

PROFOUND Q & A ON VEDANTA

By Swami Paramarthananda

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NOTE:

1. Swami Paramarthananda has not verified the transcription of talks. The transcriptions have been done with Swamiji's blessings by his disciple.
2. We will add one Question and Answer every week in this book.
3. The new Question and Answer added will also appear every week in the Face Book Group- Swami Dayananda Followers



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BY SWAMI PARAMARTHANANDA

Question No:1 What is the role of *Ishvara* in *Advaita*?

A: *Advaita* means 'One without a second' – '*ekameva advitiam*'. It is the declaration of the Ultimate Truth that Brahman exists at all times as the Existence/ Consciousness principle in all living beings. *Mahavakya vichara* helps a *sadhaka* to grasp this Truth and claim his Brahman status. This is the knowledge which liberates a *samsari* from his wrong notion of *samsaritva*.

Who reveals this spiritual knowledge? Brahman being totally actionless cannot reveal this knowledge. It is the *Sastras* which reveal this truth. All the *Sastras* have come out of the mouth of *Ishvara* himself and hence considered very sacred and valid at all times.

Brahman associated with the creative power called *Maya* is called *Ishvara*. He is the *srishti-sthiti-laya-karta*. All *Sastras* and Vedas are the words of *Ishvara* himself. All that is seen, observed and experienced are nothing but *Ishvara*. It is He who is bestowing the '*karma-phala*' to all the *jivas* and fulfilling the wishes of His devotees who worship with sincerity and devotion. It is He who controls and keeps the creation in proper harmony and order.

This being the glory of *Ishvara*, we all should be '*Ishvara-pradhana*' oriented and not '*Brahma-pradhana* oriented', since Brahman is actionless and cannot solve any of our worldly problems.

Worship of *Ishvara* with various forms is certainly very useful in enabling the worshipper to get *chitta-suddhi*. But, it cannot directly lead a person to '*moksha*'. *Moksha* is possible only when the wrong notion of the individual that he is a suffering *samsari* is removed through vedantic knowledge acquired through the study of *Sastras* and doing *Mahavakya-vichara*.

According to our *Sastras*, Brahman alone can be the one and only *Satya*. This means everything else other than Brahman has to be *mithya*. On this basis, *Ishvara* also has to be *mithya*, even though he is endowed with

the powers of Omniscience, Omnipotence and Omnipresence. *Isvara-anugraha* is very much required for a seeker even to resort to vedantic studies and doing vedantic *sravana, manana*, etc. Even as a seeker takes up Vedanta *vichara* for attaining his final goal of *nityananda*, he should simultaneously continue to worship *Isvara* also so that he succeeds in his attempts.

A *jnani* also recognizes the importance of *Isvara* and he continues to worship Him even after getting *jnana*. He knows that *Isvara* cannot be ignored at any stage. He considers his body/mind to be the very temple of *Isvara* – Refer Gita Chapter 18, verse 61 (*Isvara sarva bhutanam, hrid-dese Arjuna tisthati*). It is for the same reason that in the last *sloka* of Mandukya *karika*, Gaudapadachaya offers salute to the Supreme Reality.

Question No.2 Can I get uninterrupted *ananda* from sense objects?

A: Not at all. Sense objects being *anatma* do not have an iota of *ananda* in them. Where is the question of getting any *ananda* from them?

Upanisads declare that the only source of total *ananda* is one's *Atma svarupa*. Taittiriya Upanisad declares that nature of Atma is *purna ananda*. It is called *Atmananda*. It is called *purna* because it is complete in itself. *Purnatva* is a state where one is totally relaxed, there is no longer any distress or dissatisfaction, and there is a sense of total fulfillment within oneself. In other words, one is satisfied with himself as he is, since he has achieved *krita-kriyata*. His attitude towards the world is one of *upeksha* – a state where there is no *raga* or *dvesha*, no expectations from the world. On the other hand, he can help the world. This is what *purna* means.

'I', the Atma represent wholeness, the limitlessness that stands undivided between the object and oneself. *Atmananda* refers to this undivided wholeness, oneness. There can be nothing but *purna ananda* in what is whole and undivided.

Chandogya Upanisad defines what completeness is. It is called '*bhuma*'. The Upanisad says: "*yo vai bhuma tat sukham*". The words 'Absolute, Whole' can be used only when one sees nothing, hears

nothing, understands nothing except one's own Self. The moment something outside oneself is seen or heard, etc. incompleteness sets in.

All of us are in this state of *purna ananda* when we are in deep sleep. In this state, the entire *anatma* body/mind and the world get completely resolved and the sleeper rests in his own Atma *svarupa*. But, he is not aware of this state because of his basic ignorance called *mulavidya*.

When a *jnani* claims his Atma *svarupa*, his *purna ananda svarupa* also is automatically claimed. Being totally free from the effects of the *anatma* body/mind and the world, he always remains in the state of *purna ananda*, a state where remains ever self-fulfilled. That is why he says: "*Chidananda rupam, shivoham, shivoham*". It is this which is also termed as Pure Love, which is unconditional and is the inherent nature of a *jnani*. It is this universal love which a *jnani* spreads all around and looks upon every living being and every thing in creation with pure compassion and benevolence.

What is experienced by all of us is only *vishaya ananda* arising out of satisfaction of our desires through the sense objects in the world. It is totally subjective. When something pleasant is experienced, the mind becomes relatively peaceful and a reflection of a small fraction of original *ananda* takes place. It is this *ananda* that the individual experiences. *Vishaya* being *anatma* cannot have even a bit of *ananda*. It can only prompt the rise of happiness in the mind when it is liked by the mind. It can never be its source. Being something experienced from time to time, *vishaya ananda* has to be temporary. It just appears to be there for some time in the mind and then it disappears. Had his mind stayed calm and unperturbed throughout, he would have enjoyed a continuous flow of *ananda* in his mind.

