात् । अतः युक्तः युक्तेः अनुप्रवेशः, अनुभवापेक्षा च न इतरत्र । –पंचपादिका ।

Tr.'Q: How (is it that an enjoined *karma* – Vedic action – to be performed and a result to be obtained as a result of action, i.e. *kartavya* / *sādhya*, do not require

experience)?

Ans: The *karma* to be performed and the result to be accomplished are non-existent at the time of gaining knowledge of the mode of performance of the action, since the action or result is either yet to be performed or accomplished. Therefore no experience is required simply because it is not possible; however, in the case of *Brahmajñāna*, Brahman is ever-existent and available for experience.

(Q: Brahman may be ever-existent and available for experience. Nonetheless, why is its experience required, especially if its nature itself is experience – *anubhava*?)

Ans: Brahman is experienced erroneously (as a *saṃsārī*, which it is not). Right knowledge (understanding/grasp) obtained through the *śruti* alone cannot end the delusion without *Brahmasākṣātkāra* – the direct experience of Brahman (which alone eliminates the obstruction of ignorance). The delusion of one moon mistakenly appearing as two (when one's sight is obstructed by a finger held before the eyes) vanishes only when the obstruction is eliminated.

In comparing the modes of gaining knowledge of (a) the means of producing something (viz. *dharma*) and (b) something pre-existing (viz. Brahman), it cannot be said that there is similarity between the two merely because the means of gaining knowledge, the *pramāṇa*, is the same in both cases. (*Dharma* is something produced in accordance with notions of

individual human will, based on one's choices.) If the mode of gaining knowledge were similar in both cases, the ever-existing entity (viz., Brahman) would also be reduced to something produced in accordance with the notions of the individual human will. Furthermore, the various alternatives based on injunction (*vidhi*), prohibition (*niṣedha*), alternative (*vikalpa*), synthesis (*samuccaya*), general rule (*utsarga*), exception (*apavāda*), contradiction (*bādhā*), addition (*abhyuccaya*) etc. would become applicable to the pre-existing entity as well. This would be incorrect in the case of a pre-existing entity, since the contingency could arise that the entity becomes featureless (i.e. not possessing any specific feature) (because the features of the entity would be shaped by the notions ascribed to it by any given individual).

(Thus in determining the nature of an entity, for example, the post cited in the *bhāṣya*), the various options considered, namely whether it is a post, a man or something else, do not constitute correct knowledge, whereas the various options regarding the oblations made in a sacrifice do constitute correct knowledge in spite of the variety of options. The correct ascertainment of an object which corresponds to the true nature of the object (for example, the post is a post) is correct knowledge because knowledge of an existing entity depends on the nature of the entity, whereas the true nature of an entity does not depend on its knowledge.

If the true nature of an entity were to depend on

the knowledge of the entity, a sea-shell mistaken to be silver would turn into actual silver.

On the other hand, the knowledge of an action to be performed (as stated in the *śruti*) can be correct knowledge even if there is contrariety in the statement of *śruti*. This can be seen in statements such as ‘O Gautama, woman is verily fire’ (i.e. look upon woman as fire in the *upāsanā* called *Pañcāgni vidyā Ch.U. 5-8-1* and *Br.U. 6-2-13*).

This being so (i.e. since knowledge depends on the nature of an entity, but the nature of an entity does not depend on its knowledge), the knowledge of Brahman also depends on the entity (viz. Brahman) alone because it is about an entity that is pre-existing. Therefore, the corroboration provided by reasoning (*yukti*) and the requirement of experience (*anubhava*) are proved (by way of this passage) as *pramāṇa* in the case of *Brahmajñāna*, but not in the other (case of *dharma – kartavya / sādhyā*)’.

ANUBHAVA AND REASONING ARE INDISPENSABLE FOR GAINING BRAHMAJÑĀNA – VIVARAṆA-PRAMEYA - SAṄGRAHA

Commenting on the same portion of the *bhāṣya* in his *Vivaraṇa-prameya-saṅgraha*, Śrī Vidyāraṇya Muni also asserts the necessity of *anubhava* and reasoning in order to gain *Brahmajñāna*. He also defines *Brahmānubhava*.

युक्त्यनुभवयोरपि ब्रह्मजिज्ञासायां अपेक्षितत्वात् । युक्त्यपेक्षा

पूर्वमेव प्रसाधिता । अनुभवः नाम ब्रह्मसाक्षात्कारफलकः
अंतःकरणवृत्तिभेदः। न च तमन्तरेण ज्ञानाकांक्षा निवर्तते । न च
ब्रह्मस्वरूपं अनुभवितुं अयोग्यं इति शंकनीयं, घटादिवत्
सिद्धवस्तुत्वात् ।

(पूर्व पक्ष) – विमतं ब्रह्मवाक्यं (i.e. ब्रह्मतात्पर्यकवेदान्तवाक्यं)
अनुभवनिरपेक्षफलपर्यन्तज्ञानजनकं प्रमाणभूतवेदवाक्यत्वात्,
धर्मवाक्यवत् इति चेत् ,

(सिद्धान्त) – न, अनुभवायोग्यविषयत्वोपाधिहतत्वात्, न हि
अनुष्ठानसाध्यः धर्मः अनुष्ठानात् पूर्वं वाक्यबोधावसरे अनुभवितुं
योग्यः । अनुष्ठानं तु विनापि अनुभवं शाब्दज्ञानमात्रात् एव
सिद्ध्यति इति अनपेक्षितः एव धर्मानुभवः । अतः धर्मात्
अत्यन्तं विलक्षणस्य सिद्धस्य ब्रह्मणः युक्ता युक्त्यनुभवापेक्षा ।

–विवरणप्रमेयसंग्रहः

Tr. ‘Reasoning (*yukti*) and experience are also required to
know Brahman. The need for reasoning was proved in
the earlier portion (of the *Vivaraṇa-prameya-
saṅgraha*). A specific type of *antaḥkaraṇavṛtti* (viz.
Brahmākāravṛtti or *akhaṇḍākāravṛtti* that is in
conformity with Brahman), which produces
Brahmasākṣātkāra – the direct experience or cognition
of Brahman, is called *anubhava*. The desire to gain
Brahmajñāna cannot come to an end without
Brahmasākṣātkāra. It is not correct to suppose that the
true nature of Brahman (devoid of the superimposed
nāma-rūpātmaka jagat) is something unsuited to
experience, because Brahman is a pre-existing entity
like a pot, available for experience.

It may be argued that since disputed Vedāntic

sentences which ascertain Brahman are Vedic
sentences having the status of a *pramāṇa*, they are
similar to Vedic sentences that reveal *dharma* and
therefore produce knowledge culminating in the result
(viz. liberation) independent of experience
(*Brahmānubhava*).

The reply: This inference is not correct. This inference
is defective due to the *upādhi* – “*dharma* as something
unfit to experience”. (An *upādhi*, as seen earlier, is
something that leads to a fallacious *hetu*, or middle
term). *Dharma* – being something to be accomplished
by the performance (*anuṣṭhāna*) of actions (*karma*) – is
not available for experience before the actual
anuṣṭhāna, that is to say, at the time the meaning of the
śruti sentence that imparts knowledge of the *anuṣṭhāna*
is understood. And Vedic *karma* can be performed
without experience by understanding the meaning of
śruti sentences. Therefore the experience of *dharma* is
not necessary. The foregoing proves that the
ever-existent Brahman, totally distinct from *dharma*,
requires reasoning and experience to gain its
knowledge’.

In short, an experience conforming to the true nature of
Brahman / *ātmā* is indispensable for gaining *Brahmajñāna*.
The experience of *ātmā* in its true nature – not one mixed with
adhyasta entities as in the state of ignorance – is the basic
constituent (*avibhājya-ghaṭaka*) of *aparokṣajñāna* (direct
self-knowledge). Otherwise, knowledge is *parokṣa* – indirect.
The experience of *dharma* is not possible at the time of
gaining knowledge of its *anuṣṭhāna* or at the time of the actual

anuṣṭhāna because *dharma* is yet to be born. Things already existent are available for experience. The knowledge of directly perceptible entities (i.e. *pratyakṣa*) and *aparokṣa vastu* necessarily requires *yathārthānubhava* – an experience true to the nature of the entity. The desire to know an existing entity can come to an end only when *yathārthānubhava* is gained. The knowledge of Brahman, the only ever-existing entity, is no exception to this rule. Direct knowledge (*aparokṣajñāna*) necessarily requires such experience, whereas indirect knowledge (*parokṣajñāna*) does not. Though the Veda is the common *pramāṇa* for the knowledge of both Brahman and *dharma*, there is a distinction in their *avabodhana-prakāra*, their modes of imparting knowledge. Being in conformity with the entity, knowledge depends on the entity and not on human notions; but a given entity does not depend on either knowledge or the *pramāṇa*. The *sādhana-catuṣṭaya-saṃpatti* suggested by the word '*atha*' in the first *Brahmasūtra* becomes highly relevant in the context of *Brahmānubhava*. An individual lacking in *sādhana-catuṣṭaya-saṃpatti*, *cittaśuddhi* (purity of mind) and *cittanaiścalya* (steadiness of mind) cannot hope to get *Brahmānubhava* in spite of being exposed to *śravaṇa*. All that *parokṣajñāna* needs is *śraddhā* in the *śruti* and an average intelligence.

By worldly standards, stray pieces of information can easily pass off as knowledge. Lest one thinks so, the *bhāṣyakāra* defines *Brahmajñāna* as that which culminates in *anubhava*. *Brahmajñāna* is not rambling semantics. It is imperative that *mumukṣus* first understand the *svarūpa* (exact nature) of *ātmajñāna* / *Brahmajñāna*.

ABIDANCE IN THE *APAROKṢA-JÑĀNA* (DIRECT COGNITION) OF *ĀTMĀ* IS A STATE OF *NIRVIKALPA* (NON-DUAL) EXPERIENCE

The direct cognition of *ātmā* is a distinct experience. It is free from the experience of the perceptible Creation (*drśya-prapañca*) superimposed (*adhyasta*) on Brahman. There are no *tripuṭīs* in that state. It is the *nirvikalpa* (non-dual) homogeneous experience of *cit* and *cit* alone. This was seen in the context of the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*. One should bear in mind that the knowledge of *ātmā* qualified by the experience of *adhyasta upādhis* or *viśayas* is by no means the cognition of *aparokṣa ātmā* in its true nature. Obviously it is not direct *ātmajñāna*.

This can be further verified by comparing the nature of knowledge in the case of *pratyakṣa* (direct perception) and in the case of *aparokṣa ātmā*. A perceptible object (*indriya-pratyakṣa*) and *ātmā* are both directly available for knowing. Their knowledge is as true as the thing to be known. In both cases, the *pramāṇajanya-vṛtti* must conform exactly to the thing to be known. Theoretically, according to Vedānta, knowledge (*jñānam*) is *caitanya* in the sense of the *cidābhāsa* in the *tattadākāra-vṛtti* – the thought corresponding to either the perceptible object to be known or *ātmā*. But for practical purposes, it is the *tattadākāra-vṛtti* itself that is taken as knowledge. *Ātmā* is *nirvikalpa* (non-dual), *nirviśaya* / *nirupādhika* (free from all superimposed *drśyas*), *prapañcopaśama* (free from Creation). In short, it is free from self-ignorance and the resultant *adhyasta* entities. The *ātmākāra-vṛtti* must therefore also be a replica of *ātmā*. The

make-up of *antaḥkaraṇa* is such that it can conform to the nature of *ātmā* in the form of an *ātmākāra-vṛtti* (*B.G.Bh.* 18-50)⁷⁶. Such an *ātmākāra-vṛtti* true to the nature of *ātmā* alone can end the ignorance of *ātmā*. The ignorance of *ātmā* cannot end in any other way. This *vṛtti* reveals the *śodhita* (*nirupādhika*) *tvam pada* (you the *jīva* in reality). Due to the *anubhava-svarūpatva* of *ātmā* it is necessarily a direct experience of the *tvam pada* in its true nature free from *upādhis*. The cognition of the *śodhita tvam pada* cannot communicate by itself that it is *Brahmasvarūpa*. It is the *pramāṇa*, the *mahāvākya* that has to point out that it (the *tvam pada*) is Brahman. However, the *mahāvākya pramāṇa* ‘*tat tvamasi*’ (you are Brahman) will not operate unless the *śodhita* (*nirupādhika*) *tvam* is directly cognised. Without this cognition, the *mahāvākya* will be akin to introducing a person to a schizophrenic whose basic perception of the person being introduced is already distorted. The equation of the *mahāvākya* points out that *tat* and *tvam* are identical. This will hold good only if *tvam* is cognized in its true nature. The *tvam* (you) as it obtains now, namely a *saṃsārī* identified with its *upādhis*, cannot by itself be *tat pada* – Brahman.

