

Prelude

In Sanskrit, the word '**Manisha**' means conclusive wisdom or determinate knowledge. Such knowledge does not arise merely due to some faith or based on dogmatic principles or emotional attachments but is born out of intellectual discrimination. It is resolute and completely free of any doubt.

The word '**Panchakam**' refers to that which is contained in five. So Adi Sankara's '**Manisha Panchakam**' refers to the conclusive wisdom or determinate knowledge asserted in five verses. What is Sankara's assertion as his determinate knowledge? What is such conclusive wisdom?

'The Atman, the immutable energy present within me and in every life is none other than the Paramaatman, the pervasive, omnipresent energy, embedded as a thread within all lives and seated as the witness to everything. Whoever has this knowledge and remains steadfast in that wisdom of non-duality, he alone, irrespective of his stature in the world due to the caste, creed or societal classifications, is the real preceptor and Guru, worthy of worship even by the gods.'

This is the conclusive wisdom of Adi Sankara. This wisdom and the poignant rationale for its assertion are the core of Manisha Panchakam. Why did Sankara compose these verses? What were the imperatives and the context? Why is '**Manisha Panchakam**' important and what does it offer to humanity? These are the questions to which we seek answers through this study of Manisha Panchakam and the treasure of wisdom from the Upanisads, contained in it.

The Upanisads, that form part of the Vedanta, the end of Vedas, declare that the Self alone is real. The Upanisads are the science of Self or known as Atma-vidya. As it is said in the Taitriyopanisad, '**Satyam Gyaanam Anandam Brahma**]', the Self is Sat, the ultimate-noumenon; it is Chit, the infinite-consciousness and it is Ananda or the absolute-bliss.

The Upanisads are the spontaneous revelation of truths, often expressed through paradoxes. Imparted by the Seers, these are meant for the students of Self-Inquiry, with sincere aspirations and appropriate maturity for the receipt of and the contemplation on such knowledge. The contents of the Upanisads are not systemized text of philosophy for learning through self-study. Only guided by a competent teacher, such knowledge and method of contemplation can be acquired, to pursue the

Self-Inquiry, and ultimately towards the perfection and absolute bliss. Of all life-forms, only human beings are capable of aspiring for, and attaining such status.

This is said in Hitopadesham as:

आहार-निद्रा-भय-मैथुनानि सामान्यमेतत् पशुभिर्नराणाम् । ।
ज्ञानं नराणामधिको विशेषो ज्ञानेन हीनाः पशुभिः समानाः ॥

**āhāra-nidrā-bhaya-maithunāni sāmānyametāt
paśubhirnarāṇām| |**

**jñānaṁ narāṇāmadhiko viśeṣo jñānena hīnāḥ paśubhiḥ
samānāḥ ||**

First Line:

aahaara = food; nithraa = sleep; bhayam = fear; maithunani = passion; saamaanya me = such general traits; thath = exist; pashubhir naraanaam = common to both animals and human-beings;

Second Line:

gyaanam naraanaam = The knowledge of human-beings; athiko = is much higher; vishesho = superior; gyaanena = such intellectual abilities; heena: = if wasted (without proper application); pasubhisamanaa: = human-beings are no different to the animals.

Both animals and humans are subjected to common feelings such as hunger, sleep, fear and passion and equipped with the associated faculties in their physical and intellectual make-up; yet only the human-beings are capable of using these faculties to discriminate and seek the higher pursuit of Self-realization. If such differential advantage for higher-goal is unused in one's life, then the endowed faculties are simply wasted and the human-life is similar to that of an animal. This is the essential import of this verse.

The pursuit of Self-realization ('Atma-vidya') is the highest goal for human-beings. The word 'gyanna' in Sanskrit, denotes knowledge gained through Atma-vidya. This is gnosis or the esoteric knowledge of the Self. All other external knowledge is known as 'vigyanam'. This is said in the epic 'Amarakosa' - 'ramaaseshadheer gyaanam anyathra vigyaanam'

The preceptor and guide who can take us towards the gyaanam is the Guru. With such wisdom, those who undertake the commitment to lead others by their exemplary conduct in the world, with steadfast devotion and compliance befitting their chosen role are known as the 'Acharyas'.

The term 'aacharam' means the principles, values and the moral conducts that are prescribed in the Vedas and 'Acharya' is the one who by his words, thoughts and deeds remain true to the 'aacharam' and lead-by-example the followers and the society in general. The Acharyas need to ensure stern restraints and untiring efforts to ensure that their words, thoughts and deeds always remain truthful to the chosen path. They actively seek and utilize opportunities for imparting appropriate knowledge to their disciples and to the world at large.