All these problems will get resolved in one stroke, by recognizing the presence of Atma within oneself and claiming that to be his real nature. There is no other way.

Question No.3: Can improvement to *anatma* help one to attain the state of total happiness?

A: *Anatma* being limited in every aspect can never be improved 100%. Improvement to *anatma* mind is really not the goal of a

sadhaka. All that is required is to give up one's identity with the *anatma* body/mind and the world and claim his *nija svarupa* which is the *sakshi chaitanya* which is shining all the time within him. This is what a *jnani* does. He simply gives up all *dveshas* of *anatma* by the understanding that he is not the mind or the body; that he is always the *Chit svarupa*. For him, no duality exists. He sees himself as Atma existing in whatever he sees and experiences. Once he claims his Atma *svarupa*, even if the mind has any of the *doshas*, they cannot affect him, since in his vision, they do not exist at all. A *jnani* understands this and thus always abides in his higher self.

Question No:4: Upanishad talks of '*anupravesha*' of Brahman into the creation. Is there any such real *anupravesha* or is it only symbolic?

A: There can be no such 'entry' of Brahman into the world, as any entry would indicate some physical movement. In Brahman, there is no action whatever. It is totally *akarta*. The Upanishad uses the word '*anupravesha*' only to symbolically indicate that it pervades the body-mind complex, enlivens it and gets 'seemingly enclosed' within. The Consciousness principle being all-pervading pervades everywhere including the body and mind. In addition, it gets reflected in the body-mind complex and makes it sentient. Such a sentient body-mind complex is called *jivatma*. As many such enclosures are there, so many *jivatmas* are there, each experiences the world as the experiencer '*bhokta*'. Though *jivatma* experiences the world, the indwelling consciousness, called *pratyagatma* remains totally free from all that the *jivatma* does, since it is '*nirvikara*' in nature. There can be no action in an entity which is complete in all respects without any parts or divisions and which is all-pervading. This *pratyagatma* is the very same all-pervading Consciousness. It is this *pratyagatma* which is 'equated' to *Paratmatma* through *Mahavakyas*. It is just like understanding that the space within a created pot is the very same as the all-pervading space and the pot is merely a container. Similarly, the body/mind is merely a medium through which *Paramatma* appears as *jivatma*.

The consciousness pervading the entire body/mind complex is called *samanya chaitanya* and that which is recognized at a particular part of the body (like the sensation one gets when he is touched by another) is called *visesha chaitanya*.

Question No.5: Is the creation real?

According to the Upanisads, Brahman alone is *Satya* and everything else is *mithya*. The Upanishad reveals: *Brahma satyam, jagan mithya*. *Advaita* cannot admit any duality in any manner. According to Upanisads, the world is an appearance only. During *Adhyaropa* it appears to be real, but in the ultimate analysis, it is proved to be unreal. This view is supported by a *vakya* in Brihadaranyaka Upanisad V.2.5.19 which says: 'Ishvara by His magical power appears as this manifold universe.'

Ishvara with his *maya shakti* manifests the world, which is inappropriately termed as creation. Everything remains in *Ishvara* in its potential form and gets manifested as the world by the law of Karma. Though the world is seen to exist for our experience and use, its existence is only seeming, in the sense that its existence is lent to it by Brahman. It is just like a pot can have no existence of its own. It is clay that appears as pot. Similarly, it is Brahman which appears as the world in various names and forms. Thus, the world cannot have real existence, even though it is experienced all the time and also has utility value. Experience of an object can never prove its existence. We experience dream world in dreams, and it appears very much real in the dream state; but we very well know it totally disappears when we wake up.

It should be remembered that world is never created. Creation implies a beginning and an end. World is '*anadi*' and existed in its potential *avyakta* form before its manifestation as the *vyakta* world. At the time of *pralaya*, it again merges into *samashti Ishvara*. This cycle goes on and on. Matter can never be created. World is only an apparent 'transformation' called *vivarta* of Brahman.

Adi Shankaracharya explains: The so-called world is *mithya* because of the reason it is experienced; the knower/ experiencer 'I' alone is *Satya*.

‘I’ as *Atma* is everything within time and beyond time. ‘I’ lend ‘existence’ to everything and ‘I’ exist even when the external world is not known. Like the world, the body and Mind too is an observed object and something experienced and hence *mithya*.

Acharya Gaudapada expresses ‘ajata vada’. He completely negates the very world itself, its creation or existence. This theory is called ‘*ajata vada*’ which says that the perceived world is never born, i.e., never created. This theory completely rejects all causality of the world. He says Brahman which is unlimited and what is Immortal cannot become something limited or mortal at any time. This means that in reality, nothing is born and nothing dies. Nothing exists except Brahman, the One and only Reality. This Reality exists as the existing principle in all the objects outside and as the enlivening consciousness principle within the *jivatma*. It is only to the ignorant people that the world appears to be real.

In the other Upanishads except Mandukya Upanishad, ‘mithya vada’ Prakriya is emphasised. *Karana* is declared as *Satya* and *karya* as *mithya*. This is because *karya* has a name and form, whereas *karana* has none. Brahman with its *maya* power is the *karana* and *Satya* and the world is a *karya*, hence *mithya*. ‘I’ as the indwelling Consciousness is non-different from Brahman. ‘I’ as the indwelling Consciousness is the witness of all that happens outside including the three states of existence of the body/mind – *jagrat*, *svapna*, *sushupti* every day. ‘I’ remain as ‘I’ am without any change whatever as the witness Consciousness even though ‘I’ exist within the body/mind in all the three states.