The *śodhita* (*nirupādhika*) *tvam* revealed by the *ātmākāra-vṛtti* is an exact replica of *ātmā* which is *nirvikalpa* (non-dual – free from the *tripuṭī* of *jñātā*, *jñāna** and *jñeya*). *Ātmā* is the only self-revealing or self-experiencing (*anubhava-svarūpa*) principle, whether the individual is an *ajñānī* or a *jñānī*. During the state of ignorance, all *adhyasta*

⁷⁶. अत्यन्त निर्मलत्वस्वच्छत्वसूक्ष्मत्वोपपत्तेः आत्मनः, बुद्धेश्च
आत्मसमनैर्मल्याद्युपपत्तेः आत्मचैतन्याकाराभासत्वोपपत्तिः । (**vṛtti*)

entities are experienced in the presence of *anubhava-svarūpa ātmā*. The ever-existing *anubhava-svarūpa ātmā* continues even when the entire *adhyasta prapañca* is ended from cognition. What remains is the experience of *ātmā* unqualified by all that is *adhyasta*, including the *pramātā* and *ahaṃkāra*. It is from this point that the *bhāṣyakāra* emphasises the need to end the entire *adhyasta* in order to gain *ātmajñāna* (*B.G.Bh.* 18-50)⁷⁷. The ever-existent *aparokṣa* (self-revealing), *ātmā* is always available for direct cognition / experience in its true nature provided the obstructions that deny *ātmānubhava* – namely, *adhyasta* entities along with their cause – are eliminated. The *ātmākāra-vṛtti* (also an *adhyasta*) too gets terminated in *jñāna-niṣṭhā*. What remains then is *anubhava-svarūpa ātmā* / Brahman alone. This also explains why Vedānta insists on the development of a *śuddha* (*nirviṣaya* – pure) and *niṣcala* (steady) *antaḥkaraṇa* through means such as *sādhana-catuṣṭaya saṃpatti*, *karmayoga* and *upāsana*.

THE MEANS PROVE THAT *BRAHMAJÑĀNA* IS A *NIRVIKALPA* STATE

The Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavadgītā* define means to gain *ātmajñāna/Brahmajñāna*, and these means make it amply clear that *ātmānubhava-Brahmānubhava* is *nirvikalpa* in nature. These and such other means including *sādhana-catuṣṭaya saṃpatti* would be requisites totally uncalled for if a mere understanding of Vedānta itself were *aparokṣa Brahmajñāna*. Let us look at some excerpts from the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavadgītā*.

⁷⁷. नामरूपाद्यनात्माध्यारोपणनिवृत्तिरेव कार्या।....तस्मात् अविद्याध्यारोपणनिराकरणमात्रं
ब्रह्मणि कर्तव्यं ।.... बाह्याकारभेदबुद्धिनिवृत्तिः एव आत्मस्वरूपालम्बने कारणम् ।

- i) ‘Some *yogīs* directly cognise *ātmā* in their highly purified intellect (*antaḥkaraṇa*) by means of *dhyāna*’ (*B.G.* 13-24).

To accomplish *dhyāna* (meditation – *ātmacintana*), the senses need to be totally withdrawn from their sense-pursuits. They are made to abide in the mind. The mind is withdrawn from all its (usual) functions and made absorbed in *ātmā* by single pointed *cintanam* (thinking). *Dhyāna* (here) stands for the uninterrupted flow of the *ātmākāra-vṛtti* like the flow of oil (when poured from one vessel to another) – (*B.G.Bh.* 13-24).

- ii) The description of *yoga* (*dhyāna* or the absorption of mind in *ātmā*) in the sixth chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* brings out facets of the state of mind of the *yogī* above.
- a) A person who succeeds in accomplishing *yoga* (i.e. *yogārūḍhaḥ*) is *sarvasaṅkalpa-sannyāsī* – one who has relinquished all desires for things here and hereafter along with their means (*B.G.* 6-4).
- b) The mind of an accomplished *yogī* which is absorbed in *ātmā* resembles the steady flame of a lamp in a windless place (*B.G.* 6-19). It has no cognition other than that of *ātmā*, and therefore no other *vṛttis*.
- c) The mind of a *yogī* is *niruddham* – free from all its functions (*sarvataḥ nivārita-pracāram*, *B.G. Bh.* 6-20), i.e. it is free from *vṛttis* (*B.G.* 6-20).

The person in that state of *yoga* delights in *ātmā* by directly knowing it through the means termed

ātmanā – through the mind highly purified by *samādhi* (*samādhi-pariśuddhena antaḥkaraṇena* – *B.G.* 6-20; *B.G.Bh.* 6-20).

- d) The *Brahmabhūtaḥ* (one who has gained Brahman i.e. a *jīvanmukta*) knows me (Bhagavān) precisely by knowing ‘how great’ (*yāvān*) and ‘who’ (*yaḥ*) I am in reality (*tatvataḥ*) through *bhakti* (characterised by *ātmajñāna*), (*B.G.* 18-55). Here, *yāvān* stands for *saguṇa* Brahman with the entire expanse of *upādhis* (i.e. *upādhikṛta-vistarabhedāḥ*), while *yaḥ* refers to *nirguṇa* Brahman free from all that is superimposed (i.e. *vidhvasta-sarva-upādhibhedāḥ* – *B.G. Bh.* 18-55). This shows that the direct knowledge of Brahman free from all *upādhis*, which has to be *nirvikalpa*, is indispensable. That alone can be the knowledge of the transcendent (*nirupādhika*) Brahman in its true nature. *Śruti* declarations such as ‘*sarvam Brahma*’ only reveal the immanent (*sarvavyāpī*) nature of Brahman as the basis (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of the entire *adhyasta jagat*. The *jagat* has no independent existence apart from Brahman. Such *śruti* statements do not intend to confer the status of *nirvikārī* (changeless) Brahman on the *vikārī* (ever-changing) *jagat*. The *sāmānādhikaraṇyam* viz. everything is Brahman (*sarvam Brahma*) is used only for the sake of dissolving Creation – *prapañca-pravilāpanārtham* (*Br.Sū. Bh.* 1-3-1). This was already seen in the context of *Brahmāvagati*. The principle is: though the *jagat* is

non-different (*ananya*) from Brahman on account of the cause-effect relation between the two, the true nature of *jagat* is Brahman but the true nature of Brahman is not *jagat* (*Br.Sū. Bh. 2-1-9*)⁷⁸. *Brahmajñāna* must necessarily be true to the nature of *nirguṇa* Brahman – totally free from the *adhyasta prapañca* (i.e. *vidhavastha-sarva-upādhibheda*).

- e) The *Kaṭhopanīṣat* (1-2-12) states that the accomplishment of *adhyātmayoga* is the means to know *ātmā* directly. This is defined as making the mind absorbed in *ātmā* after withdrawing it from *viśayas* – sense objects (*Kṛ.U.Bh. 1-2-12*). In his *Jīvanmuktiviveka*, Vidyāraṇya Muni describes *adhyātmayoga* as *pratyagātma-samādhiḥ*.
- f) A *vivekī* (*prājñāḥ*) has to withdraw the senses from their objects and absorb them into the mind. The mind has to be withdrawn from its function and absorbed into the intellect (*buddhi*). The *buddhi* has to be absorbed into *Hiraṇyagarbha* (wielder of the macrocosmic *buddhi*). That is to say, the individual *buddhi* should be made as pure as *Hiraṇyagarbha's*. Finally, such a prepared *buddhi* has to be absorbed in *śānta ātmā* – *ātmā* free from all specific cognitions (*sarva-viśeṣa prastamitarūpe*, *Kṛ.U. 1-3-13*, and its *bhāṣya*).

g) *Ātmā* is known through the means of *hṛt-manīṭ*

⁷⁸. अनन्यत्वे अपि कार्यकारणयोः कार्यस्य कारणत्वं नतु कारणस्य कार्यात्मत्वं 'आरम्भणशब्दादिभ्यः' (ब्र.सू. २-१-१४) इति वक्ष्यामः । (*Br.Sū.Bh. 2-1-9*)

(*Kṛ.U. 2-3-9*). *Hṛt-manīṭ* is *avikalpayitrī buddhi* (*nirvikalpā buddhi*), the *buddhi* that ceases to indulge in *vikalpa* (duality) (*Kṛ.U. Bh. 2-3-9*).

That *hṛt-manīṭ* is gained when all the senses remain withdrawn from their sense objects, the mind no longer indulges in its function, and the intellect does not take to its function (*Kṛ.U. 2-3-10*).

The above state of the senses, mind and intellect is termed *yoga* (*Kṛ.U. 2-3-11*). *Ātmā* free from all *adhyasta* entities, namely self-ignorance along with its effects (i.e. *avidyādhyāropaṇa-varjitah*), abiding in its true nature (*svarūpa-pratiṣṭhaḥ*) is directly known in that state (*Kṛ.U.Bh. 2-3-11*)⁷⁹.

The above passages clearly demonstrate that *Brahmānubhava* or *Brahmajñāna* is *nirvikalpa*. It is a state of the *antaḥkaraṇa*. *Ātmajñāna* is a *manodharma* – a disposition of mind (*antaḥkaraṇa – Ribhu-Gītā*).⁸⁰ *Ātmā* does not assume any states whatsoever. It is non-dual and changeless. It is the same all the time. The perception of a rope mistaken for a snake is not a correct perception of the rope in its true nature. However, whether known correctly or mistakenly, the rope remains unchanged, it is the perception that changes. It is the deluded perceiver who exhibits states of ignorance and knowledge, and not the rope. Identified with the gross, subtle and causal bodies, the *jīva* has to begin the pursuit of gaining

⁷⁹. तां योगमिति मन्यन्ते स्थिरामिन्द्रियधारणम् । (कठ, २-३-११)

एतस्यां हि अवस्थायां अविद्याध्यारोपण वर्जितस्वरूपप्रतिष्ठः आत्मा (ज्ञातुं शक्यते)।
– कठभाष्य, २-३-११

⁸⁰. श्री शिवरहस्यम्, 6th *Aṃśa*, Ch. 32, verse 12 - The *Ribhu-Gītā*.

self-knowledge from its present *sopādhika* state. *Buddhi* is the means to gain this knowledge. As seen earlier, steadfastness of the *ātmākāra-vṛtti* / *Brahmākāra-vṛtti* is indispensable. Obviously, it is a state of *antahkaraṇa*. The *Kāṭhōpaniṣat* (2-3-11) calls it *yoga*. Lord Kṛṣṇa describes it as both *Brāhmī sthitiḥ* (the state of abidance in Brahman – *B.G.* 2-72) and *yoga* (*B.G.* Ch. 6). This is *Brahmāvagatiḥ*, *Brahma-sākṣātkāra* or *Brahmānubhava*. Anything short of this *sākṣātkāra* is not the *aparokṣajñāna* of Brahman. At best it can be *parokṣajñāna* or *youktika-jñāna* (knowledge gained through reasoning). Direct self-knowledge (*aparokṣa Brahmajñāna*) is not verbosity or a play of words.

The indispensability of gaining *Brahmānubhava* / *ātmānubhava* is evident from the following *śruti* passages:

‘Where is there delusion and grief for one whose mind is engaged in his own true nature to the point of experience (*anubhava-paryantā buddhiḥ*) (and) who sees the identity of his own self and Brahman in accordance with the *śāstra*-scriptures?’ (*Varāhōpaniṣat* 4-4-3).

‘In vain does the ignorant fool rejoice in Brahman without its experience, akin to enjoying fruits on a branch that is reflected (in a lake)’ (*Maitreyōpaniṣat* 2-23).

THE NATURE OF VEDĀNTA PRAMĀṆA

Sentiments, biased views and rambling semantics have no role in gaining knowledge. This is all the more so in the acquisition of *Brahmajñāna*. Wise counsel states: A rational

statement uttered even by a child is worthy of acceptance, an irrational statement by even *Brahmā* – one of the Trinity – should be discarded like a blade of grass. (*Yogavāsishṭha* 2-18-3).⁸¹

Earlier, we had taken a look at the contention that since Vedānta is a Vedic *pramāṇa* similar to the *pramāṇa* which reveals *dharma*, the experience is not necessary for *Brahmajñāna*, and had seen the fallacy in this contention. The contention was also refuted by the *Pañcapādikā* and the *Vivaraṇa-prameya-saṅgraha*. Lest such doubts recur, let us understand the nature of the Vedānta *pramāṇa* fully, especially with respect to the nature of self-knowledge, whether experiential or non-experiential.

Knowledge is defined as -

ज्ञानं तु प्रमाणजन्यं यथाभूतविषयं च (ब्रह्मसूत्र भाष्य 3-2-21) ।

Tr. Direct knowledge of an entity is born of *pramāṇa* and has as its object the true nature of the entity (known, *yathābhūta-viṣayam*, *Br.Sū.Bh.* 3-2-21).

Knowledge is said to be both *vastutantram* (*vastvadhīnam*) – dependent on the entity to be known – and *pramāṇatantram* (dependent on its *pramāṇa*). That knowledge of an entity is *vastutantram* is evident from the *tattadākāra-vṛtti* (a thought conforming to the true nature of an entity) required to gain direct knowledge of an entity. Therefore, the nature of such knowledge is governed by the actual nature of an entity. Hence direct knowledge must be

⁸¹. युक्तियुक्तमुपादेयं वचनं बालकादपि ।
अन्यत्तृणमिव त्याज्यमप्युक्तं पद्मजन्मना ॥ (योगवासिष्ठः 2-18-3)

true to the nature of an entity. Accordingly, whether such knowledge is experiential or not is determined by the entity to be known and not by its *pramāṇa*.