Manisha Panchakam is the fruit of such an opportunity in Adi Sankara's life. The five verses of Manisha Panchakam is the culmination of Acharya's compassion to impart the profound wisdom, triggered by an event in his life.

Once, Adi Sankara was walking along the narrow streets of Varanasi, a holy city in Northern India, along with his disciples, after completing the ritual bath in the holy river Ganges. The entourage was confronted by a man, clad in dirty clothes, of unkempt appearance and holding the leash of his pet dogs. On seeing him coming towards them, the disciples of Sankara hasten to ask the Stranger to quickly move away from the path. Their tone was scornful and the haste imminent.

Those were the days when discrimination due to birth in the name of caste-system was prevalent; treating some people as untouchables was the curse dividing the Indian society. Therefore such open discrimination was not uncommon on the streets of India among those who were not truly learned. As the disciples yelled at the Stranger, he looked at Adi Sankara as the leader of the entourage and so holding him responsible for the acts of the disciples, took him to task by asking thus:

'O, the Best amongst the Seers! What is that you want to move away? Is it this physical body, which is made-up of food and only insentient as that of yours? As the body is just a shell, void of any intelligence, how can it heed to your order? Perhaps, you are asking the indwelling intelligence to move away! Even so, is it not the same Atman that is within you and which is also pervading as an embedded thread among everything? How can the ever existing Atman separate? Or if you are deluded that the Atman enshrined in lowly bodies too become lowly, tell me, what difference is

there to the Sun, the jewel of the Sky, whether its reflection falls on the waters of the holy river Ganges or on the dirty cesspool? What difference is there in the space, whether it is contained in a golden pot or in an earthen-ware? As a learned person, you must know this! How come you are able to find differences in the undifferentiated Brahman, so as to scorn at me to get away?'

The Stranger's question is direct and thought-provoking!

What better opportunity is needed for Adi Sankara? Is he not the Guru for the whole humanity! Is he not the true Acharya, who has demonstrated in every word, thought and action, the right conduct of a leader! What better timing is there to show the act of true wisdom to his disciples and to the humanity! At once, Sankara bows to the Stranger. In him, there was no intellectual arrogance or 'Vidya-garvam', which is like the most stubborn disease.

Arrogance due to wealth is more likely to vanish when the wealth is eventually lost; so too are the pride due to all perishable possessions. But it is not so easy in the case of knowledge. Unlike material wealth, knowledge only grows even when given to others. So any pride of scholarship will also grow and thus prove very difficult to get rid of. That is why the learned must be more alert, not giving any room for vain ego to take over. Ego has no sign of wisdom.

Sankara at once looked at the Stranger in reverence and responded with these five profound verses – Manisha Panchakam. The legend goes thus.

There are different versions to this story. Some say that there was no such incident in Sankara's life. Others claim that it was indeed true and in fact, it was Sankara who scorned the Stranger, as he was not completely matured at that stage of his life and it was like a slip on his part. Few also say that the Stranger who confronted Sankara was none other than the God, Ishvara Himself.

Although my knowledge is limited, and as my adoration to Sankara is infinite, I view the context of Manisha Panchakam only as an opportunity for Adi Sankara to demonstrate to his 'fallen' disciples the humility of the wise and the true wisdom of non-duality. The assumption that the Stranger was none other than Lord Shiva does not fit the very essence of Manisha Panchakam which is about the absolute surrender to the learned, no matter in what stature they may be deemed by the world.

There are plenty of evidences in Sankara's life to show that he was a complete and realized soul from his young age, immensely soaked in the principles of Advaita (non-duality), wielding the light of supreme knowledge and holding equanimity to all. To him, Guru is like God and to be treated in reverence as God.

It is futile to invest effort and time to research the validity or historical evidence for this story in Sankara's life. More important and useful would be the understanding of the verses and the truth these convey, which is the purpose of this study.

It was the time when the society was divided in India, mainly due to the caste-system, a birth-based differentiation; It had no rational or moral basis, yet the caste-based discrimination was widely spread that even led a section of the society to be treated as untouchables. People wrongly attached status due to birth and inflicted on to themselves and others undue sufferings. Disparities on such irrational views existed and still exist across many societies, yet the caste-based discrimination is the most unjust imposition that India was and is suffocated with.