Question No.6: In Ch. 4 *mantra* 9 of Svetasvara Upanisad it is stated that *Ishvara* is the creator, whereas Taittiriya Upanishad says everything came out of Brahman. Is there not an anomaly?

A: Vidyanarany Muni clarifies this doubt. He says *maya-sahita chaitanya* created the world. Brahman being totally actionless cannot create. It is

only *Ishvara* with the power of *maya* which manifests the creation, and *Ishvara* himself keeps *maya* under his control. Thus, he remains unaffected by *maya* at all times. Similarly, even he pervades the body/mind complex very intimately as the *sakshi chaitanya*, he remains totally unaffected by what happens to the body/mind complex.

Question No. 7: When *satya* can be only one which is Brahman/Atman, how is it we talk of *Vyavaharika* and *pratibhasika satyas*?

A: It is true there can be only one *Satya* which is Brahman. It is called *Paramarthika Satya*, the Absolute Reality which is unchanging at all times. It cannot be contradicted either by *vyavaharika satya* (empirical existence like that of the world which appears to be real) or *pratibhasika satya* (like seeing a snake on a rope, where the snake was never there at any point of time). On the other hand, both get contradicted by *paramarthika satya*. Both are lower orders of reality.

The body/mind complex and the world is only a manifestation of Brahman and is called *vyavaharika satya*, because world is available for our *vyavaharas* and is also useful to us. But, it has only this transactional reality. *Pratibhasika satya* is something which exists only in its appearance. For example, a person sees a rope in dim light and mistakes it for a snake. Here, a snake which appears to be there is the creation of the person seeing the rope and the person reacts to it in the form of fear of snake in his mind. While the rope belongs to *vyavaharika reality*, the mistaken snake is of *pratibhasika reality*.

Both *vyavaharika* and *pratibhasika satya* are only relative concepts and get falsified through *Brahma-jnana*. It is only a falsification and not destruction. For example, when a person sees a snake in a rope, the 'is-ness' of the snake is only a projection of the snake in the mind of the seer of the rope. Snake was never there at any time on the rope. It was only a false knowledge that was superimposed on the mind. This wrong knowledge gets 'sublated' or falsified by the right knowledge. The right knowledge is that the 'is-ness' of all objects belong only to Brahman and not to the individual objects. Thus, *jnana* sublates both *vyavaharika* and *pratibhasika satya* both of which are *mithya*.

That is why we say that the waker, his waking state and the world in which he is have no reality of their own and hence will have to be classified as *mithya*, just as the dream is *mithya* from the point of view of the waker.

Question No. 8: Why is the understanding of the *mithyatva* of the world necessary for vedantic knowledge?

A: An average person tends to consider the world as real since it is seen and experienced outside him, it does not depend on him for its existence and it has its effect on the individual transacting with it. But, the truth is that world being an *anatmakarya* is *mithya* and hence unreal, it entirely depends on consciousness for its existence and it can never affect consciousness in any way. Even from our mundane experience, we know how unreliable the world is. It is never stable, ever changing and ever unpredictable. No wise person would depend upon the world for continued peace and security. All the duality *dvaita* is the product of *moolavidya* or *maya*. *Dvaita* will get negated only when *moolavidya* gets negated. It should be understood that the plurality of the world is necessary only from the angle of *karmakanda* of the Vedas.

Knowing and understanding the *mithyatva* of the world is very important from the vedantic angle. The main Vedantic teaching itself is *Brahma satya, jagan mithya, jivo brahmaiva naaparah*. Negation of the reality of the world is a must for the seeker to move away from world dependence and then God dependence to Self dependence. *Jagan mithyatva* has to be understood first. The seeker of vedantic knowledge should understand that world being *anatma, mithya* and a *karya* of *Isvara* is merely names and forms without any substance, is *anitya, a-rasa* and *asatya*.

World by itself is not the problem. It is the dependence on the world that creates all the problems. It is something like a person depending on a chair made of cardboard to sit on. The entire *samsaritva* of the individual arises on account of the wrong beliefs that his body/mind is real and the world also is real and can be depended upon for his comforts. All these wrong beliefs arise due to ignorance of one's real inner nature. Only when this ignorance is eliminated by the right

knowledge, will the person be free from *samsara*.

Though it is not possible to give up these attachments in one stroke, *shastras* have provided various *sadhanas*, *prakriyas* to be followed by the seeker. Through the exercise of his *viveka* and *vairagya*, the seeker should gradually move away from the grip of the body/mind and world attachment. Then alone, any vedantic *sravana* and *manana* which he does will have the desired impact.

It should be understood that a body/mind, the world, the *sastras*, the Guru, his teachings, though all these are *mithya* only, they are very much required for getting *Atma-jnana*.

Q9: In Taittiriya Upanisad *karana Brahma* is termed *asat*, whereas in all other places, it is referred to as *Sat*. As per general rule, *karana* alone is *sat*. Is there not a contradiction?

A: It is true that the Upanishad refers to Brahman as *asat*. What the Upanishad wants to convey is that the world remained in Brahman in its potential form only and not available for transaction just as butter remains in potential form in the milk and is available for use only when it is extracted. So, till it is extracted, it is as good as *asat*. We can say the butter 'is' only when it gets manifested as such when it is extracted from milk through a process. In the same way, we can say the world 'is' only when it is available for transaction after its manifestation. *Asat* in the *Rig Mantra* means world is in *avyakta* in *karana-rupa* Brahman. In the beginning, before the manifestation of the world, everything was in a state of 'non-existence'. This kind of 'non-existence' is referred to as *asat*.

Question No. 10: A person in *sushupti-avastha* resolves into his own *svarupa*. Does he become *asat* in that state?