In the case of entities that are *pratyakṣa* and *aparokṣa* it is the role of *pramāṇa* to produce knowledge true to the nature of the entity. Therefore, knowledge is said to be *pramāṇatantram* (dependent on the *pramāṇa*). But the *pramāṇa* does not determine the nature of knowledge. On the contrary, the type of *pramāṇa* employed depends on the nature of the entity. The *bhāṣyakāra* points this out in the *Kātha-bhāṣya*, when he states, ‘senses (*indriyas*) are made by sense objects to reveal themselves’ (*Kṛ.U.Bh.* 1-3-10). The *pramāṇa* reveals the *prameya* (the entity to be known) exactly as it is (प्रमाणं च यथाभूतवस्तुविषयम् । *Br.Sū. Bh.* 1-1-4). The *pramāṇa* is not influenced by erroneous projections or by the will of the *pramātā* (knower).

The Veda is *svataḥ-prāmāṇa* – A self-proved or self-evident *pramāṇa*. This means that the *pramā* (knowledge) produced by it is not required to be validated by any other *pramāṇa*. The *pramā* born of the Veda is valid in and of itself. Even this fact does not signify that all knowledge produced by the Veda is non-experiential. As shown earlier, it is the entity that determines the nature of knowledge – namely, whether knowledge is experiential or not. An understanding of the origins of *svataḥ-prāmāṇyam* (status of being a self-proved *pramāṇa*) of the Veda can provide more clarity in this respect.

The source of the concept of *svataḥ-prāmāṇyam* can be traced to the *autpattika-sūtra* (औत्पत्तिकसूत्र – *Jai.sū.* 1-1-5). The context is as follows. The first *Jaiminisūtra* exhorts those

who have completed the study of the Vedas to inquire into the nature of *dharma* (also *adharmā* – *Jai.sū.* 1-1-1). The question arises: what is *dharma*? This is answered in the second *sūtra*. *Dharma* is that which procures all that is good in life in keeping with *vidhis* (*codanā*) – Vedic injunctions that prompt one to take to *karma* (*Jai.sū.* 1-1-2). The third *sūtra* examines the *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) of *dharma* characterised by *vidhi* (*codanā*) – (*Jai.sū.* 1-1-3). The fourth *sūtra* rules out the possibility of direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) as a *pramāṇa* for *dharma* because *pratyakṣa* operates only with respect to existing objects which come in contact with the *indriyas* (senses) whereas *dharma* is imperceptible (*Jai.sū.* 1-1-4).

A doubt arises at this juncture: is it possible that *dharma* is non-existent because it is imperceptible? No, it is not. The fifth *sūtra* defines the *pramāṇa* for *dharma* and how it operates. It states: ‘The relation of a word (*śabda*) to its meaning is *autpattika* – natural (*svābhāvika*) or everlasting (*nityaḥ*). *Upadeśaḥ* – the teaching of *codanā* (*vidhi* – Vedic injunction) – is the *pramāṇa* for *dharma*. *Codanā* is foolproof. Therefore *codanā* is the *pramāṇa* for things that are *adrṣṭa* – yet to be produced or imperceptible. According to *Ācārya Bādarāyaṇa* (too), it does not need any other (*pramāṇa*) – it is self-proved’ (*Jai.sū.* 1-1-5).

Incidentally, reference is made to *Ācārya Bādarāyaṇa* (sage Vyāsa) in the *sūtra* not to refute the *mīmāṃsā* doctrine but from a sense of adoration. According to the first interpretation of *Brahmasūtra* (1-1-3) ‘*śāstrayonitvāt*’, Brahman – as the cause of the Vedas – is proved to be omniscient (*sarvajña*). Therefore there cannot be any error

whatsoever in the Vedas.

The meaning of the Vedic word (*śabda*) is natural (*svābhāvika*) or everlasting (*nitya*), namely the said meaning need not be validated by any other *pramāṇa*. *Brahmasūtra* (1-3-28) mentions that Creation (*jagat*) consisting of presiding deities etc. (*devatādi*) is born of Vedic words in the sense that the *jagat* is revealed by them in the form of word-meanings. Though the individual entities specified by the words are born, their species (*ākṛti* or *jāti*) are *nitya*. The deities Indra, Rudra and others are also *nitya* in terms of species. Therefore the word and its meaning are natural and everlasting. The unique features of these deities are revealed by portions of the Vedas such as *mantra* and *arthavāda*. The words Indra, Rudra etc. also stand for the offices or posts that these deities occupy. It is in this sense too that the word and its meaning are natural and everlasting. The statement “the Creation is born of words” does not mean that words constitute the material cause of *jagat*, as Brahman is. It means the *vyavahāra* (dealings) of words and their clearly perceptible meaning is possible provided words are always connected to their meanings as species (*Br.Sū.Bh.* 1-3-28).

The *autpattika sūtra* describes the *pramāṇa* of *dharma* which is imperceptible, yet to be produced, and non-verifiable at the time of gaining its knowledge. In contrast to *dharma*, Brahman is ever-existing and *aparokṣa* – indeed the constant experience of ‘I’. The Vedānta *prāmāṇa* is verifiable, unlike the *prāmāṇa* of *dharma* as means to heaven. The *autpattika sūtra* does not postulate a rule that all knowledge born of Vedic *pramāṇa* is non-experiential. As seen already, the

nature of knowledge – whether experiential or non-experiential – is governed by the nature of the thing to be known and not by the *pramāṇa*. *Ātmānubhava* / *Brahmānubhava* is the very nature of direct self-knowledge (*aparokṣa-ātmajñāna*). It is *pramāṇa-phala* – the result produced by the *pramāṇa*. It is not some extraneous factor employed to authenticate *ātmajñāna*. *Svataḥ-prāmāṇyam* of Vedānta affirms the validity of such knowledge.

According to Vedānta, all six *pramāṇas* accepted by it have *svataḥ-prāmāṇyam*, including *śabda* (*āgama* – the Veda). What is indispensable are defect-free *sāmagrīs* – the essential factors that are required for the *pramāṇa* to operate. The *pramā* resulting from the use of any of these accepted *pramāṇas* is necessarily valid provided the *sāmagrīs* are defect-free, otherwise the *pramāṇa* fails to function. For example, the direct perception of the form of an object is authentic if the eyes are healthy, the light is sufficient, the mind backs the eyes and the object is within the range of sight. *Vedānta-paribhāṣā* – the standard book on the categories of Vedānta – describes the *svataḥ-prāmāṇyam* of all six *pramāṇas* after concluding its discussion on *anupalabdhi pramāṇa*.

Svataḥ-prāmāṇyam – the status of being a self-proved or self-evident *pramāṇa* – is not a criterion that dictates that knowledge imparted by the *pramāṇa* is non-experiential. If it were so, *pratyakṣa-jñāna* (direct perception) – which is gained by the *pratyakṣa svataḥ-prāmāṇa* would be non-experiential. That is contrary to universal experience. Direct perception is experiential.

To say that *svataḥ-prāmāṇyam* signifies total independence of the *pramāṇas* is not correct. First of all, *pramāṇas* depend on appropriate, defect-free *sāmagrīs*. Moreover, *anumāna*, *arthāpatti*, *upamā*, *anupalabdhi* and *śabda* (the Veda) depend on *pratyakṣa*, which is termed the *jyeṣṭha pramāṇa* – the first or the chief *pramāṇa*.

The nature of the Vedānta *pramāṇa* is such that on producing direct self-knowledge, it ends the *pramātā* and itself ceases to exist as a *pramāṇa*. It is like a *pramāṇa* in dream losing its status as a *pramāṇa* on waking up (*B.G.Bh.* 2-69)⁸². *Ātmā* / Brahman is the *svarūpa* (true nature) of the impostor *pramātā* – the knower (*jīva*). Operated to the point of fruition, the Vedānta *pramāṇa* reduces the *pramātā* to its *nirupādhika-svarūpa* viz. *ātmā*. As a result, *ātmā* / Brahman can never become the *prameya* that can be known as an object by the *pramātā* even if Vedānta has the status of a valid *pramāṇa* to know *ātmā* – Brahman. This distinguishes the Vedānta *pramāṇa* from others. That is why *ātmā* / Brahman is called *aprameya* – a thing that cannot be known by the *pramātā* as an object distinct from itself.

Cittaśuddhi or *cittaprasāda* is indispensable for the Vedānta *pramāṇa* to produce *Brahmajñāna*. It is defined as the purity of the *antaḥkaraṇa*, which can display Brahman in its true *nirupādhika* state as a faithful replica (*cittasya Brahmākāra-prathanānukūlā svacchatā*). As shown already, the *tat tvam asi mahāvākya* will fail to function unless there is a direct appreciation of the *śodhita tvam pada* – the

⁸². न हि आत्मस्वरूपाधिगमे सति पुनः प्रमाणप्रमेयव्यवहारः सम्भवति । प्रमातृत्वं हि आत्मनः निवर्तयति अन्त्यं प्रमाणं । निवर्तयदेव च अप्रमाणी भवति स्वप्नकालप्रमाणं इव प्रबोधे । (भगवद्गीताभाष्यम् 2-69)

nirupādhika 'I'.

In his teaching to Lord Rāma, sage Vasiṣṭha emphasizes the indispensability of *citta-śuddhi*, for which means such as *sādhana-catuṣṭaya* are imperative. The sage says – ‘Approaching a *guru* and exposing oneself to his teaching is only a formality in terms of observing the norms of the scriptures. The primary means of gaining *Brahmajñāna* is *prajñā* (the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*) born in the pure *antaḥkaraṇa* (*śuddha citta*) of the disciple.’ (उपदेशक्रमो राम व्यवस्थामात्रपालनम् । ज्ञप्तेस्तु कारणं शुद्धा शिष्यप्रज्ञैव राघव ॥ *Yogavāsiṣṭha, Nirvāṇa-Pūrva*, 83-13). This shows that an unprepared mind cannot gain direct *Brahmajñāna* in spite of exposure to the Vedānta *pramāṇa-śravaṇa*. Let us bear in mind that the Vedānta *pramāṇa* fails to operate for sure unless the *mumukṣu* has the indispensable defect-free *sāmagrīs* such as a *śuddha citta* with *citta-naiścalya*, capable of bearing in itself the replica of *nirviśeṣa ātmā* as revealed by the *akhaṇḍākāra* / *ātmākāra vṛtti*. Otherwise it would be akin to seeing with defective eyes, giving rise to a vision that is distorted.

Having understood the nature of the Vedānta *pramāṇa*, it should be very clear that the role of *ātmānubhava* / *Brahmānubhava* is not to validate or corroborate this *pramāṇa*. Rather, it is the inevitable final *pramāṇa-phala* (result produced by *pramāṇa*). The lack of *ātmānubhava* in spite of efforts indicates that the *pramāṇa* has failed for want of defectless *sāmagrīs*. The distinction between the *Veda-pramāṇa* with respect to the *karmakāṇḍa* and with respect to Vedānta should be clearly understood. The former does not

need experience (*anubhava*) while gaining knowledge because experience is just not possible. That is not the case in *ātmajñāna*. Mere *youktika-jñāna* (knowledge born of reasoning) or some information about *ātmā* gleaned from the *sāstra* can at best be *parokṣajñāna*. It is not *aparokṣa*. *Parokṣajñānīs* are still under the spell of *adhyāsa* like animals etc. This was seen in the *paśvādibhiśca aviśeṣāt* portion of the *adhyāsabhāṣya*.

ROLE OF KARMAYOGA AND BHAGAVAD-BHAKTI (INTENSE LOVE FOR ĪŚVARA)

Vedāntic teaching can lead to *Brahmajñāna* only if the *mumukṣu* has *cittaśuddhi* and *cittanaiścalya*, which are indispensable for the *pramāṇa* of Vedānta to operate. *Dharmānuṣṭhāna*, a life of adherence to the do's and don'ts enjoined in the Vedas, has the effect of *duritakṣaya* (annulling of past *pāpas*). Thereupon dawns *viveka*, leading to *sādhana catuṣṭaya-sampatti*. *Karmayoga* and *Bhagavadbhakti* serve as means to gain *śuddhi* (purity) and *naiścalya* (steadiness) of *citta* (mind).

If *Brahmajñāna* is not gained in spite of exposure to proper Vedāntic teaching, the only possible diagnosis is that these preparatory means are lacking. Sage Vālmīkī, finding that his disciple Bharadvāja did not gain *Brahmajñāna* even after being taught the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, exhorts him to take to *saguneśvaropāsanā* – devotional worship of *saguna* Brahma. Vālmīkī advises:

भज सम्भरिताभोगं परमेशं जगद् गुरुम् । (Yo.Vā.Ni.Pū. 127-33)

Tr. ‘Invoke the Supreme Lord (*Parameśa*), the universal preceptor, who wields different embodiments (to guide and protect his devotees).’