In Sanskrit, the term 'jaadhi' means classification. In everyday life, we deal with differences; all things are classified in one way or the other, based on some inherent or acquired differences. Differences are necessary and we have to deal with these in our lives. For example, there are many different varieties of mango; so are differences in the varieties of the same grain. The blood is also found to be of different types. Such inherent and acquired differences in the nature are to be accepted and handled in our lives. These differences are termed as 'vyavahaariha' in Sanskrit. These are also to be well understood in order to engage in the world.

All analysis leads to deeper scrutiny and more differentiation. That is the trait of a discriminating intellect. Yet, this differentiating intellect must be balanced with the integrating wisdom, to realize that what is differentiated at one level becomes integrated at another level. Like the difference of fingers unseen when viewed as the hand, all differences at one level disappear at another.

In the question of the Stranger, the differences of the bodies are raised. All bodies are nourished by food only which is made-up of the five primordial elements. When such integrated understanding is instilled, the apparent differences of the bodies can be handled, not with scornful disrespect, but with reverence because all bodies are of the same cause. Therefore, 'vyavahaariha' differences are to be understood and managed in our

worldly

life.

There is another type of differentiation, namely 'prathipaasika'.

These are perceptual differences, or differences that exist only in the imagination of the beholder. The discrimination due to birth-based caste-system is an apt example of prathipaasika. The notion that one is superior or inferior based only on the birth is clearly irrational. It has no basis, yet such prathipaasika exists in different forms amongst us even today. In every human society, we see such 'prathipassika' burden, causing infinite stress on the society in one form or the other. The caste-system is a compelling example due to the prathipassika only, rooted as a disease in India, and continues to be advocated by those who really do not comprehend or adhere to the truth of Vedas. Only to rid of such evil and promote the true value in the conduct of the humanity, Jagadguru Adi Sankara lived amongst us and taught us by his exemplary life.

A key lesson from the Manisha Panchakam is that the evil of cast-system must be totally rejected and removed.

Mistakenly, the word 'shudra' is taken to mean a lowly person and the word 'brahmin' to a holy person, merely by the reasons of birth. There is also a misconception that the entire notion of birth-based discrimination is only due to the use of words such as 'shudra' or 'brahmin' in the Vedas. This is totally incorrect and nothing is far from truth. By spreading such notion, the universality of Vedas and in particular, its most appealing wisdom of Upanisads have been eclipsed and gone beyond the reach of the very human-being these are meant to guide. Vedas speak of truth and nothing but the truth. Then, in what context in the Vedas, the words 'shudra' or 'brahmana' are used?

In order to promote progression for every human-being both in material world and in spiritual development, there are indeed four different classifications as suggested in Manusmriti, an ancient Sanskrit text on the code of conduct.

जन्मना जायते शूद्रः कर्मणा जायते द्विजः ।

वेदद्यायि भवेदिप्रो ब्रह्म जानाति ब्रह्मणः॥

**janmanā jāyate śūdra: karmaṇā jāyate dvija: |
vedadyāyi bhavedipro brahma jānāti brahmaṇaḥ||**

First Line:

janmanaa = by birth; jayate shudra: = all are born as shudra (who are ignorant of righteous living); karmanaa = by (righteous) actions; jayate dhvija: = twice-born (beginning a new way of life);

Second Line:

veda adyaayi = who properly learn the Vedas; bhvade vipro: = and conduct accordingly is the Vipran; bhrahma jaanaadhi bhrahmana: = who attains the knowledge of Brahman is the brahmin

This verse conveys that only the right character and the right-conduct of a person differentiate one from others in the world.

Those whose actions are driven by the whims and fancies of the body and mind, with no regards to the norms of the society or care for the righteous living are considered to be shudra. At birth and as young children, we have no idea of what is right or wrong. All are born as shudra.

Then through the guidance of the parents and subsequently by the teachers and the society at large, we learn to live a righteous life; our life is thus transformed so much so to be considered as a new birth, as to be called 'dvijan'. The root 'dhvi' means two and 'jan' means birth. Termed as 'dvijan' or twice-born, he is the man who leads a righteous life, adhering to the code of conduct guided by the authority of Vedas and appropriate for the society he lives in. Although the guidance for his ascent starts from the parents, subsequent tutelage under qualified teachers is also necessary to be considered as a dvijan and lead a life that is proper and spiritually elevating.