A: The right understanding should be that one resolves into *karana Brahman* which is *Isvara* that manifests the world. One indeed remains *sat*, and does not become *asat*, during *sushupti-avastha*, due to recollection on waking up thus: "I slept happily" or "I did not know

anything". Such re-collection is possible only when there is a collection of that experience by an existent entity during *sushupti-avastha*.

Question No.11: What is *Sakshi-chaitanyam*?

A: The indwelling Consciousness principle pervading the body/mind is called *Sakshi-chaitanyam* or Atma. This alone is responsible for the *chit-pratibimba* in the mind by its mere presence. It is there within the mind as the witness of all that happens in the mind and remains unaffected by what happens in the mind. Whilst the mind knows every object sequentially one after another, *Sakshi -chaitanyam* reveals everything together without requiring a sequential process. It is just like the sunlight illumining all objects on which the light falls together and not one by one.

Mantra 6.11 of Svetasvatara Upanishad says that this *Chaitanyam*, the Atma is hidden in all beings, in the sense that it is not available for perception, but due to whose presence, perception itself is made possible. *Chaitanyam* presides over all actions and blesses all activities.

Though *Sakshi-chaitanyam* appears in each body as a separate entity, it does not mean there are that many *chaitanyams*. *Chaitanyam* is only one and it merely appears enclosed in individual bodies.

Question No.12: How does one separate consciousness from the body/mind?

A: This calls for a clear understanding of '*atma-anatma-viveka*'. *Anatma* consists of the entire world with its contents and the body/mind. As can be seen from the name itself, its characteristics are totally opposed to those of Atma. The *anatma* has five features which are *drisyatvam*, *bodhyatvam*, *sagunathvam*, *sa-vikaratvam* and *agamapayitvam*. *Anatma* is a product of *panchabhutas* and so can be seen and experienced, have physical features and attributes, of changing nature and subject to arrival and departure.

The seeker of vedantic truth has to understand these limitations of

anatma and learn that they can never be a source of permanent happiness which is his goal. He should therefore move away intellectually from the attachment to all forms of *anatma*. He should contemplate on the truth: "I am not the physical body/mind and even if the body disappears, I will continue to exist. I should understand that consciousness does not belong to the mind, but only manifests in the mind." Such an intellectual thought process of distancing oneself from the *anatma* is called *atma-anatma-viveka*. This *viveka* should be contemplated upon deeply in the mind and should get ingrained in it. I should learn that the recognition of the consciousness, the *Sakshi-chaitanyam* is only a new understanding of the already existing consciousness in the mind.

This consciousness, the Atma is there behind my very existence, all my thoughts and actions and in all the three periods of my existence. It continues to exist even after the body disappears.

The importance of the mind cannot be ignored. It is through the *mithya* mind alone that the vedantic wisdom has to be acquired and assimilated. Though for an *ajnani* mind creates bondage, for a *jnani* it helps to acquire the Self knowledge.

Q13: The *Sakshi chaitanyam* (Witness consciousness) being very close to the body/mind, will it not get affected by the *doshas* (defects) of the mind?

A: No. *Sakshi chaitanyam* is *niravayava*, *nirvikara*, *nirguna* (partless, changeless and devoid of qualities). These are the very characteristics of *Sakshi chaitanyam*. It always remains unaffected by any of the impurities of the mind, and remains ever pure. Mere pervasion cannot affect its status of purity, just as sunlight does not get affected by the impurities in the objects which it illumines. The thoughts that arise in the mind may be pure or impure, but they do not affect *Sakshi chaitanyam*.

Question No.14: Will the knowledge of *Sakshi chaitanyam* (Witness consciousness) release the seeker from *samsara* and enable him to

attain *moksha*?

A: The seeker should not only know the presence of *Sakshi chaitanyam* within his body/mind, but also he should go a step further and proclaim that 'He' himself is that *Sakshi chaitanyam*. This is the most important step which every seeker has to take. Merely knowing that there is *chaitanyam* within him will not help. In fact, he already knows this fact and the proof is that he is sentient.

For making this claim, he needs to give up his belief that he exists as the body/mind. This belief is deeply imbedded in his mind and had become reinforced through his own sense of *ahankara* (I) and *mamakara* (mine). The seeker should know that his real status is not his body/mind, but the indwelling consciousness. Simultaneously, he should know the world is *mithya*, is *aneka*, *anitya*, *asatya* and *a-sara* and hence should dismiss it as well. He should have the firm understanding that the problems of his body/mind belong to the body/mind alone and do not affect him, the Atma.

This knowledge can be attained by him only through *Mahavakya vichara* in the form of *tvam-pada-vichara* and *tat-pada-vichara*. *Tvam-pada-vichara* is based on *anubhava pramana* (one's experience in this world) and the *tat-pada-vichara* is based on *Sastra pramana*. When the seeker says 'I am aware of the mind', he should understand that the 'I' he is referring to is the 'knower I', the Atma 'I' and not the physical I. This 'subject I' is Atma. In this Atma 'I', there is no *ahankara* or *mamakara*. Thus, there is a complete detachment from the *anatma* body/mind and the *anatma* I. Such a contemplation requires constant *niddhidyasanam* on these truths.

Question No.15: Please explain what the 'I' thought is?

Answer: The presence of *sakshi chaitanyam* (consciousness) and its reflection in the mind as *pratibimba chaitanyam* (reflected consciousness) makes the 'I' thought to arise in one's mind. This is called '*aham-vritti*' (I thought). An insentient entity can never say 'I am'. This *vritti* (thought) is always there when the mind is available in *jagrat* (waking) and *svapna* (dream) *avasthas* (states). No special

effort is required to say 'I am' except that one has to be in a conscious state. Though the entire process is enabled by the *sakshi chaitanyam*, the thought itself belongs to the mind and not to the *sakshi*. '*Aham-vritti*' is required by me to claim and declare '*aham Brahmasmi*'.