Bhagavadbhakti or devotion is intense love towards *Parameśvara*. In Vedic parlance, *bhakti* falls under the category of *karma* and is not a separate concept. Lord Kṛṣṇa declares that he has prescribed two distinct modes of living, with firm adherence (*niṣṭhā*) to *jñāna* and *karma* (B.G. 3-3) respectively. *Karma* is an indirect means to *ātmajñāna*. *Karma* cannot destroy self-ignorance and produce *jñāna* because it is itself a product of self-ignorance. On the other hand, *bhakti*, despite being a *karma*, is a distinct *sāadhanā* (means) for preparing the mind to gain *ātmajñāna*. In *Kaliyuga*, *bhakti* has the further advantage that it is a very practical means.

Karmayoga is the discharge of one's duties with an attitude that allows one to gain the disposition conducive to the attainment of self-knowledge. The natural tendency is to perform *karmas* (actions) prompted by desire for their results. This afflicts the individual with worry, anxiety, excitement and restlessness, which in turn rob him of the calm and unruffled disposition necessary for *jñānam*. An attitude of *karmayoga* based on steadfast devotion to *Īśvara* prevents such an undesirable state of mind. *Karmayoga* transforms *karma* into a worshipful offering to *Īśvara*. Lord Kṛṣṇa describes this principle:

यतः प्रवृत्तिर्भूतानां येन सर्वमिदं ततम् ।
स्वकर्मणा तमभ्यर्च्य सिद्धिं विन्दति मानवः । (B.G. 18-46)

Tr. By worshipping through one's *karma* the *Īśvara* from

whom all elements and beings are born (or because of whom all beings function), and by whom the entire Creation is pervaded, the eligible person (*mānavah*) gains the capability (*siddhi*) that enables steadfastness in *ātmajñāna*.

The teaching on how to effect this change in attitude during the performance of *karma* is enunciated in the following verse:

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूः मा ते संगोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥ (B.G. 2-47)

Tr. (O Arjuna), your business is to be concerned with action (*karma*) alone and never with its results. Do not be the author of the results of action (which is a recipe for transmigration). Let not your inclination be to inaction either (merely because you do not desire results).

Lord Kṛṣṇa asks us to engage ourselves in *karma* without preoccupation with its results. A *karmayogī* should rise above concepts such as ‘This *karma* is mine’, ‘Its results are due to my efforts’, ‘I am the person entitled to the results of action’, ‘I did’, ‘I deserve’, ‘I shall enjoy the results’. These strengthen the erroneous ‘I notion’ (*ahaṅkāra*) in the embodiment, and breed anxiety, worry and restlessness. A mind engrossed in such factors cannot take to *śravaṇa*, *manana*, *nididhyāsana* and gain *ātmajñāna*. What is recommended by Lord Kṛṣṇa is a *samabuddhi* (an equanimous mind, unaffected by results) rather than *saṅgabuddhi* (a mind totally attached to the results of actions).

Lord Kṛṣṇa does not say that the doer does not have a right to the results of his actions. ‘The performer of action is the reaper of its results unless he is a *jñānī*.’ (B.G. 18-12). Grammatically speaking, the particle *mā* is mainly used in the sense of prohibition (forbidding). In rare cases *mā* may mean negation (*na* – no). To quote Bhagavān Śrī Sathya Sai Baba ‘*mā phaleṣu*’ means ‘refuse the fruit’ or ‘do and deny the consequence.’⁸³ Certainly the doer can, out of his own free will and determination, refuse to be affected by results, favourable or unfavourable. The question arises: If desire should not be entertained for the results of action, who will look after us? Such doubts do not disturb a *karmayogī*. For him, liberation from the circle of birth and death is more important than fleeting comfort and happiness in life. A *karmayogī* has firm *śraddhā* (attitude of total trust) in Bhagavān who has made an assurance, ‘*Yogaḥsemam vahāmyaham*’ (I take care of all the needs of my earnest devotee) (B.G. 9-22), and has full confidence that Bhagavān will certainly look after him (*karmayogī*). This shows that *Bhagavadbhakti* is an integral part of *karmayoga*.

M O K Ṣ A I S A N U B H A V Ā R Ū Ḍ H A (A B S O R P T I O N / S T E A D F A S T N E S S I N B R A H M Ā N U B H A V A)

In principle, *aparokṣa ātmajñāna* / *Brahmajñāna* confers *mokṣa* (liberation). But it is not by means of some *adrṣṭa* (*puṇya*) born of *karma* or *upāsana*. For practical purposes, *Brahmasākṣātkāra* / *aparokṣa Brahmajñāna* itself is *mokṣa* wherein *avidyā* (self-ignorance) along with its

⁸³. ‘Gītā Vāhinī’, Ch.V., by Bhagavān Śrī Sathya Sai Baba.

effects is terminated. As seen earlier, *mokṣa* is *ātmā* itself, known directly without a trace of *avidyā* (*Vedānta Kalpalatikā*). In other words, *mokṣa* is *svātmani avasthānam* (abidance in *ātmā* – *Taittirīya* / *Kena Bh.*). *Ātmā* being *anubhavasvarūpa* and now free from *avidyā* and its effects (for the *jīva* who has got *ātmajñāna*), *mokṣa* is nothing but the self-evident experience of *ātmā-svarūpa* without the *tripuṭī* – *pramātā*, *prameya* (as distinct from *pramātā*), and *pramāṇa*. Thus *Brahmajñāna* itself is *mokṣa*, provided there is *jñānaniṣṭhā* / pre-requisite for *jīvanmukti*. This shows that *ātmajñāna* / *Brahmajñāna* is also a unique experience.

The following passages from the *sūtrabhaṣya* corroborate the above.

(i) प्रत्यक्षफलत्वात् च ज्ञानस्य फलविरहशंकानुपपत्तिः । कर्मफले स्वर्गादौ अनुभवानारूढे (अप्राप्तानुभवे) स्यात् आशंका, भवेत् वा न वा इति । अनुभवारूढं (प्राप्तानुभवं) तु ज्ञानफलं 'यत् साक्षात् अपरोक्षात् (i.e. अपरोक्षं) ब्रह्म' (*Br.U.* 3-4-1) इति श्रुतेः, 'तत् त्वं असि' (*Ch.U.* 6-8-7 etc.)) इति च सिद्धवत् उपदेशात् । (*Br.Sū.Bh.* 3-3-32)

Tr. *Mokṣa*, the result of *jñāna*, is immediate/direct. Therefore no doubt can be entertained about its absence or failure. Heaven etc. are the results of *karma*. Their result is not available for experience (at the time *karma* is performed). Therefore there is room for doubt regarding the achievement of results, namely, whether the results will be obtained or not. By contrast, *mokṣa*, the result of *Brahmajñāna*, is absorption/steadfastness in *Brahmānubhava* / *ātmānubhava* (then and there). It is corroborated by the *śruti* statement, 'Brahman is

immediate, the most intimate self-evident 'I' (*Br.U.* 3-4-1)'. In its teaching 'You are Brahman' (*Ch.U.* 6-8-7 etc.), the *Chāndogyopaniṣat* also presents Brahman as ever-accomplished (*Br.Sū.Bh.* 3-3-32).

(ii) अनुभवारूढं एव च विद्याफलं, न क्रियावत् कालान्तरभावी इति असकृत् अवोचाम । (*Br.Sū.Bh.* 3-4-15).

Tr. We have often stated that *mokṣa* – the result of *Brahmajñāna* – is absorption in *Brahmānubhava* alone. Unlike *karma*, it is not something that comes into existence after a period of time. (*Br.Sū.Bh.* 3-4-15).

BRAHMAN IS NOT A SENSE OBJECT

The *bhāṣya* now proceeds to answer the following doubt entertained by some in this context. The doubt is first presented, then clarified.

a result of medical treatment centred on the body amply illustrates how purificatory acts such as bath etc. centred on the body can create a sense of purity in the notional *jīva* due to erroneous identification. The whole show of *saṃsāra* comprising of 'do and achieve' is conducted solely by the *jīva* endowed with *ahaṃkāra* – the 'I' notion in the embodiment. Such a *jīva* alone is the experiencer (*bhoktā*) of all the results of actions. The Upaniṣads corroborate this fact. Thus it is established that actions abiding in the body cannot perfect or refine *ātmā*. It is *bhoktā* (the *saṃsārī jīva*) who is available for *saṃskāra* (perfection or purification).

It should be clear that the notional being *jīva*, namely

ātmā endowed and identified with the embodiment, alone can gain the false perfection (called *saṃskāra*). By contrast, actual *ātmā* is totally free from the embodiment and is never available for acts of perfection. *Upaniṣadic* passages to this effect are now cited.

भा. तथा च 'एकः देवः सर्वभूतेषु गूढः सर्वव्यापी सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा । कर्माध्यक्षः सर्वभूताधिवासः साक्षी चेता केवलः निर्गुणः च' (श्वेता.६-११) इति । 'सः पर्यगात् शुक्रं अकायं अत्रणं अस्नाविरं शुद्धं अपापविद्धम्' (ईशा.८) इति च । एतौ मन्त्रौ अनाधेयातिशयतां नित्यशुद्धतां च ब्रह्मणः दर्शयतः । ब्रह्मभावः च मोक्षः । तस्मात् न संस्कार्यः अपि मोक्षः। अतः अन्यत् मोक्षं प्रति क्रियानुप्रवेशद्वारं न शक्यं केनचित् दर्शयितुम् । तस्मात् ज्ञानम् एकं मुक्त्वा क्रियायाः गन्धमात्रस्य अपि अनुप्रवेशः इह न उपपद्यते ।

Bh.Tr. Similarly, (the nature of *ātmā*) is declared in the *Upaniṣads* – '(*Ātmā* is) *ekaḥ* (one and the same non-dual principle abiding in all), *devaḥ* (self-luminous knowledge-principle), *gūḍhaḥ* (not available for cognition because of being concealed by *māyā*), *sarvavyāpī* (all-pervasive), *sarvabhūtāntarātmā* (the true "I" in all), *karmādhyaḥṣaḥ* (illuminator of all actions), *sarvabhūtādhivāsaḥ* (inhabitant in all as their very basis), *sākṣī* (one who makes everything known directly without depending on anything else), *cetā* (the pure awareness / pure knowledge-principle), *kevalaḥ* (non-dual, free from *dṛśya*) and *nirguṇaḥ* (free from all attributes)' (*Śv.U.* 6-11). '*Ātmā* is the all-pervading (*pariyagāt*), resplendent knowledge-principle (*śukram*), devoid of subtle body (*akāyaḥ*),

free from wounds and sinews (*avraṇaḥ* and *asnāviraḥ* i.e. free from gross body), free from attachment etc. (*śuddhaḥ*), free from sins and *puṇya* (*apāpavidhaḥ*)' (*Ī.U.* 8). These two *mantras* show that no good qualities can be added to Brahman and that it is (also) ever-free from all defects whatsoever.

Liberation is *Brahmabhāvaḥ* – the very nature of Brahman (i.e. *Brahmasvarūpaḥ*). For this reason too, liberation is not something that can be perfected. Moreover, no one can possibly point to any other means through which any action (other than those that result in birth, change, procurement or perfection) can approach liberation (because there is no fifth type of result of action besides birth etc.). Therefore, except knowledge, even the whiff of an action (*kriyā*) cannot provide an approach to liberation.

Ātmā is one and the same non-dual principle abiding in all. Yet ignorant people fail to know its true nature because it is concealed by *māyā* – which is synonymous with self-ignorance. It is not correct to say that *ātmā* is totally unrelated to *jīva* or distinct from it, and therefore unknown. To dispel such doubts the *Śvetāśvataropaniṣat* points out that *ātmā* is all pervasive (*sarvavyāpī*) and the true 'I' in all (i.e. *sarvabhūtāntarātmā*). Since *ātmā* is all-pervading and the very 'I' in all, the absence of its true cognition is caused only by *māyā*.

Though *ātmā* is the 'I' in all beings, it cannot be the doer (*kartā* – the *saṃsārī*) because it is *karmādhyaḥṣa* or *kriyā*

sākṣī, the illuminator (*sākṣī*) of all actions. And yet *sākṣī ātmā* is not truly distinct from the entities illumined (*sākṣya* or *drśya*) so that real duality could result, as it is the very basis (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of all that is created. In other words, the entire created *drśya* is superimposed on *sākṣī ātmā*, which is the basis of everything.

The words *cetā* (the pure awareness principle / *caitanya* principle) and *kevalaḥ* (the non-dual principle free from *drśya*) describe what *sākṣī* is. It is well-known in the world that a person who is a knower of a specific thing or event but not an active part or participant therein is called *sākṣī* (witness). The word *ca* (च) in the above quotation (6-11) from the *Śvetāśvataropaniṣat* signifies the absence of any defect in *ātmā*. Thus *ātmā*, being *nirguṇa* (free from attributes) and *nirdoṣa* (devoid of defects), is not available for any perfection either by adding excellence/good qualities (*guṇa*) or by removing defects/*doṣas*.

The *Īśāvāsyopaniṣat* quotation describing the nature of *ātmā* begins with the masculine pronoun *saḥ* (he). Therefore the rest of the words in that sentence, such as *śukram* etc., that are in the neuter gender have to be taken to be in the masculine gender. The words *avraṇaḥ* (free from wounds) and *asnāviraḥ* (free from sinews) together connote that *ātmā* is free from the gross body.