Beyond righteous living and right conduct of the chosen path of life, some may dedicate their lives solely for the learning and the contemplation of Vedas. They are known as 'vipras'. To them, the spiritual awakening is the motivation and Self-realization is the goal; by studying Vedas and performing the duties therein, the vipras carve out a specific path to live in this world, one in which their endeavors harmoniously serve both their personal quest for spiritual enlightenment and the social guidance for the moral authority.

Only a special few under the guidance of the Guru or merely by the grace of God, attains the true knowledge of the Brahman. They are known as the brahmins. So One becomes a brahmin only by the attainment of supreme knowledge of Brahman but not by birth or the external

appearance.

Like the children who are deemed 'shudra' due to their ignorance, also are the grown-ups who do not acquire the knowledge or adhere to the conduct for righteous living. The term 'shudra' literally means one who is sad or in distress. It is so, because by not choosing to learn and follow the righteous living, they miss the opportunity to seek the true happiness and reorient their lives. That is why their life is said to be in eternal distress or sadness.

At birth therefore, all are equal and have the equal right to choose the path to lead a life as dvijan, vipran or brahmin. Such changes are not enforced by birth but only by the choice of the individuals. These classifications are not due to perceptual differences or prathipaasika, but simply the graduation of personal evolution. In this approach, birth is not an impediment. Caste-system has no role to play; there are no unfair comparisons due to birth. Only the character of the individuals matter; Righteous living is the basis; Responsible conduct in the context of society is the measure. Differences both inherent and acquired are inevitable in the worldly affairs yet beneath all the differences is the undifferentiated Atman. Understanding this truth is the integrating wisdom. This is quoted by the famous Tamil saying ' yaathum onre! yaavarum kelir!', meaning that everything is nothing but the One, and everyone is a kin! With that knowledge, comes equanimity, the ability to see the same divinity in everything. This is the truth of Advaita ('A' + 'dvaita' = not two).

How do we develop such wisdom?

Vedas define two approaches to understand the world. One is known as 'kaariya dhrishti' or the effect-orientation; this is about focusing on the outcome or the effect as the principle aim of study. This approach gives knowledge about the consequences and consequent objects.

The other approach is 'kaariya dhrishti' or cause-orientation, the study of the cause. Its outcome is the knowledge of the root-cause and the cause-objects. For example, cause-orientation looks at gold as the causal-object while effect-orientation looks at different forms of golden ornaments.

Ordinarily our orientation is towards the effect only. But cause-orientation is necessary to acquire better knowledge, and in the case of Self-Inquiry, 'kaariya dhrishti' or cause-orientation is paramount. It leads to the wisdom that the inherent and acquired differences in the phenomenal world only mask the underlying undifferentiated Brahman.

With such wisdom, living in this differentiated world becomes a play and indeed a joy. We shall be able to view the world as a joyful place and life is but a play and our role is to happily engage and duly perform.

The characteristic of the truly learned is equanimity, the ability to see divinity in all, the capacity to apply the integrating wisdom amidst the differentiated world. Equanimity is the most important requirement for the Self- realization, a key lesson imparted in Manisha Panchakam.

We also learn that the possession of right knowledge alone is not sufficient. It is necessary to live accordingly, as said in the famous Tamil epic Thirukkural 'karrapin nirka adharkut thaha' – (karrapin = after acquiring the appropriate knowledge, nirka = have steadfast devotion, adharku thaha = accordingly). Righteous living requires steadfast commitment to the wisdom acquired. This is known as 'gyaana nishta'. The word 'nishta' means strict adherence. When there is no 'nishta', the acquired knowledge, however superior it may be, is just a laden weight. One may err and fail sometimes to comply; yet the truly learned will unreservedly rectify the error, realign and reestablish in the chosen 'nishta'.

The main impediment to recognize mistakes and to seek recourse is the arrogance of scholarship. Possession of superior knowledge is totally incompatible to vain ego of scholarship. This 'vidya-garvam' should be completely annihilated; the ability to do so and the courage to submit when corrections are needed are the marks of the learned. By the way of his response to the Stranger. Adi Sankara has shown that humility, completely void of ego is the character of the learned.

Through the assertion of his determinate knowledge in Manisha Panchakam, Adi Sankara brings the essence of all Upanisads for our understanding by poignantly unveiling the 'maha-vakayas' or the greatest sentences of Vedanta.