Whenever we experience anything, a 3-fold experience takes place. i.e. seeing the object, knowledge of the object and the knower me. This means that I know something and also I know that I know. For both of these, the *sakshi chaitanyam* is the observer. It is none other than the real 'I', that is me the Atma.

The observed world itself arises in the mind in the form of a thought only. This is called '*idam-vritti*' (this-thought). It is clear that the '*idam-vritti*' is the object for the observer 'I'.

Sakshi alone will be left out when both *aham-vritti* and *idam-vritti* are gone. There will be no 'observer I' or 'experiencer I' called the ego 'I'. Pure 'I' alone remains since I am neither a *drasta* (subject) or *dravyam* (object). Pure *Chaitanyam* (consciousness) cannot be an observer by itself.

It is due to ignorance that I attribute the property of the mind to *Sakshi chaitanyam* making me to feel I am located somewhere doing something. When the mind is disturbed, I think I am disturbed. To overcome this problem, one has to disassociate himself from the ego 'I'. My intrinsic nature is *sakshi chaitanyam* and I am a mere witness of what happens around me. I am ever-present in all the three states of existence.

Question No.16: Can it be said *jivatma* is a part of *Paramatma* and we are all limbs of *Paramatma*?

Answer: No. This goes against the very teaching of the Upanishads. The intrinsic nature of both *jivatma* and *Paramatma* is the same, which is Brahman. This can be understood from the 'pot' example. Space within a pot called pot-space cannot be different from total space. Space has no parts at all, it is total in nature and so is indivisible. Merely seeing space in a container does not make it as a separate pot-space different from the total space. The total space undergoes no

change whatever though space is seen within the pot also. The same analogy applies to *jivatma* and *Paramatma*. Once the adjuncts of both are ignored, it will be seen that both are identical in all respects. This is so even though the all-pervading Consciousness appears to be enclosed in individual bodies. *Jivatma* and *Paramatma* are just two different names on different stand points.

Question No.17: How can we recognise Consciousness?

A: It is our Consciousness that becomes varieties of experience when associated with different thoughts. We have to understand how a thought arise in the mind. When we look at an object, our sense organs come in contact with it and the mind registers the presence of the object. This is called *vishayakara-vritti* (object-thought). In essence, it is nothing but the consciousness + object which results in the object experience. When one says 'I am conscious of an object', it means that his consciousness has enveloped the object and makes it known to the mind. The consciousness is the sentient principle which makes the inert object to be known. The objects observed and experienced may go on changing, but the consciousness itself which illumines the object in the mind does not change at all. Even if all objects disappear and nothing is left, yet consciousness will continue to be, as it is eternal, all-pervading and self-revealing. It is like a permanent light which illumines everything all around. Even if nothing is there to be illumined, the light will continue to shine.

In between two changing thoughts, one can recognize his own consciousness, which is nothing but his own real inner nature.

Question No.18: Are Brahman and *Ishvara* identical?

A: Both words are used rather loosely in different contexts. They have to be understood depending upon the context. Very often, Brahman is referred to as *Ishvara*. They are different from each other. Brahman is always understood as the Ultimate Reality, the only *Satyam*. Nothing exists other than Brahman. So, it is *advitiam* (non-dual). It is also *nirguna* (not having a particular disposition), though the 'is-ness' of the

objects is attributed to it as *Sat* principle.

Brahman associated with *Maya* is called *Ishvara*. *Ishvara* borrows existence from Brahman and hence falls under *mithya* category. *Ishvara* is the mix of macro reflected-consciousness and macro reflecting-medium. It has also the three *gunas* (dispositions), its *sattva guna* being very predominant. It does have a shade of *rajas* and *tamas*. Brahman and *Ishvara* are non-separable. They always exist together. While Brahman is *akarta*, totally actionless, entire *karya* of *srishti* (manifestation), *sthiti* (sustenance) and *laya* (unmanifestation) is done by *Ishvara*. When Upanisads refer to Brahman as the *srishti karta*, it refers to *Ishvara*, who is also known as *Saguna Brahman*.

Though *Ishvara* is associated with *Maya*, *Maya* can never exercise control over *Ishvara*. It is *Ishvara* which keeps *mayasakti* under his control. Understanding *Ishvara* is important for understanding Brahman. As the controller of the entire creation, he keeps everything in proper synchronization and order. That is why he is called *Paramatma*. If the appendage *param* is dropped from this name, He will be none other than *nirguna* Brahman.

Question No.19 : Please explain the methodology of *adhyaropa* and *apavada*.

A: *Adyaropa* means superimposition and *apavada* means negation of that superimposition. This methodology is employed in Vedanta to establish a particular truth. Both are complementary in nature; one is incomplete without the other. This methodology may appear to be a contradiction and so has to be properly understood.

This is applied particularly with reference to creation. In the beginning, Upanishads say creation came out of Brahman; later on this idea is dismissed and the conclusion drawn is that the world is not created at all and it is just as 'real' as a world seen in a dream.

Similarly, while talking about *moksha*, initially the student is told he should seek the grace of *Ishvara* for his freedom from worldly problems. Later on, this entire idea is dismissed and the student is told that the world by itself is not a cause of his sorrow; it is his attitude towards the

world in terms of his bondage with it that is the real cause. Through *apavada*, he is advised to change his attitude and understand that the world itself is *mithya* and he himself is the *adhishtanam* of the world in view of his Brahman status.