The two *Upaniṣadic mantras* quoted in the *bhāṣya* prove that no good qualities/excellence can be added to Brahman and that it is ever-free from defect. Another reason why liberation is not something that can be accomplished through perfection is because it is *Brahmabhāvaḥ*. It is

identical with the very *Brahmasvarūpa* (the nature of Brahman). Brahman is not available for perfection. For this reason too, liberation is not something that can be perfected.

Incidentally, the definition of *mokṣa* that we arrive at here in this *bhāṣya* portion is *Brahmabhāvaḥ*, becoming of the true nature of Brahman itself. The component *Brahma* in the compound *Brahmabhāvaḥ* stands for *Brahmasvarūpa* – the true nature of Brahman. *Bhāvaḥ* is 'becoming' in the sense of making the mind absorbed in Brahman by causing the mind to conform to its true nature. *Bhāvaḥ* also means a state of being. So liberation is the state of being Brahman in its true nature. In the state of self-ignorance, Brahman appears to be at variance from its true nature. In view of this, the direct cognition of *Brahmasvarūpa* is considered to be a state, though Brahman is free from all states in reality. This direct cognition of Brahman is a state of the *antaḥkaraṇa*.

As established thus far, actions resulting in *utpatti* (birth), *āpti* (procurement), *vikāra* (change) and *saṃskāra* (perfection) cannot result in liberation. There is no fifth type of result of action which can serve as a means to liberation. Action cannot therefore accomplish liberation. Does this mean then that liberation is impossible to achieve and it is futile to commence with this treatise to ascertain *Brahman*? That is not the case. This *śāstra* is meant for gaining *Brahmajñāna*. Liberation is gained by *Brahmajñāna* and not by action.

KNOWLEDGE IS NOT AN ACTION ENJOINED BY INJUNCTION (*VIDHI*)

The contender claims that there is a contradiction in the

statement that liberation is gained by knowledge and not by action, in that knowledge itself is an action. This contention is addressed in the following *bhāṣya* portion.

भा. ननु ज्ञानं नाम मानसी क्रिया । न । वैलक्षण्यात् । क्रिया हि नाम सा यत्र वस्तुस्वरूपनिरपेक्षा एव चोद्यते, पुरुषचित्तव्यापाराधीना च । यथा ‘यस्यै देवतायै हविः गृहीतं स्यात् तां मनसा ध्यायेत् वषट् करिष्यन्’ इति । ‘संध्यां मनसा ध्यायेत्’ (ऐ.ब्रा.३-८-१) इति च एवं आदिषु । ध्यानं चिन्तनं यदि अपि मानसं तथा अपि पुरुषेण कर्तुं अकर्तुं अन्यथा वा कर्तुं शक्यं,

16. Annihilation of *saṃsāra* by *Brahmajñāna* stands proved.
17. *Manana* and *nididhyāsana* are not necessary after gaining *Brahmajñāna*.
18. Only if *Brahmajñāna* is not a *vidhiśeṣa* can it be justified that *Brahmajijñāsā* is distinct from *dharmajijñāsā*.
19. All *pramāṇas*, including scriptural injunctions, cease to function on gaining *Brahmasākṣātkāra*.

EPILOGUE

A *mumukṣu* endowed with *sādhana* *catuṣṭaya-sampatti* should take to *Brahmajijñāsā* until *Brahmāvagati* (*Brahmasākṣātkāra*) is gained. *Brahmajñāna* culminates in *Brahmānubhava* / *ātmānubhava* because Brahman is the only ever-existing entity (*bhūtavastu*). Being an existing entity, Brahman is available for experience, unlike *dharma* in the case of *jijñāsya dharma*. Steadfastness in *Brahmajñāna* is called *Brahmaprāpti*.

SCRIPTURAL EXCERPTS WHICH PROVE THE EXPERIENTIAL NATURE OF *BRAHMAJÑĀNA*

Lord Kṛṣṇa defines *Brahmaprāpti* as *jñānasya* (i.e. *Brahmajñānasya*) *parā niṣṭhā* – the highest culmination of *Brahmajñāna* (*B.G.* 18-50). The *bhāṣyakāra* describes *parā jñānaniṣṭhā* as abidance, in the sense of certainty, in *ātmānubhava*⁹⁴ (*B.G.Bhāṣya* 18-55). *Ātmānubhava*, the experience of the ‘true I’, finds expression as ‘I am non-dual pure awareness (*caitanya*) free from all sorrows’ (सर्वदुःखविनिर्मुक्तैकचैतन्यात्मकोऽहम् । *Br.Sū. bhāṣya* 4-1-2). ‘I’ (*ātmā*), be it in its true nature or in its mistaken form in the realm of ignorance, is always available for experience because *ātmā* is *anubhavasvarūpa*. This can be verified from our self-evident experience: ‘I am’. Whether the experience conforms to *ātmā* (*yathārtha*) or is unlike it (*ayathārtha*) determines whether the experience lies in the realm of knowledge or in the realm of ignorance. *Ātmānubhava* or *Brahmānubhava* is also defined as ‘the manifestation of *cit* (pure awareness) not coloured by the *viśayas* (*drśyas*) and without objectification (by the *pramātā* which has itself become extinct)’.⁹⁵

Gouḍapādācārya, the great doyen of Vedānta, describes *Brahmānubhava* or *Brahmaprāpti* in his *kārikā* on the *Māṇḍukyopaniṣat*. He indicates that the mind becomes the very replica of Brahman when Brahman is known directly.

यदा न लीयते चित्तं न च विक्षिप्यते पुनः ।

अनिगनमनाभासं निष्पन्नं ब्रह्म तत्तदा ॥ (मांडूक्य कारिका 3-46)

⁹⁴. स्वात्मानुभवनिश्चयरूपेण यदवस्थानं सा परा ज्ञानानिष्ठा (भगवद्गीता भाष्य १८-५५)

⁹⁵. अविषयतयैव विषयानुपरक्तचित्स्फुरणम् ।

Tr. ‘When the mind (that is totally withdrawn from all the pursuits and made to get absorbed in *ātmā*) does not sleep, does not become stupefied (by the adverse unconscious – *kaṣāya*), when it does not get distracted by sense objects and is very steady, free from the projection of superimposed *tripuṭīs*, it (the mind) conforms to the true nature of Brahman’. (*Māṇḍukya kārikā* 3-46).

This cannot but be a distinct *anubhava* (experience) wherein the mind, free of even the *pramātā*, virtually becomes Brahman. This is *Brahmajñāna*. The distinction between *aparokṣajñāna* (direct self-knowledge) and *parokṣajñāna* (indirect knowledge) lies in the presence or absence of *Brahmānubhava* / *ātmānubhava* (also termed *Brahmasākṣātkāra*) respectively. The indispensability of such an *anubhava* (experience) can be verified from the following statements from the *Māṇḍukyopaniṣat* and the *Bhagavadgītā* with relevant portions of the *bhāṣya*.

- i) *Māṇḍukyopaniṣat* (*mantra* 7) defines *ātmā* and through the command ‘*sa vijñeyah*’ exhorts the *mumukṣu* to know it directly. Though the *bhāṣyakāra* has not commented on the word *vijñeyah* in this *mantra*, its commentary can be found elsewhere. In the *Kenopaniṣat bhāṣya* (2-5), the meaning of *vicitya* is specified as *vijñāya* and further elaborated as *sākṣātkṛtya*. Therefore *vijñeyah* means *sākṣātkartavyah*. That means *sākṣātkāra* is necessary and mere *parokṣajñāna* is not enough to gain *mokṣa*.
- ii) Lord Kṛṣṇa describes *kāma* (desire) as *jñāna-vijñānanāīanam* – the destroyer of both *jñāna* and

vijñāna (*B.G.* 3-41). The *bhāṣyakāra* comments :⁹⁶

Jñānam is the knowledge gained through the *adhyātma-śāstra* and the teacher; whereas *vijñānam* is the intense experience of that which is learnt from the *adhyātma-śāstra* and the teacher.

- iii) *Jñāna-vijñānatṛptātmā* – the *Brahmajñānī* is contented with *Jñāna* and *vijñāna* (*B.G.* 6-8).⁹⁷

The *bhāṣya* comments :

Jñānam – A thorough understanding of what is expounded in the *Vedāntic* scriptures.

Vijñānam – One's own experience in accordance with what is known through the scriptures.

- iv) In defining *yoga*, Lord Kṛṣṇa describes the *Brahmajñāni* as one who experiences (*vetti*) that happiness (*sukham*) which is limitless (*ātyantikam*), can be known by the *buddhi* independent of the senses (*buddhigrāhyam*), and is not an object of the senses (*atīndriyam*).⁹⁸ (*B.G.* 6-21)

While commenting on the verse, the word *vetti* (which literally means ‘knows’) is explained by the *bhāṣyakāra* as ‘experiences such happiness’.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ ज्ञानविज्ञाननाशनम् । (भ.गी. 3-41)

ज्ञानं-शास्त्रतः आचार्यतः च आत्मादीनाम् अवबोधः ।

विज्ञानं-विशेषतः तदनुभवः । (भ.गी. भाष्य 3-41)

⁹⁷ ज्ञानविज्ञानतृप्तात्मा । (भ.गी. 6-8)

ज्ञानं = शास्त्रोक्तपदार्थानां परिज्ञानम् ।

विज्ञानं = शास्त्रतः ज्ञातानां तथैव स्वानुभवकरणम् (भ.गी. भाष्य 6-8)

⁹⁸ सुखमात्यन्तिकं यत्तत् बुद्धिग्राह्यमतीन्द्रियम् । वेत्ति (भ. गी. 6-21)

वेत्ति = तदीदृशं सुखम् अनुभवति (भ. गी. भाष्य 6-21)

v) *Savijñānam jñānam* (B.G. 7-2):

The *bhāṣya* elaborates on this phrase, stating that it stands for knowledge (*jñānam*) which is *vijñānasahitam* – accompanied by *vijñāna*. It is further defined as *svānubhava-samyuktam* – endowed with one's own experience.

vi) *Jñāna-yoga-vyavasthitih* (B.G. 16-1).⁹⁹ The *bhāṣya* comments:

Jñānam – the knowledge of things such as *ātmā* etc. gained through the scriptures and the teacher.

Yogaḥ – the reduction to experience of that which is (thus) known, through withdrawal of the senses etc. and single pointedness of the mind.⁹⁹

Vyavasthitih – Abidance, or steadfastness, in both *jñānam* and *yogaḥ*.

Thus *Brahmānubhava/ātmānubhava* is an indispensable constituent of *aparokṣa ātmajñāna/Brahmajñāna*, otherwise such knowledge is merely *parokṣa* (indirect). This experience has to be strictly in accordance with the teaching and the scriptures. Mere understanding of Vedānta is part of the process of gaining *ātmajñāna*. That is why Sage Vasiṣṭha, at the conclusion of his teaching to Lord Rāma, exhorts him to arrive at a uniformity of the guru's original teaching, scriptural knowledge and his own *Brahmānubhava* by advising him : ‘O Rāma, you should

⁹⁹ ज्ञानयोगव्यवस्थितिः (भ. गी. 16-1)

ज्ञानं – शास्त्रतः आचार्यतः च आत्मादिपदार्थानां अवगमः ।

योगः – अवगतानां इन्द्रियाद्युपसंहारेण एकाग्रतया स्वात्मसंवेद्यतापादनं योगः ।

तयोः ज्ञानयोगयोः व्यवस्थितिः व्यवस्थानं तन्निष्ठता । (भ.गी.भाष्य 16-1)

uniformize my teaching, your understanding of the *śāstra* and the direct experience (of Brahman)’ (*Yo. Vā.Ni. U. 203-21*)¹⁰⁰.

The above criterion of uniformity of these three in arriving at certitude regarding correct *ātmajñāna* was also highlighted by Sage Vasiṣṭha at the beginning of his teaching. ‘*Ātmā* is directly known by the eligible *mumukṣu* who by repeated practice (of *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*) has gained uniformity of the teaching of the *guru*, his correct understanding of Vedānta (scripture), and his direct experience of *ātmā* (*Yo. Vā. Mu. Vyā. 13-11*)¹⁰¹.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE WORD ANUBHAVA USED IN VEDĀNTIC TEXTS

Some Vedāntists object to the translation of the word ‘*anubhava*’ in the phrase *ātmānubhava / Brahmānubhava* etc. as ‘experience’. According to them *anubhava* means self-knowledge. They claim that an experience is always inconclusive in terms of knowing. Yes, it is true that all words have their limitations. The nature of *ātmā / Brahman* is beyond the range of description by words. Even then we have to communicate with frail words. That is why Vedānta emphasizes the indispensability of *ātmākāra / Brahmākāra-vṛtti* entirely in accordance with the true nature of Brahman. This *vṛtti*, is directly experienced and there is no *tripuṭī* in it because it is an exact replica of *ātmā / Brahman* free from duality. This is what *bhāṣya* points out in its statement: *Brahmajñāna* culminates in direct experience (vide pg. 180).