Advaita inquiry is Atma-vidya or Self-Inquiry. Upanisads which constitute the Vedanta part of the Vedas is study of our selves. These reveal who we really are, and lead us to the truth that the Self is none other than the whole or the Brahman. This is also known as 'atma tatvam'. The Sanskrit word 'tatvam' is generally taken to mean 'philosophy'; actually 'tat' means 'that' which is external and 'tvam' means 'your-self'. So the maha-vaakyam 'You are that' is the implied declaration of the word 'tatvam'.

Manisha Panchakam is the revelation of such astounding truth. A true understanding of Manisha Panchakam requires devoted study and

contemplation under a competent Guru. Even a casual reading of the text requires a considerable understanding of Vedanta and the doctrine of Advaita. Although it is not the purpose of this book, in order to aid a better understanding of the Manisha Panchakam, relevant concepts of Vedanta are briefly introduced. These are no way complete except to provide a context for understanding the concepts conveyed in these verses.

None equals Adi Sankara for the systematic, coherent and logical presentation of thoughts, making even the most complex ideas as easier comprehension and the most profound wisdom as the trivial knowledge. His mastery of poetry, deft handling of the language, forthright approach to the core of the matter, the brilliance of articulation and synthesis of purport are all unparallel and even admired for the rigors of scientific scrutiny. In these verses lay the most exhilarating wisdom to fulfill our quest and raise the awareness. To understand, contemplate and uphold such knowledge, one needs to possess clear intellect, focused and serene mind and the grace and guidance of the divine Guru, as prescribed in the final verse of Manisha Panchakam,

Impoverished of these qualities, how can I unearth the hidden treasures of wisdom from this magnum opus called Manisha Panchakam? How can this feeble attempt of interpretation in both Tamil and English, serve the noble purpose? I pray that my apparent bravery although masked by ignorance, is only guided by the grace of God, to render just service to the aspiring readers.

There are many books and texts by the scholars on Manisha Panchakam. The teachings of gracious guru, Sri Sri Maha Periyava of Kanchi include excellent interpretation of many intricate aspects of Vedanta and the works of Adi Sankara.

So with immense humility I submit this interpretation, as a drizzle over the vast ocean and pray that it quenches some thirst for someone and propel them towards able teachers for more refined understanding. I seek pardon for all errors, wholly as my folly and offer immense gratitude to everyone who cares to correct.

I humbly submit to the lineage of Adi Sankara, the ever graceful Sri Sri Maha Periyava of Kanchi Mutt and its reigning heads Sri Sri Periyava and Sri Sri Bala Periyava, to their divine feet and grace.

City of Kasi – Stranger's Question

The Stranger, who was confronting Adi Sankara and his entourage in the narrow street of Varanasi, looks at Adi Sankara and raises his questions when he was scornfully asked to get away from the path. These two slokas or verses are considered to be the questions raised by the Stranger and like a real axe to unearth the profound thoughts of Sankara in the form of Manisha Panchakam. Although simple in the structure, these questions reflect the greatest wisdom of the questioner.

अन्नमयाद् अन्नमयम् अथवा चैतन्यमेव चैतन्यात् ।
यतिवर दूरीकर्तुम् वाञ्छसि किम् ब्रूहि गच्छ गच्छेति ॥

**annamayād annamayam athavā caitanyameva caitanyāt |
yativara dūrīkartum vāṁchasi kim brūhi gaccha gaccheti ||**

Meaning

O, The best among the Seers! Whom are you addressing by your scornful command as 'Go away, go away'? Is it to my physical body which is made-up of food as yours or the immutable intelligence (the Atman) embodied within, which is also within you and pervasive?

FirstLine:

annamayaad = made-up of food (my body); annamayam = manifested variations of food (as your body); atha vaa = else, perhaps; chaitanyam = the inner sentient energy in me (atma); ya meva = it is also; chaitanyaat = pervasive inner sentient energy (as in you);

SecondLine:

yati vara = O! Best among the Seers!; dooree kartum = keep at a distance; vaanchasi = you are keenly; kim = whom; broohi = (in anger) you shout to; gachcha gachcha iti = go away, go away, thus;

Interpretation

In this verse, the Stranger raises the point about the 'prathipaasika' or perceived differences leading to scornful discrimination and social injustice. Yet his questions reflect his much deeper understanding of Advaita. Clearly he is a man of immense wisdom, as he describes the nature of human embodiment and the concept of Atman.

The Vedanta analyzes each life as an embodiment of Atman. The highest form of life on the earth is the life of human. The human body, which enshrines the Atman, is viewed in two different perspectives in the Vedanta.