For initial understanding of this methodology, example of rope/snake is given. When a person sees a rope in a dim light, he mistakes it for a snake. The perception of so-called snake is a superimposition *adhyaropa* on the rope. When he sees the same rope in bright light, the snake is no longer there. So, the snake-knowledge gets negated by the right knowledge of rope. This negation of *adhyaropa* is called *apavada*. Similarly, due to ignorance, all the afflictions of the body/mind are foisted on *Sakshi chaitanyam*, the Atma. This is also a case of *adhyaropa* on Atma. By vedantic knowledge, this wrong knowledge gets negated. This negation is *apavada*.

Question No. 20 : In Verse 5 of Chapter 6 of Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says the world exists in Him and He exists in the world. Is there not a contradiction here?

Answer: The idea conveyed is that Brahman alone is really existent as *ekam* (oneness) and everything else is there on borrowed existence. Thus, the distinction between the *srishti karta* (cause of creation) and *srishti* (creation) is eliminated. Even though observed *jivas* and the world are there, everything is Brahman alone appearing in different names and forms.

Question No.21 : Does establishing *jagat-mithyatvam* precede *Brahma satyam*?

Answer: Yes. It is crucial to establish the *mithyatva* of the *jagat* first. Self knowledge can be effective only when this is established firmly in the mind. Simultaneously, the *mithyatvam* of *prarabdha* also has to be understood. Avoidance of the world or running away from it will not establish *jagat -mithyatva*. Internally, the mind should be fully convinced that entire *jagat* is *a-sara* and deserves to be negated. The Upanishads declare that the world is nothing but a bundle of names and

forms. The proof of the negation of the world will be when the seeker says: "Let anything happen to me or in the world concerning me, I am not affected in the least."

Question No.22 : Where is ignorance (*avidya*) located?

Answer: Ignorance cannot exist independently, it should have a locus. The locus is *Atma*, the *sakshi chaitanyam*. The three *avastas* – *jagrat*, *svapna* and *sushupti* rest on *avidya*. This *avidya* is also called *moolavidya* or *maya* which creates the fundamental ignorance of one's real inner-nature through its veiling power called *avarana sakti*. It is not ignorance of the objects of the material world, it is the spiritual ignorance which one suffers right from his birth. *Atma* and *moolavidya/Maya* exist together. *Moolavidya* has no *sat*, *chit* or *ananda* of its own. It is due to this power that entire *srishti* which is there in potential form in Brahman gets manifested. So, Brahman is the *ashraya* (locus).

Question No.23 : What is the nature of *moolavidya*?

A: *Moolavidya* or *maya* is the manifestor of the entire universe. The entire world of *anatma* is a product of this alone. It wields its power of *avarana* by which it conceals the truth about Brahman and makes the *jiva* to believe that the world is real through its *vikshepa-sakti*. The real problem is not *vikshepa-sakti* but *avarana-sakti*. It is the *avarana-sakti* which creates *Atma-ajnanam* for the individual. It is the cause of *mithya-jnanam* which makes the individual to believe that *anatma* really exists and is experienced. This *mithya-jnanam* alone leads to *prapancha-darsanam* and the consequent *samsara*. Shankaracharya calls even *karma* as *ajnanam* as it binds the *karta*.

Note that *maya* cannot really cover the reality, Brahman, like a cloud can never cover the sun. It only covers our knowing ability to know Brahman and thus acts as an obstruction to Brahman-Knowledge. As long as this ignorance lasts, the world will appear to be real to us and we will be feeling the *samsaritva* all the time. It is through vedantic study and *Mahavakya-vichara* that one can transcend *moolavidya*.

In all the three states of existence, this ignorance is located in the consciousness in the mind. When one says 'I am ignorant' it means the Atma 'I' in him is the locus of his ignorance. *Anatma* mind itself cannot be its locus since it itself is a product of ignorance. *Jagrat prapancha* is created by *moolavidya* located in Me, the *Sakshi*. In other words, 'I' am the creator of *jagrat prapancha* and *swapna prapancha* through *moolavidya*. Neither of them have an existence of their own, as both are *mithya*.

When the seeker gets '*aham Brahmasmi*' wisdom, this ignorance gets automatically wiped out. Even though Atma and the mind with ignorance are very close to each other, Atma being actionless cannot remove the ignorance. It has to be removed only through *Sastra-vichara* and obtaining *Brahma-jnanam*.

Question No.24 : What is the status of *mulavidya*? Does it come under 'existing category' or 'non-existing' category?

Answer: According to Vedanta, it is *bhava-abhava-vilakshanam* – does not fall under existing category or non-existing category. It is there till it is removed by *jnanam*.

Question No.25 : Is *jiva* created by Brahman?

Answer: No. Brahman does not and cannot create anything. All that is seen as creation is a manifestation of *maya-sahita Ishvara*. He also creates only the body/mind of the *jiva*. *Jiva* is *anadi*. If one says: 'I am born', it means only his body/mind is born. Due to ignorance, the creation of the body/mind is superimposed on *jiva*. At the time of death, body perishes, not the *jiva*.

Question No.26: Does *Ishvara* (Lord) create this world?

Answer: *Ishvara* (Lord) by himself cannot create. He is only a *samanya karanam* (general cause) for the creation, The *visesha karanam* (special cause) is a set of *karmas* (good deeds and bad deeds) of the

jiva (embodied self). A world is required for the *jivas* (embodied self) to exist and go through their *karmas* (fructification of good deeds and bad deeds). Thus, *jiva* (embodied self) also supports *Isvara* (Lord) for the evolution of the creation. Both *jiva* (embodied self) and *Isvara* (Lord) are *anadi* (timeless). There is no birth for *jiva* (embodied self). Only the bodies of *jiva* (embodied self) are born.

Question No.27: How is it that the *Sastras* (Scriptures) treat *jagrat* (waking world) and *svapna prapanchas* (dream world) on the same footing, when the *jagrat prapancha* (waking world) is continuously experienced and the *svapna prapancha* (dream world) is experienced only in dream?