¹⁰⁰ यथा मयोपदिष्टोऽसि यथा पश्यसि शास्त्रतः ।

यथानुभवसि श्रेष्ठमेकवाक्यं तथा कुरु ॥ (यो.वा.नि.उ. 203-21)

¹⁰¹ स्वानुभूतेश्च शास्त्रस्य गुरोश्चैवैकवाक्यता ।

यस्याभ्यासेन तेनात्मा सन्ततेनावलोक्यते ॥ (यो.वा.मु.व्य. 13-11)

Sans such an experience, that knowledge of Brahman is only indirect (*parokṣa*). It indicates that Vedānta *pramāṇa* could not operate to the point of fruition for want of essential pre-requisites (*nirdoṣa sāmagrīs*). *Brahmākāra-vṛtti* which is necessary to enable such an experience is possible (vide pg. 139 to 143). This shows that Vedānta is not verbosity. Just understanding of Vedāntic texts itself is neither *Brahmajñāna* nor *Brahmasākṣātkāra* though it is an essential step (vide pg. 363). In self-knowledge there is no cognition of *dṛśya* including the *tripuṭī* (understander, understanding, understood) (vide pg. 147). A *mumukṣu* must know very well the exact *modus operandi* of Vedānta *pramāṇa* including its *avabodhana-prakāra* (pg. 201 to 207; 189, 195). For the sake of further clarity, this commentary has unfolded all the Vedāntic terminologies thoroughly. If we consider the exact nature of *mokṣa*, *ātmajñāna* / *Brahmajñāna*, *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti*, the nature of *ātmānubhava* / *Brahmānubhava* and its role in gaining *aparokṣa Brahmajñāna*, it should be very clear that *Brahmajñāna* does not depend on any factors such as words, their translations and semantics. The *vṛtti* conferring the knowledge has to be true to the entity (to be known, *yathābhūtavīṣayam*, *Br.Sū. Bh. 3-2-21*). That is what the *bhāṣyakāra* gives the reason as ‘*bhūtavastu-vīṣayatvāt*’, when he emphasizes that *Brahmajñāna* culminates in the direct experience (pg 180. *Bh.*). Therefore the translation is irrelevant while determining the nature of direct knowledge of an existing entity.

The word knowledge can be superficial or incomplete. Knowledge is also inconclusive in imparting correct knowledge if it is not in accordance with the entity to be

known. All erroneous knowledge is certainly considered knowledge until it is discovered to be erroneous. Taking into account the possibility that knowledge (*jñānam*) can be erroneous, Vedānta uses the word *pramā* to denote correct knowledge. In practice, when we refer to a given knowledge or experience of a specific entity, we take it for granted that it does correspond to the true nature of that entity.

Conventionally, the word *anubhava* means experience (in the sense of ‘to be aware of’) and *jñānam* stands for knowledge, though rarely is one used for the other because both words have both meanings in general (vide pg 126-127). In fact, these words are to a great extent semantically mutually interdependent. When both *anubhava* and *jñānam* are used together in a sentence, the word *anubhava* invariably indicates experience of the subject matter, in contrast to knowledge. The conclusiveness or inconclusiveness of an experience or knowledge is determined by the correctness or incorrectness of the *vṛtti* (thought) that specifies the entity being experienced or known. Experience is always direct and intimate unlike the knowledge which can be indirect also. The certitude of *ātmajñāna* / *Brahmajñāna* as *aparokṣa* (direct) can be gained only by an experience totally corresponding to *ātmā* / Brahman.

By itself, an experience may not be knowledge, but an experience true to the nature of the entity to be known is the basic prerequisite for knowledge in the case of *pratyakṣa* (direct perception) and *aparokṣa ātmajñāna* / *Brahmajñāna*. Based on *śāstra-pramāṇas* such as the Upaniṣads , the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Ribhugītā*, *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, relevant portions

of *bhāṣya*, Pañcapādikā, *Vivaraṇa-prameya saṅgraha*, *prakaraṇa granthas*, including grammar, this commentary on *sūtras* one and two and epilogue exhaustively establish the derivation of the words *jñānam* (knowledge) and *anubhava* (experience) in general and the exact nature of *ātmānubhava* /*Brahmānubhava* in particular, the role of the latter, the relation between *ātmajñāna* and *ātmānubhava*, and the indispensability of such an experience in spite of *ātmā* being *anubhava-svarūpa* and the very content of all experiences. There is no room left for ambiguity or speculation regarding the word experience (*anubhava*) in respect of *ātmajñāna*. There are no words used in the commentary that are arbitrary labels without their meaning unfolded.

Let us remember, as already established, that the culmination (*avasāna*) of *Brahmajñāna* lies in *Brahmānubhava* (experience of Brahman) (*Br.Sū. Bh. 1-1-1*). Otherwise it gets reduced to indirect knowledge (*parokṣa*, and not *aparokṣajñāna*). *Brahmajñāna* is not a matter of verbosity or of picking up some information about *ātmā* /Brahman from the *śāstras* and repeating it like a parrot.

The correct experience of a given entity corresponds to its true nature. Though *ātmā* is *anubhava-svarūpa* and the basic content of all experiences, what we experience, or in other words what we are aware of, in and through our life, is *saviśeṣa ātmā* – ‘I’ with attributes. But in reality, *ātmā* is ‘*nirviśeṣa*’ (attributeless), the *śodhita* (*upādhi-less*) *tvam* (you) *pada* (word) in the ‘*tat tvam asi*’ *mahāvākya*. When this *tvam* (you) i.e. ‘I’ which is *aparokṣa* is experienced (i.e. when the *mumukṣu* is aware of it) in its true nature without *tripuṭī*,

the *mahāvākya pramāṇa* ‘You are Brahman’ operates. Otherwise, while experiencing ‘I’ with attributes, to equate *saviśeṣa tvam* with *nirviśeṣa* Brahman would be an incorrect equation. That is why Vedānta repeatedly emphasizes that *Brahmajñāna* culminates in the direct experience of *nirupādhika* Brahman/*ātmā*, wherein lies the certitude of *Brahmajñāna*.

Knowledge in conformity with an entity is its correct knowledge whilst all else conjectured by the human intellect at variance from its true nature is false knowledge. The validity of the knowledge of an existent entity depends on its conformity with the entity. This is a rule applicable to the knowledge of all existing entities. Brahman cannot be an exception (vide pg. 185, 186 *bhāṣya*). Therefore knowledge in conformity with Brahman alone is the correct knowledge.

The definitions of *mokṣa* examined so far should clarify that *mokṣa* is nothing short of *nirupādhika Brahmasvarūpa*. What is required is a *vṛtti* that is a replica of Brahman which destroys self-ignorance and itself drops off in *jñānaniṣṭhā*. Thereafter, the self-evident Brahman and Brahman alone remains. Semantics, including the words ‘knowledge’ or ‘experience’ or ‘Brahman’ itself, cannot approach that realm. This is *Brahmānubhava*. This is *Brahmasākṣātkāra*. This is conclusive because it is nothing but the true nature of Brahman. This is the first hand discovery of the hitherto erroneous *saṃsārī jīva*. This is the basis of *aparokṣa Brahmajñāna*. This gives the certitude to *Brahmajñāna*. Otherwise it is only *parokṣa-jñāna*. This is what *bhāṣyakāra* says in his statement: *Brahmajñāna*

culminates in *anubhava* (experience) (vide pg. 180). What is important is the nature of *Brahmānubhava*. Its conformity to Brahman/*ātmā* is testified by the *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* which ends the self-ignorance with its effects. *Brahmānubhava* / *ātmānubhava* eliminates all possibilities of *Brahmajñāna* being superficial or incomplete. It verifies the conformity of *Brahmajñāna* with Brahman. The direct knowledge of an existing entity including Brahman is valid only when it totally conforms to the true nature of that entity.

If the word *anubhava* used in the Vedāntic text is invariably translated as knowledge without distinguishing it from experience regardless of the context, many of such Vedāntic passages will make no sense. This can be verified to an extent from the *bhāṣya* passage (vide pg. 180, 185, 211) and quotations from *Pañcapādikā* and *Vivaraṇa-prameya-saṅgraha* cited in this book (vide pg. 129, 143 - fn. 64, 184, 185, 190, 193).

Translation apart, the necessity of direct experience of *ātmā*, without *tripuṭī*, in gaining *aparokṣa-jñāna* cannot be obviated. Trying to end the directly (*aparokṣatayā*) experienced sorrowful *saṃsāra* by the indirect (*parokṣa*) *ātmajñāna* / *Brahmajñāna* which lacks the direct experience of *ātmā* / Brahman, is an adventure of quenching the thirst by drinking the mirage water! *Maitreyopaniṣat* 2-23 rejoinders: ‘In vain does the ignorant fool rejoice in Brahman without its experience, akin to enjoying fruits on a branch that is reflected (in a lake)’.

FIFTH TO SEVENTH *JÑĀNABHŪMIKĀS* PROVE THE EXPERIENTIAL NATURE OF *BRAHMAJÑĀNA*

Some Upaniṣads and *Yogavāsiṣṭha* describe in detail the *saptajñāna-bhūmikās* – the seven stages of *Brahmajñāna*. Though *Brahmajñāna* is one and the same, the varying degrees of *antaḥkaraṇasuddhi*, *citta naiścalya*, *vairāgya* and *abhyāsa* (practice) of *nididhyāsana* give rise to varying intensities of *jñānaniṣṭhā*. These varying degrees of steadfastness of the abidance of the mind in *jñāna* constitute the different stages of *jñāna*. The first three stages cover the *mumkṣu* still in the realm of ignorance. The fourth stage encompasses one on the verge of becoming *jīvanmukta*. The fifth to seventh stages point to higher and higher intensities of *jñānaniṣṭhā*. Even a cursory glance at the description of the last three stages shows that *Brahmajñāna* is experiential.

The following is a brief description of the seven stages of knowledge, with the nomenclature differing at places.

1) शुभेच्छा (*Śubhecchā*):

In the first stage, the mature individual develops intense *mumukṣā* with *sādhana-catustaya-saṃpatti* and a firm resolve to take to *ātmavicāra* until *ātmasākṣātkāra* is gained.

2) विचारणा (*Vicāraṇā*):

Actual *śravaṇa* and *manana* are initiated, and other indispensable *sāadhanās* are taken to.

3) तनुमानसा (*Tanumānasā*):

Coupled with the preceding two stages, the *mumukṣu* develops indifference towards sense objects and withdraws the mind from them. He attempts to get his mind absorbed in *ātmasvarūpa* through consistent *nididhyāsana*.

4) सत्त्वापत्तिः (*Sattvāpattiḥ*):

Having developed intense *vairāgya*, the mind is made to abide in Brahman through *nirvikalpa samādhi* leading to *Brahmasākṣātkāra*. The *jñanī* in the fourth stage is termed *Brahmavit* by the *Varāhopaniṣat* (Ch. 4), which lays down a nomenclature for individuals in these last four stages.

5) असंसक्तिः (*Asamsaktiḥ*):

As the fourth stage fructifies, there is steadfastness in *Brahmasākṣātkāra* – the direct cognition of Brahman. The *ānanda* nature of *ātmā* manifests itself very clearly. The *jñanī* who is now a *jīvanmukta* has no contact with *avidyā* and its effect, Creation. He becomes aware of the world at times on his own due to his *prārabdha karma*, when his mind is not absorbed in Brahman. His perception of the world and his response to it are like a person half asleep. The *jīvanmukta* in this fifth stage is called *Brahmavidvaraḥ*.

6) पदार्थभाविनी (*Padārthabhāvinī*):

The sixth and seventh stages present the fructification of the fifth stage and result in a firm abidance of the mind in Brahman/*ātmā*. There is spontaneous and consistent *Brahmākāra anubhavavṛtti* in the sixth stage. The *jīvanmukta* in the sixth stage has no cognition of internal or external *drśyas*. He is unaware of the world, like a person in sleep. His body continues to survive through the efforts of others who bring him down to the level of body consciousness and consciousness of the world in order to feed him etc. The *jīvanmukta* in this sixth stage is called *Brahmavidvariṅyān*.

7) तुर्यगा (*Turyagā*):

In the seventh stage, the mind of this *jīvanmukta* gets deeply absorbed in *ātmasvarūpa* through intense practice of the earlier stages. *Brahmākāravṛtti* has ended. He is *ānandaikaghanākāra*. Only the *anubhavasvarūpa nirviśeṣa* Brahman remains. Even others are unable to make him aware of his body. He is called *Brahmavidvariṅhaḥ* (the most exalted of *Brahmajñānīs-Varāhopaniṣat*, Ch. 4). The intensity of *Brahmānubhava* at this stage at its culminating point is at par with the experience in *videhmukti*. The only difference between the two states is the presence or absence of the body. Being bodiless in nature, *videhmukti* does not come under the category of the *saptajñānabhūmikās*.

It is worth noting that even an *aparokṣa Brahmajñānī* who has had *Brahmasākṣātkāra* for at least a while – even though not a *jīvanmukta* – does in fact get *videhmukti* after his *prārabdha karma* is exhausted. But he is beset by *citta-dharmas*, characterized by *karṭṛtva*, *bhokṭṛtva*, joys and sorrows, during his remaining life-span (*Jīvanmuktiviveka*, Ch. 2).

PRAMAṆA OF SAPTAJÑĀNABHŪMIKĀS

The following *śrutis*, *smṛti* and the *vṛddhasammati* (the consensus of great Vedāntic masters) serve as the *pramāṇa* for the *saptajñānabhūmikās*.