One view is that the human embodiment consists of five sheaths or layer, namely the sheaths of food (annamaya), vital air (praanamaya), mind (manomaya), intellect (vigyanamaya) and bliss (aanandamaya). The Stranger, being a Seer himself, refers to the first sheath in the first line. The Vedanta also views the human embodiment consisting of three different types of bodies, namely the gross-body (sthula sarira), subtle-body (sukshma sarira) and the causal-body (kaarana sarira).

The gross-body is the physical and tangible body. This is made-up of sheath of food only. 'deham annamaya kosam' says the Upanisad. The word 'deham' means the gross-body, 'annam' means food, 'mayam' means the extended variations or manifestation and 'kosam' means the sheath. The gross body is termed as annamaya kosa or food sheath. It is so called because the body is born of food, nourished by food, decayed by food and turns into food. The food here refers to the cause-objects of all gross bodies. These are, when analyzed using 'kaariya dhristi' proves to be made-up of the same five-common-elements, namely space (aakash), air (vaayu), fire (agni), water (apa) and earth (prithvi).

The gross body is what is referenced in the Stranger's question.

The gross body is insentient. It has no intelligence of its own. So, there is no use in asking the gross body to move away as it is lifeless. Also, all gross bodies, although appear variably, are in principle, the same and insentient.

Perhaps, knowing that the body is insentient, was the command to get away, addressed to the sentient energy within? Even so, this must be wrong because the Atman that shines life in this body is no different to the Paramaatman that enliven in all bodies, pervasive and omnipresent. So how can it go away?

Ordinary people may, due to 'prathipaasika' differences, inflict irrational discrimination on others. How can a saintly person whose purpose is Self-realization discriminate others, knowing that all things are due to the undifferentiated Brahman? Where is the integrative wisdom! That is why, the Stranger, who himself proves to be a great Seer, did not chose to ignore the scornful command and simply go away. As it comes from the entourage of saintly people, such folly must be questioned.

By addressing Adi Sankara as 'O, the best among the Learned', the Stranger emphatically brings the anomaly of the action. Then the Stranger thinks that perhaps the disciple who delivered the scornful order, knows these facts, but is he deluded about the Atman? Is

the delusion because of his views that the Atman embodied in a lowly and dirty body also becomes tainted and unclean? Is the Atman guilty of association?

Thinking thus, the Stranger asks the next question.

Stranger's Question

प्रत्यग्वस्तुनि निस्तरंगा सहजानन्दावबोधाम्बुधौ विप्रो ।
अयम् श्वपचोयमित्यपि महान् को अयम् विभेद भ्रमः ॥

pratyagvastuni nistaranga sahajānandāvabodhāmbudhau
vipro |
ayam śvapacoyamityapi mahān ko ayam vibheda bhramah ||

Meaning

The Atman is the dearest and remains as the tide-less serene ocean of bliss and the indwelling essence in all of us. As this should be the perfect understanding of the truly Learned, how can such scornful discrimination possible, as one is a holy brahmin and the other a lowly dog-eater, when all is the undifferentiated Brahman?

FirstLine:

pratyag = lucid and near; vastuni = thing (the indwelling essence); nistaranga = the wave less and serene; sahaja ananda = naturally, innate, natural Bliss Absolute; avabodha = the perfect understanding; ambudhou = ocean like; vipro = one who is learned;

SecondLine:

ayam = this (this hatred); shwa pacho = dog-eater (lowly outcaste); ayam iti api = this, and also; mahaan = learned (holy caste); ko ayam = by what reasons to; vibhedha bramah = discriminate in the Brahman

Interpretation

The first question itself indicated that the Stranger is no ordinary mortal but a Self-realized soul. In the second question, this is further justified.

Here, in the first sentence, the essential nature of the Atman is defined. What is that which is the nearest to me? It is I. The propinquity of the Self is the closest. It is the Atman in the state of Sat-Chit-Ananda.

The search of the Self is the Self-inquiry.

To indicate the Self, Vedas suggest the method of negation as the initial approach. This is through the successive answers 'not this, not this' for the recursive question 'who am I'. This will precipitate towards the identification of the Self. Where does this take us?

Mind is a chain of thoughts. The embedding thread is the Self. As the thread is revealed between the beads in a chain, the Self is also revealed between the seeds of thoughts in the mind. The focused contemplation and meditation are only for the revelation of the Self. The beads in the hands of the spiritual aspirants and masters are only indicative of this concept, not as we think for the counting of meditative repetitions. If the mind is engaged with the counting where is the focused contemplation!