Answer: In the view of the *Sastras* (Scriptures), both are very similar in nature. Just as everything appears real in *jagrat* (waking) state, the *svapna* (dream) world and the things experienced in that state are equally real, but only in dream state. On waking up, everything disappears. The same logic applies to *jagrat* (waking) world also. *Jagrat* (waking) also is just like a long dream since it is also the projection in the mind. In *sushupti* (deep sleep), it is kept in a potential form. *Jagrat* (waking world) is *Isvara's* (Lord's) projection in the mind and *svapna* (dream world) is *jiva's* (embodied self's) projection.

Question No. 28: Does *jiva* (embodied self) have a free-will or is he fully subject to *Isvara's* (Lord's) will?

Answer: Yes. All of us are endowed with complete free will to think and act and earn *punya* (fruits of proper action) or *papa* (fruits of improper action) as the case may be. Beyond that, our free-will does not extend. Once actions are performed, we get bound by their results. *Isvara* (Lord) is the *karma-phala-data* (Giver of fruits of action) and the results of action are given out by him without any kind of partiality.

Question No.29: Atma is *chaitanya svarupa* (whose nature is consciousness). How can it be *asraya* (locus) for ignorance?

Answer: Yes, they can. *Paramarthika satya* (absolute reality) is the *asraya* (locus) for the *jagat* (world). It is just like co-existence of an imaginary snake on a rope or mirage water on a hot desert. Such co-

existence is the cause of ignorance.

Question No.30: *Sastras* say *nityananda* cannot be experienced; it is something to be understood and claimed. Please explain.

Answer: *Sastras* talk of two types of *ananda* in the Upanishads. One is the experiential *ananda*, known as *vishayananda* which is experienced in the mind. Taittiriya Upanishad talks of this *ananda* which is graded starting from *manushya ananda* right upto *brahmananda*. These do not come under the *nityananda* category. *Nityananda* is that *purna ananda* which is the very *svarupa* of Brahman/Atma. It is the very source from which all experiential *ananda* flows out. The body/mind is pervaded by the all-pervading Consciousness which is of nature of this *purna ananda*. When a person's mind is relatively calm and peaceful, it is this *ananda* reflected in the mind which is recognized as the sense of happiness which the person enjoys. Its duration will be limited to the extent that the mind is calm and peaceful and will disappear when the mind returns to its usual state of turmoil.

We have to understand that the *purnatva*, being the Whole at all times is referred to as *nityananda*. When we claim the status of being the very *atma svarupa*, our being the Whole, the *purna vastu* is also claimed.

Question No.31: You say as Brahman, I am *ananda svarupa* (nature of fullness, happiness). But, in reality this does not seem to be so. Can you please clarify?

Answer: There can be no doubt whatever that the *nija svarupa* (true nature) of each of us is Brahman and that is pure *ananda* (fullness, happiness). Veda is the *pramana* (source of knowledge) for this and so cannot be disputed.

It is true as '*jivas*' (embodied self) we experience sorrow. This means sorrow is an object of our experience. As per the general rule, object has always to be different from the subject. So, I have to be different from sorrow which means I have to be happy. This is what exactly *Sruti* (Scripture) reveals. It says even while experiencing sorrow, my intrinsic nature of pure *ananda* (fullness, happiness) does not change at all. This *ananda* (happiness) is not like *vishaya ananda* (happiness born of sense

objects) which can be experienced and understood. *Nija ananda* (fullness, happiness which is one's true nature) is beyond the realm of experience, it is the very nature itself like one see in a state of deep sleep where there is no trace of any sorrow. This truth has to be cognitively understood through *mahavakya vichara* (study of Great equation mentioned in the Upanisads) and doing *nididhyasanam* (contemplation). This knowledge can get reinforced if the seeker practices to distance himself from his *deha-atma-buddhi* (considering body as I).

Question No.32: Does a *jnani* (wise person) *have vishaya-iccha* (desire for objects) at all? Does he also get *vishaya-ananda* (happiness from sense objects)?

Answer: In Bhagavad Gita Chapter 12, Lord Krishna describes *jnani-lakshana* (characteristics of a wise person). Though a *jnani* (wise person) rests in his *atmananda* (fullness which is his original nature) all the time, yet he may be active in this transactional world for the sake of *loka sangraha* (benefit of the society). So, he has may be involved in *loka-vyavahara* (transactions in the world). He still has his *prarabda* (result of virtuous and vicious action done in earlier births to be exhausted in this birth) to be exhausted and therefore has to continue in the society. He will no doubt get *vishaya-ananda* (happiness from sense objects) also like any of us; but he knows its limitations and just goes through the same without attaching any importance to it. He does not depend upon the relationship between the physical body, the sense organs or sense objects for his well-being. He knows he is self-existent and does not depend upon anything external for his *ananda* (happiness) since he has realized (understood) that he himself is *purnananda svarupa* (nature of fullness and happiness). There may be some *janis* (wise persons) who isolate themselves completely from the society and prefer to be left alone. Such cases are rare.

Question No.33: Does *maya* exist?

Answer: The literal meaning of the word is 'magic' or trick. In vedantic parlance, it means *avidya* or ignorance. *Maya* is a veil which covers the *Atma svarupa* (one's true nature) leading to *ajnanam* (ignorance) in the mind of the *jiva* (embodied self). It acts like a veil simply shutting out the *Atma-svarupa* (one's true nature) within and

makes the *jiva* (embodied self) an *ajnani* (ignorant person). It is something like a piece of cloth hung between you and me and you cannot see me anymore, though I am there right in front of you. Likewise, *Atma* (consciousness) is very close to the *jiva* in his body/mind, closer than anything else, yet hidden from the *jiva*. Really speaking, *maya* cannot really cover the *Atma* since *Atma* is all-pervading *chaitanyam* (consciousness). But, it does create *moolavidya* (fundamental ignorance) in the mind which prevents the mind from knowing *Atma*.