- i) The *Varāhopaniṣat* (Ch. 4) from the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*.
- ii) The *Mahopaniṣat* (Ch. 5) from the *Sāma Veda*. It is interesting to note that this Upaniṣad describes the seven

- stages of self-ignorance as well.
- iii) The *Annapūrṇopaniṣat* (Ch. 5) from the *Atharva Veda*.
- iv) The *Akṣyupaniṣat* (Ch. 2) from the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*. This *Upaniṣat* refers to the *Jñānabhūmikās* as *Yogabhūmikās*.
- v) The *Muṇḍakopaniṣat* (3-1-4) describes the *jīvanmukta* in the seventh stage of the *jñānabhūmikās* as *Brahmavidvariṣṭhaḥ*. The description is: **आत्मक्रीडः** (one who sports only in *ātmā* and not with children, wife, husband etc.); **आत्मरतिः** (one whose love / pastime is only *ātmā*); **क्रियावान्** (one whose practice is *jñāna*, *dhyāna*, *vairagya* etc.); if **आत्मरतिःक्रियावान्** is taken as a single word, it means one whose practice is only *ātmaratiḥ*; **एषः ब्रह्मविदां (सर्वेषां) वरिष्ठः ।** (such a person is the most exalted of all *Brahmajñānīs*). Here the word *Brahmavit* stands for *Brahmajñānī* alone and not a person who has merely studied the Vedas. This is so because the context here as indicated by the descriptions *ātmakrīdaḥ* etc. is that of *Brahmajñāna – parā vidyā* – whereas the topic of *aparā vidyā* which includes the simple study of the Vedas was concluded in the second section of the first *muṇḍaka*. According to *Varāhopaniṣat* (Ch. 4), a *Brahmavidvariṣṭhaḥ* is a *jīvanmukta* in the seventh stage of knowledge. Śrī Vidyāraṇya Muni in his *Jīvanmuktiviveka* (Ch. 4) explains that the states of *ātmakrīdaḥ*, *ātmaratiḥ*, *kriyāvān* and *Brahmavidvariṣṭhaḥ* (*Mu.U.* 3-1-4) correspond to those of *Brahmavit* (4th stage of knowledge), *Brahmavidvaraḥ* (5th stage), *Brahmavidvariṣṭhān* (6th stage) and *Brahmavidvariṣṭhaḥ* (7th stage) respectively.

- vi) *Yogavāsiṣṭhaḥ* (also called *Mahārāmayāṇa*):
- a) *Utpatti Prakaraṇa*, *sarga* 118. Sage Vasiṣṭha's teaching to Lord Rāma. The earlier *sarga* 117 contains a description of the seven stages of self-ignorance.
- b) *Nirvāṇa Prakaraṇa (Pūrvārdha)*, *sarga* 34. This teaching called *Devārcana-vidhāna* (the highest mode of *nididhyāsana*) from *sargas* 28 to 42 is imparted by Lord Śiva to sage Vasiṣṭha. *Sarga* 34 describes only the fifth to seventh stages of the *jñānabhūmikās*. Sage Vālmīki reports that Lord Śiva went into *samādhi* at the end of the teaching. Sage Vasiṣṭha and his disciples followed suit. Lord Śiva resumed the teaching after a period (*muhūrta*).
- c) *Nirvāṇa Prakaraṇa (Pūrvārdha)*, *sarga* 120. Here, Manu teaches his son, king Ikṣvāku.
- d) *Nirvāṇa Prakaraṇa (Pūrvārdha)*, *sarga* 126. This is taught by Sage Vasiṣṭha to Lord Rāma.
- vii) *Jīvanmuktiviveka* by Śrī Vidyāraṇya Muni is replete with the quotations on the *saptajñānabhūmikās*.

AUTHENTICITY OF THE ALLEGED ‘MINOR’ UPANIṢADS

Here, it would not be out of context to scrutinize the bona fides of a claim made by some misguided individuals. They say that of the total 108 Upaniṣads, while ten are commented upon by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, the rest (the alleged ‘minor’ Upaniṣads) are later insertions and hence not authentic. This is totally baseless.

The origin of this wrong notion is unknown. Perhaps it is the product of some Ph.D. thesis written during the British regime in India under a Westerner guide with scant knowledge of Indian scriptural lore. More often than not, the norms employed by such academics or professional scholars to arrive at a conclusion are flimsy and irrelevant and lack thorough investigation into the ancient *adhyātma-śāstra*. We have seen this in the introductory portion of this text when discussing the author and date of the *Brahmasūtras*.

These remaining Upaniṣads too along with their specific *śānti mantras* can be traced to the Vedas to which they belong. Without exception, their final content (*tātparya*) is the same, as is the case with the much studied ten Upaniṣads. No doubt they contain a number of elaborations, new facets and deeper insights into Vedānta not found or merely hinted at in the famous ten Upaniṣads. If we find them new and difficult to understand, let us thoroughly ascertain their correctness with an open mind by giving up our *kūpa-maṇḍūka-vṛtti* (mentality of a frog in the well).

None other than Lord Śiva, Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Kṛṣṇa as well as celebrated Vedāntic masters such as Vasiṣṭha, Vālmīki, Gouḍapādācārya, the *Bhāṣyakāra* and Vidyāraṇya Muni have described or quoted topics from these Upaniṣads freely in their teachings or Vedāntic works. As seen before, Lord Śiva elaborates on the fifth, sixth and seventh stages of *Brahmajñāna* (*Yo.Vā.Ni.Pu.* 34) described in these Upaniṣads, when teaching the highest mode of worshipping the Divinity principle (*Devārcana-vidhāna*). At the end of his narration, Lord Śiva demonstrates the authenticity of these

stages of knowledge by himself getting absorbed in one of the three stages. This incident took place much before the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* was composed. It could be either in *Tretāyuga* or much before it.

Lord Viṣṇu also refers to *Jabāla śruti* (Śivarahasyam *aṃsa* 6, called Ribhugītā, Ch. 49, vs. 35, and the *śruti* referred to is *Bhasmajābālopaniṣad*, Ch. 2). The teaching containing the reference to this incident belongs perhaps to *Satyayuga*. Lord Kṛṣṇa, who incarnated in *Dwāparayuga*, quotes the *Dhyānabindopaniṣat* (B.G. 6-25) and the *Yogaśikhā* Upaniṣad (B.G. 6-20, 21, 22) in the *Bhagavadgītā* (Ch. 6). It is obvious that sage Vyāsa, the compiler of Vedas, consents to this while composing the *Bhagavadgītā*. The exact nature of *prajñā* which is a component of the compound word *sthitaprajñā* (B.G. 2), is defined in the *Adhyātmopaniṣat*, though not described in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Sages Vasiṣṭha and Vālmīki have quoted these Upaniṣads profusely in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (which dates back to the *Tretāyuga*). Gouḍapādācārya, in his *Māṇḍukya Kārikā*, quotes from *Tripuratāpini*, *Avadhūta*, *Ātma* and *Brahmabindu* (or *Amṛta*) – Upaniṣads. The *prakaraṇa-granthas* (topic-wise treatises) written by the *Bhāṣyakāra* and by Vidyāraṇya Muni are replete with quotations from these Upaniṣads. The *Muṇḍakopaniṣat* simply enumerates four of the seven stages of *Brahmajñāna*, whereas *Varāha*, *Mahā*, *Annapūrṇā* and *Akṣi* – Upaniṣads elaborate all stages at length. This proves that in addition to the ten commented upon by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, the remaining Upaniṣads out of the total 108 are equally authentic.

ALLEGIANCE TO ANCESTRAL WELL (*TĀTASYA KŪPAḤ*)

A saying by the wise goes – *Advaita-darśanam-jñānam* (the direct knowledge of non-dual Brahman alone is true knowledge). It is called *parā vidya* – the most exalted knowledge. All other types of knowledge are categorized as *aparā vidya* – inferior knowledge. Notwithstanding this truth, there are many who maintain that they do not need *adhyātma-sāstra* (Vedānta) because their ancestors were experts in other branches of knowledge or other pursuits. They declare with pride that their forefathers were adept in fields such as *upāsanās*, *karma-mīmāṃsā*, *tarka* (logic), *Sāṅkhya* – philosophy, *tantra*, *mantra*, *aṣṭāṅgayoga*, medicine and alchemy. We too will pursue the path of our ancestors and not Vedānta, they say. Because of such sentimental attachment, they consider that which they are accustomed to to be the best. Vasiṣṭha comes down heavily on such a mindset and ridicules these contemptible individuals. He says that they are no better than those who drink saline water from a well only because it is an ancestral well (*tātasya-kūpaḥ*), even though the pure *Gangā* river flows nearby (*Yo.Vā.Ni.U.* 163-56). There are many followers of Vedānta too who harbour such a mentality and feel contented with whatever little information on Vedānta they gather, refusing to inquire further or verify the correctness of the information gathered so far. Vasiṣṭha advises people not to be foolish like them and remain subjected to repeated cycles of birth and death by not taking to Vedānta to the point of fruition.

THE ROLE AND RELEVANCE OF VEDĀNTIC PRAKRIYĀS

(Modes of teaching)

This book will be incomplete without a brief analysis and ascertainment of Vedāntic *prakriyās* (mode of teaching) or *Vādas* (doctrines employed in the teaching). While they serve as means to produce *ātmajñāna* / *Brahmajñāna*, all of them have inherent limitations. This is not because of any incapacity in the Vedas or shortcomings in Vedāntic masters in the state of *jīvanmukta*, but because of the non-dual nature of Brahman which is inaccessible to mind and words. What is to be attained is Brahman totally free from *jagat*, whereas what is at our disposal is the empirical *jagat* which has no access to Brahman. ‘There is no perception of the *jagat* in *Brahmajñāna*, while there is no *Brahmajñāna* so long as the *jagat* is perceived’ (*Yo.Vā.Ni-U.* 40-9).

This is a stumbling block that is overcome by *jīvanmuktas*, who at times stay absorbed in Brahman free from Creation and at other times remain aware of the world and interact with it. Seers (*dr̥ṣṭāraḥ*) in the Vedas have devised different modes/doctrines of teaching to guide *ajñānīs* (ignorant *mumukṣus*) and lead them to the attainment of *Brahmajñāna*. ‘Scriptures devised by *jīvanmuktas* continue to exist in the world for the sake of *mumukṣus* as means to gain *ātmāsākṣātkāra*’ (*Yo.Vā.Sti.* 13-4). ‘The names of all-pervasive Brahman such as *cit* (चित्), Brahman, and *ātmā* have been coined by *jīvanmuktas* for use in the scriptures’ (*Yo.Vā.Ut.* 122-35). (Lord Śiva teaches sage Vasiṣṭha): ‘In order to teach *mumukṣus*, to compose the scriptures, and to validate the Vedas, *Purāṇas* and *Brahmasūtras*, highly

adorned *jñānīs* and guardians of the world such as *Brahmājī* (one of the Trinity), Rudra, and Indra have coined for the nameless *Īśvara* (Brahman) names such as *cit* (चित्), Brahman, Śiva, *ātmā*, *Īśa*, *Paramātmā* and *Īśvara*’ (*Yo.Vā.Ni.Pū.* 41-21 to 23).

In view of the contrast between the nature of Brahman, which is totally free from the *jagat*, and the *ādhyātmic śāstras* (scriptures) which are in the realm of *jagat*, *prakriyās* have to be viewed in their right perspective. What needs to be examined is their capacity to produce *Brahmasākṣātkāra*, without in any way dwelling on their inherent limitations.

The *prakriyās* employed most often are *ātmānātma-viveka*, *pañcakośa-viveka*, *avasthātraya-viveka*, *dr̥k-dr̥śya-viveka*, *puruṣa-prakṛti-vibhāga*, or *kṣetra-kṣetrajña-vibhāga*, *avidyā/māyā-vāda*, *vāsanā-prakriyā*, *vivartavāda*, *adhyāropāpavāda*, *kārya-kāraṇa-bhāva* etc. These *prakriyās* are implied in the Upaniṣads and several Vedāntic texts, even if not referred to explicitly in them.

Take for example the existence of *avidyā* postulated in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, a magnum opus among Vedāntic treatises. The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* consists of the teaching of sage Vasiṣṭha to Lord Rāma at the behest of sage Viśvāmitra. This teaching was received from Lord *Brahmājī* by both these sages. It was composed by sage Vālmīki at the command of *Brahmājī*.

Avidyā, *māyā*, *avyakta*, *avyākṛta*, *ākāśa* (as *māyā*), *akṣara* (as *māyā*) are more or less synonyms found in many Upaniṣads. In his *bhāṣya*, *Ācārya* Śaṅkara introduces *avidyā* using these synonyms in addition to *ātmānātma-adhyāsa* (*Br.Sū.Bh.* 1-4-3, *I.U.Bh.* 12, *Kt.U.Bh.* 1-3-12, *B.G.Bh.* 5-14,

adhyāsabhāṣya etc.).

In light of the synonyms of *avidyā* enumerated above, selected excerpts from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* regarding the existence/non-existence of *avidyā/māyā* can facilitate the analysis of *avidyā-vāda*. The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* includes many narrations containing Vedāntic teachings, each complete in itself. For the sake of clarity, quotations chiefly establishing the existence of *avidyā* are cited first followed by contradictions brought up by Lord Rāma and their redressal by sage Vasiṣṭha, and then quotations regarding its non-existence.