Here the Stranger, as he seems to be a Self-realized soul, surpasses these intermediate stages of inquiry and states the nature of the Self. It is the ocean of absolute bliss, still, with no vacillations or doubts.

The first line of his question indicates that the ultimate benefit of Atma-vidya is the realization of Atman as the serene and absolute bliss, ever existing as the dearest and closest to us, just waiting to be identified with.

Ananda or bliss is the only aim for all lives. In the worldly life, we do not understand what true happiness is and wander searching in vain for that fulfilling bliss. We fail to realize the true happiness within us.

In the second line, the Stranger ponders how come this wisdom is not reflected in the actions of these learned men? How can a Seer take on the external appearance, so as to treat one as lowly 'dog-eater' to be kept away from one who is holy 'brahmin'? By stating the nature of the Atman, the Stranger has questioned the wisdom or the lack of it for the discrimination of the command to keep him away.

Then the Stranger thinks, perhaps, the scornful command from the disciple came due to the misconception of the Atman. Is it possible that the Atman embodied in a dirty and tainted sheath also becomes dirty and tainted?

To clarify this, is his next question.

Stranger's 2nd Question

किम् गंगाम्बुधि बिंबितेम्बर मणौ चंडाल वीधी पयः ।
पूरेवा अन्तरमस्ति कांचनघटी मृत्कुम्भयोर्वांबरे ॥

kim gaṅgāmbudhi bimbitembara maṇau caṇḍāla vīdhī
payah |
pūrevā antaramasti kāṁcanaghaṭī mṛtkumbhayorvāmbare
॥

Meaning

What difference is there to the Sun, the precious jewel of the sky, whether its radiance is reflected on the holy waters of river Ganges or in the polluted cesspools of the dirty streets of lowly living. What difference is there in the space that fills an earthen-ware or a golden pot?

FirstLine:

kim = what; ganga ambudhi = in the Ganges water; bimbita = in reflected and shining; ambara manou = radiance of the jewel in the sky (the Sun); chandaala veedhi = in the street of the slum dweller; payah = water;

SecondLine:

poorae vaa = in cesspools or; antaram = difference; asthi = exist? kaanchana ghatee = be it a golden pot; mrit kumbha yor va = or be in an earthen pot; ambarae = the fulfilling space.

Interpretation

An example is given in the first line of the verse.

There is no impact to the Sun whether its light falls on the holy waters of river Ganges or the dirty cease pool of a lowly street. So is the case of Brahman the only eternal light. It is ever shining and its reflections appear to enliven different bodies. Yet, irrespective of the state of the bodies, there is no change to the Atman; it is untainted; it remains as the witness only with no association to the bodies it enshrines. While the first example looked from the concept of Paramaatman (Sunlight) to Jeevaatman (reflected sun light) in different bodies, in the second example of the second line, the approach is from the Jeevaatman (Atman embodied in different bodies) and its undifferentiated nature with the Brahman at the removal of the bodies.

In the second line, Stranger asks what is the difference in the void space whether encased in a golden pot or an earthen-ware. There is none; so is the non-existence of any difference between the Atman, enshrined in a lowly body and a holy body. When the pots are broken, the space

previously encased simply merges into the eternal space. Likewise the Atman although appear to be encased in different bodies, is one and the same; when it is devoid of bodies, the Atman is none other than the Brahman.

A key lesson from these examples is the importance of equanimity as the true sign of wisdom. Without it the wisdom of non-duality is not complete.

Adi Sankara's Manisha

The questions of the Stranger kindle the light of wisdom and to bring forth the profound truth of Advaita as Sankara's response. Jagadguru Adi Sankara's Manisha Panchakam is not simply a response to the questions of the Stranger but the answers to Self-Inquiry. These are filled with the nectar of profound wisdom from the Upanisads, presented succinctly for our conception and ultimate enlightenment.

Jagadguru Adi Sankara is the greatest master in wrapping the ocean of knowledge in the seeds of words. In the Manisha Panchakam, he brings the purport of 'maha-vaakyas' or 'the most significant sentences' of Upanisads for our understanding. The Upanisads articulate the oneness of the universe through various examples and arguments for guiding us along to the Self realization; the Upanisads often pack salient aspects of wisdom in few words of a sentence that is good enough to trigger immense contemplation and ultimate transformation within. Such sentences are known as 'maha-vaakayas'.