Maya is so powerful that it can delude even the *jnanis* (wise persons). It is that which creates *ahankara* (I sense) in the mind of the *jiva*. *Karma* (*punya-papa*) also is an integral part of *maya* and is *anadi* (beginning less) like *maya* and *jiva*.

The entire creation is a projection of *maya*. Being *Isvara's upadhi*, it derives the power to project. It is so powerful that it makes one to believe that the world really exists. But, it can be transcended and won over by *Atma jnanam*.

Maya is *anadi*, it has no beginning, but does have an end with the rise of vedantic wisdom. It is just like disappearance of the dream world when the dreamer wakes up. We cannot say whether *maya* exists or does not. It is not separate or non-separate from Brahman. It is a great wonder and cannot be categorically explained. It is neither *sat* or *a-sat*, which means it is *mithya* and *jada* (insensient). That is why it is *anirvachaniya* (cannot be clearly explained). But, for all practical purposes, we have to admit that it does exist, since we all experience this world which is a product of *maya*. But, with Brahman knowledge, it ceases to exist. Though it exists along with Brahman, it cannot be counted as 'existing', since it is a *karya* (effect) of Brahman. It is this which gives Brahman its *karanam* (causal) status.

Ajnanam gets eliminated by *jnana*, but *maya* does not go away. *Maya* being *mithya* cannot be made non-existent. Our aim also is not the elimination of *maya*, but understanding it to be *mithya*. This is called *bhada* and is accomplished through *Atma jnanam*.

Maya is *trigunatmika*. It has the three qualities of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. As products of *maya*, the *jivas* also have these three qualities. All names and forms which are ever changing are *maya*.

It is *mohatmaka* causing delusion and confusion in the mind. It makes one to believe that world and its contents all exist, when they do not 'exist' from the vedantic vision.

Isvara as a 'person' with name and attributes also falls under *maya* category; but the *nirguna Isvara*, the *chaitanyam* is *Satyam*.

Question No.34: Does *maya* originate from Brahman?

Answer: No. Brahman being *akarta* (action-less) cannot produce anything. *Maya* is also not super-imposed on Brahman. *Maya* is *anadi* (beginning-less) and is there in Brahman all the time. But, it is not a part or property or attribute of Brahman, since Brahman is attribute-less and without any parts.

Question No.35: How does *maya* appear in the three states of existence?

Answer: In waking state, it is there as the person's ignorance of Brahman. In dream state, it is the material cause of the entire dream world and its objects; in the deep sleep, it appears as the *smriti* (memory), which enables a person to say that he slept well.

Question No.36: Is it possible for us to know *maya*?

A: For the act of knowing, the knower and the object known have to be separate. So, if we want to know *maya*, it has to be separate from us. But, we, as ignorant *jivas*, are identical with *maya*. So, we cannot know *maya*. But, it can be negated by us through vedantic knowledge.

Question No.37: Is there any such thing as creation?

A: Nothing can ever be created. Matter cannot be created. But, the Upanishads say that *srishti* (creation) came out of Brahman. Being *akarta* (non-doer), Brahman cannot create and world cannot come out by itself. But, a world is seen and experienced. How is this explained? The explanation is the very 'existence' of world is the existence of Brahman alone. That is what Lord Krishna says in Gita '*aham visrjami*' –

'I' manifest as the creation. Brahman is both the *upadana* (material cause) and *nimitta karanam* (intelligent-cause). Everything exists in Him and everything came out of Him. He is there in various *nama rupas* (names and forms). Logically, if a pot is analyzed, clay alone is there in the shape of a pot. So, the existence of pot gets dismissed. Similarly, clay itself is various molecules put together. So, clay also gets dismissed. In this manner, everything in the world gets dismissed and ultimately what is left is the creator Brahman. So, the creation in essence is Brahman only.

It always exists either in unmanifest or manifest form as the world. Whatever is seen and observed is only a manifestation. *Maya* and *maya-karya* (effect of Maya) both belong to *vyavaharika satta* (empirical reality) and hold good only at the *vyavaharika* (empirical) level. They do not have absolute reality. That is why we say everything seen and experienced including our body/mind are nothing but Brahman only with different names and forms. Therefore, in the view of an *uttama adhikari* (highly qualified person), there is no creation at all.

Question No.38: What is the locus of *ajnana* (self-ignorance) ?

A: 'I' the *Atma* is its locus. 'I' alone project all the three *prapanchas* (waking world, dream world and deep sleep world) and enter into them. All the worlds exist in Me, the *Atma*.

Question No.39: Is the Consciousness associated with the three states of existence or dissociated?

Answer: Consciousness by its intrinsic nature is Absolute. When it pervades the three states of existence (waking, dream and deep sleep), it is not as if it physically separates itself and joins them. Being all-pervading, it exists in them also. Without its presence, the states cannot exist at all.

In order to understand what the all-pervading Consciousness is, the three states of existence have to be mentally dismissed as *mithya*. What is left out will be *Turiyam*, the *Atma I*, the Consciousness. This is

an intellectual exercise one has to undertake to understand it. This has to take place in waking state only. In the statement 'I am a waker', when we negate the waker as being *mithya*, what is left is the Consciousness.

Question No.40: What type of ignorance is there in the three states of existence?

Answer: In *jagrat* (waking state), it is in the form of *ahankara* (I notion); in dream, it is in the form of identification with the dream body and dream world and in deep sleep, it is in the form of just ignorance. We can call it spiritual ignorance. No misconceptions are possible in deep sleep. That is why the person who slept well says he was happy in sleep.

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