- i) ‘Goddess Sarasvati says that *avicāra* (lack of inquiry into the nature of *ātmā*) is born of *svabhāva* (*avidyā*)’ (*Yo.Vā.Ut.* 21-70).
- ii) ‘This entire expanse of *Jagat* is the effect of *māyā*’ (*Yo.Vā.Ut.* 60-8).
- iii) ‘*Māyā* / *avidyā* is the cause of entire *saṃsāra*’ (*Yo.Vā.St.* 41).
- iv) ‘The nature of *prakṛti* is *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamoḡṇas*. This *triguṇātmikā prakṛti* itself is *avidyā*. This alone is the cause of *saṃsāra*. The ultimate reality (*param padam*) is totally free from *avidyā*’ (*Yo.Vā.Ni.Pū.* 9-5 and 6).
- v) ‘This delusion in the form of the multitude of *dr̥śyas* is termed *avidyā*. It does not exist in reality just as there is no water in a mirage. But at my behest, accept *avidyā* to be real (*satya*) for the sake of the teaching and listen to what I say’ (*Yo.Vā.Ni.U.* 52-5 and 6).

- vi) The following dialogue between Lord Rāma and sage Vasiṣṭha unfolds the exact role of *avidyā* in Vedāntic teaching (*Yo. Vā. Ni. Pu.* 49-10 to 17).

Rāma: How can *avidyā* exist in Brahman, which is non-dual, all-pervasive and ever-existent in nature?

Keeping in the mind that *avidyā* does not exist from the standpoint of a *jñānī*, but is postulated for the sake of teaching at the present level of understanding of ignorant individuals, Vasiṣṭha replies:

Earlier there was the changeless, causeless, endless, limitless Brahman. It is so now and it shall remain so forever. *Avidyā* does not exist to the slightest extent. This is an ascertainment that is irrevocable. You, me, *jagat*, quarters, heaven, earth, great elements (*mahābhūtas*), *avidyā* etc. do not exist at all. All that exists is the beginningless, endless Brahman. *Jñānīs* know that *avidyā* is only a delusion and is non-existent in reality. That which has no existence cannot be real at all.

Rāma: O revered sage, if *avidyā* does not exist, how is it that you earlier established the existence of *avidyā* in detail?

Vasiṣṭha: O Rāma, till now, you were ignorant of your true nature. It is not so any longer. Now you have become wise because of the imaginary means of imparting knowledge employed by me. *Jīvanmuktas* who know the *tātparya* (ascertained purport) of the Vedas have coined imaginary phrases such as ‘this is

- avidyā*’, ‘this is *jīva*’ etc. in order to teach ignorant *mumukṣus*.
- vii) Goddess Sarasvati states: There is no *avidyā* after *Brahmasākṣātkāra* (*Yo. Vā. Ut.* 21-72).
- viii) ‘This perceived *jagat* which is the effect of *māyā* is non-dual Brahman alone. There is no *māyā* at all.’ (*Yo. Vā. Ut.* 60-8).
- ix) ‘The doctrine is that there is no *bhrānti* (*avidyā*)’ (*Yo. Vā. Ut.* 91-41).
- x) ‘*Avidyā* does not exist from the standpoint of *paramārtha* (absolute reality)’ (*Yo. Vā. St.* 41).
- xi) ‘*Ātmā* alone exists, there is no *avidyā*. This is known as the destruction of *avidyā*’ (*Yo. Vā. Ni. Pu.* 41-10).
- xii) ‘You will know through *aparokṣa ātmajñāna* that *avidyā* does not exist at all’ (*Yo. Vā. Ni. U.* 52-7).
- xiii) ‘The doctrine of all *ādhyātmic* scriptures is the denial (*apahnava*) of this entire duality (whether it is *avidyā* and its effect, the *jīva*, with the three states of consciousness, or *māyā* along with *Īśvara* and *jagat*). There is neither *avidyā* nor *māyā*. All that exists is self-evident, self-existent Brahman, free from all afflictions, which cannot be objectified (as *prameya*) or described by any *pramāṇa*, including the scriptures’ (*Yo. Vā. Ni. Pu.* 125-1).

In short *avidyā* or *māyā* are but postulates in the limitless non-dual, Brahman, an *āropa* (superimposition) on Brahman, meant only for *apavāda* (negation) in order to gain

Brahmasākṣātkāra. *Avidyā* is taken as real in terms of *vyāvahārika* (transactional) existence until *Brahmasākṣātkāra* is gained. Then it is discovered that it did not exist at all. To teach ignorant persons that *avidyā* is non-existent is to put the cart before the horse. Postulations such as the existence of *avidyā* facilitate the teaching, in spite of these limitations. This is true of all Vedāntic *prakriyās* / *vādas*. They are means to an end and not an end in themselves.

The criterion of correctness for a Vedāntic *prakriyā* vests in its capacity to produce *Brahmajñāna*. It cannot be a subject of academic interest or a scholastic feat. It is not desirable to take an obstinate stand and condemn a *prakriyā* by reading into it unstated meaning, disregarding its capacity to produce *jñāna*. *Mumukṣus* should bear in mind that *adhyāropa* in Vedānta is meant for *apavāda* and not to ascribe the status of reality to the *adhyasta*. The mode of superimposition is not important. What is necessary is that the method employed should produce the knowledge of non-dual Brahman.

Indispensable pre-requisites for *Brahmajñāna* are *sādhana-catuṣṭaya-saṃpatti* coupled with a pure and steady mind. Without these, even *śravaṇa*, *manana* etc. are incapable of producing *Brahmajñāna*. It is noteworthy that there are *Brahmajñānīs* who have not studied scriptures at all.

In ascertaining the genuineness of Vedāntic *prakriyās*, *mumukṣus* should be guided by the following dictum from the *vārtikakāra* Sureśvarācārya. The context is the contradiction found in different *śṛṣṭi-prakriyās* (theories of Creation propounded in the Upaniṣads, employed as means to impart

ātmajñāna). He says :

प्रक्रियानियमो नापि पुंव्युत्पत्तिप्रधानतः ।
प्रतिश्रुतिविगीतिश्च प्रक्रियाणां समीक्ष्यते ॥

Tr. There is no definite rule regarding the form of a *prakriyā* (on the theory of Creation). A *prakriyā* is governed mainly by its capacity to produce *ātmajñāna*. (That is why) it is observed that different (*śṛṣṭi*) *prakriyās* are at variance with one another. (*Br.U. Vārtikā*, 1-4-401).

यया यया भवेत्पुंसां व्युत्पत्तिः प्रत्यगात्मनि ।
सा सैव प्रक्रियेहस्यात् साध्वी सा चानवस्थिता ॥

Tr. By whatsoever *prakriyā* *ātmajñāna* is produced in *mumukṣus*, that *prakriyā* alone is fruitful (*sādhvī* / *phalavat*) according to the *śruti*. But that same *prakriyā* is inherently defective in nature (although its utility depends on the different intellectual textures of *mumukṣus* to whom it is taught) (*Br.U. Vārtikā*, 1-4-402).

This norm is equally applicable to all *prakriyās* – modes of Vedāntic teaching.

Unaware of such unavoidable modes of teaching adopted in Vedānta, the followers of many other schools of thoughts have criticised – as *anupapatti* or untenable – many Vedāntic concepts such as *māyā*, *avidyā* employed as a means to unfold Brahman. It only exhibits their ignorance of the final human goal and its means in the right perspective. Vedāntic masters have refuted those allegations from time to time. Taking into account the unique nature of Brahman that defies

all the worldly norms, the *modus operandi* adopted by *jīvanmuktas* in revealing Brahman envisages three levels of vision (*dr̥ṣṭi*):

- i) *Pāmara-dr̥ṣṭi* - The vision of a lay person who considers the *jagat* to be true and Brahman or *Īśvara*, to be non-existent, or even if existent, different from 'I'.
- ii) *Youktika-dr̥ṣṭi* - A concept of *jagat* etc. arrived at through a logical approach based on reasoning by those skillful in inquiring into the truth and adept in ascertaining a *prameya* (thing to be known) through the operation of a *pramāṇa*.
- iii) *Tattva-dr̥ṣṭi* - The vision accomplished through a steadfast *akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti* as a fructification of thorough *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* wherein there is *aparokṣajñāna* of Brahman. This *dr̥ṣṭi* is found in *jīvanmuktas*.

Vedānta dismisses the first *dr̥ṣṭi* by the second and the third taken together, while the second, is refuted by the third – *tattva dr̥ṣṭi*. Sage Vasiṣṭha asserts that in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, he has followed this method of teaching to the point of direct discovery of the non-dual Brahman where the *dr̥ṣṭi*, *jīva* and *jagat* never exist. (*Yo. Vā. Ni. U.* 190-89).

MŪLĀVIDYĀ

Here, a passing reference to the *mūlāvidyā prakriyā* of *vivaraṇa* would not be out of context. Commentators have also referred to *mūlāvidyā* as *bhāvāvidyā* or *kāraṇāvidyā*. It is a *prakriyā* having its origin in the Pañcapādikā of Padmapādācārya. *Mūlāvidyā* superimposed (*āropita*) on

Brahman is described as *bhāvarūpā* – existent in nature. That does not mean it is absolutely real. This *prakriyā* propounds that Brahman alone is the *pārmārthika satyam* and *Brahmasākṣātkāra*, in which nothing else exists, has to be gained. *Mūlāvidyā* is terminated by *Brahmajñāna*. Therefore *mūlāvidyā* is reduced to *mithyā* in nature though an initial existence in terms of *bhāvarūpā* was ascribed to it. It should be noted in this context that the words *āropita* (superimposed), *avāstava* (unreal), *kalpita* (imagined), *adhyasta* (superimposed), *māyika* (effect of *māyā*) and *āvidyaka* (effect of *avidyā*) are synonyms.

If *avidyā* is taken as *adhyāsa*, that *avidyā* in the form of *adhyāsa* has to be *adhyasta* (superimposed) and therefore is *mithyā* (false) in nature. If it is not *adhyasta*, duality will be inevitably cast, resulting in the impossibility of *mokṣa* because *avidyā* as *adhyāsa* would be real. An *adhyāsa* should necessarily have a cause (*Br. U. Vārtika* 1-4-478). That cause too would necessarily have to have another cause. This would lead to the defect of *regress ad infinitum* (*anavasthā doṣa*) and the impossibility of *mokṣa* (unless the *avidyā* referred to as *adhyāsa* is *mithyā*). If it is argued that the nature of such *adhyāsa* (that is *avidyā*) is *svataḥ adhyasta* (self-superimposed), the same argument holds good in the case of *mūlāvidyā*.

The cause-effect relationship (*kārya-kāraṇa-bhāva*), *adhyāsa* and the rest are *vyāvahārika* in nature and not *pāramārthika*. Elsewhere, the *bhāṣya* says:

परमार्थावस्थायां कुतः एव वा सृष्टिः ।

गृहीते तु आत्मैकत्वे सर्वव्यवहारसमाप्तिः एव स्यात् ।

Tr. How can there be Creation in Brahman? All dealings come to an end when *ātmajñāna* is gained.

Generally, cause and effect have the same degree of reality. Therefore it is proved that an existent *adhyāsa* called *mūlāvidyā* is the cause of existent *kāryādhyāsa* (effect in the form of the *jagat* that is superimposed)¹⁰².

Thus even if *mūlāvidyā* is described as *bhāvarūpā* (existent in nature), it has only *vyāvahārika-sattā* just like the existence of *avidyā / māyā*, and is not *pāramārthika*. If *avidyā* is described anywhere in the scripture as *abhāvarūpā* (non-existent in nature), it should be understood that the statement is made from the *pāramārthika* standpoint. All norms applicable to *avidyāvāda* as seen in *Yogavāsīṣṭha* apply faithfully to *mūlāvidyā prakriyā* as well. Scholars have already established how *mūlāvidyā prakriyā* is in consonance with the *bhāṣya* and the *vārtikā*¹⁰³. Its elaboration here is beyond the purview of this book. The role of *mūlāvidyā* as a *prakriyā* capable of conferring *Brahmajñāna* cannot be refuted even if it is accepted for the sake of argument that it is not in accordance with *bhāṣya* and *vārtikā*. Any attempt to dismiss *mūlāvidyā prakriyā* is futile.

ĀŚĪRVACANAM (BENEDICTION)

We had seen earlier that sage Vyāsa is the author of the *Brahmasūtras*. In fact, Vyāsa himself received this teaching from none other than Lord Śiva. (*Śiva-Rahasyam, Aṃsa 6, viz. Ribhu Gītā 2-2*). This teaching is the highest blessing that one can aspire for. And in the entire Creation, it is the human embodiment that is specifically designed to gain this teaching of *Brahmajñāna*, which confers *mokṣa* – the highest

accomplishment in life. To get a human body is very difficult. Therefore, having been born as a human, it is the prime duty of every individual to take to *Brahmajijñāsā* until *aparokṣa Brahmajñāna* is gained. May all gain *Brahmajñāna* and attain *mokṣa*.

ॐ तत् सत् ।