We do come across such maha-vaakayas in our personal and worldly encounters.

For example, the phrase 'Vande matharam' was good enough to trigger the desire for independence among the Indians during the days of colonization. The assertion, 'You are my Son' by Kunti was good enough for Karnan in the epic Mahabharata to completely transform his life. Sri Hanuman's words 'Seen Mother Seetha' were good enough for Sri Rama in His determination to pursue the war with Ravana.

In the life Sri Sadashiva Brahmendra, one of the greatest Seers of India, was also a life changing sentence. When the Guru asked him once to 'Refrain from speech', Sadashiva Brahmendra gave-up speaking completely and entered into an eternal silent contemplation.

So was Bhagavan Ramana. At the young age, when witnessed the demise of a relative at home, Ramana was told 'Death is when the one leaves the body'. That sentence has changed his life as Ramana began to question the temporal nature of the body and contemplate on the question 'who am I'. Rest was history.

So is the statement of equation $E=MC^2$ by Albert Einstein, one of the greatest scientists, which has transformed many aspects of scientific and social pursuits in the history of mankind.

As Upanisads deal with Self-inquiry the maha-vaakyas of Upanisads are capable of triggering personal transformation of the highest order, applicable to each of us, and to the entire humanity. The maha-vaakyas of Upanisads are usually simple in their structure, easier to remember, yet immensely pregnant with wisdom. Among these, 'tatvamasi' (Thou that art), 'aham brahmasi' (I am brahmam), 'pragyanam brahma' (consciousness is Brahman), 'ayamaatma brahma' (Atman is Brahman) are the most important mahaa-vaakyas.

What do these statements convey? In a nut-shell, these are the most profound equations that elevate us, the Self, to the level of godliness, the Universal-Self.

The Self or the Atman embodied in each body is none other than the Universal-Self or Paramaatman that is embodied in the entire universe. It is astounding. Although incomprehensible to begin with, when contemplated, such maha-vaakyas are extremely revealing and positively uplifting. Generally when we say 'this is equal to that', we infer at least three things. Firstly there are two objects namely 'this' and 'that'; secondly, there appears to be some differences between these two objects because if there is no apparent difference, we would have simply identified them as 'same', but not as 'equal'. Finally, although there appears to be differences between these two, these differences are not real as they become equal.

When we consider these maha-vaakyas as the equations for revealing the oneness of the universe, we thereby infer the following. There is Jeevaatman, the Atman enshrined in the individual bodies; there is Paramaatman that enlivens in all universes as the eternal witness. There are apparent differences between these two. Yet when we analyze using the 'kaarana' and 'kaariya dhristi', these differences disappear, thus proving the equation. The main purport of Upanisads is to explore these equations of the highest order providing ample evidences of their truth. Adi Sankara's Manisha Panchakam is a master piece to bring forth the knowledge of these maha-vaakyas.

To obtain knowledge, especially in spiritual inquiry, there are four principal ways. Firstly, there is pratyaksham or knowledge realized through five senses. But the knowledge about the Self is not possible through the use of five senses.

Next there is anumaanam or inference through reasoning which enables for the discrimination of right from wrong, truth from untruth; yet intellectual reasoning alone is not sufficient to indicate the knowledge of Atman. Also reasoning is possible only when there is a concept or the object of study that is already made available through some authority.

The aagamam or the authority of Vedas is therefore the basis for defining the context of the 'Self', for further reasoning and contemplation. As the Upanisads are the knowledge revealed by the Seers, we need to have absolute faith in their authority in order to understand and realize. If we have no faith in the Upanisads, then indeed we have no other means of knowing about the Self. We may have to defer our pursuit of Self-Inquiry, until such faith is truly return to our hearts.

Finally is the swanubhavam or the direct experience. It is epiphany or spontaneous revelation. This is the ultimate and the only way to attain Self-realization. Such swanubhavam can be acquired spontaneously either because of long contemplation on the knowledge acquired by other means, or in a flash by the grace of the divinity itself. Self-realization is possible only through swanubhavam and it is aided by the long and faithful contemplation and the divine grace.

So absolute and unreserved faith in these maha-vaakayas is mandated for reasoning and sincere contemplation. That is the way to progress towards Self-inquiry and the prospects of the spontaneous swanubhavam.

In the Manisha Panchakam, although the context of Stranger's question appears as the result of social injustice, it goes beyond the individual relationship in the society to the eternal understanding of individual nature itself with that of God. That is why Sankara chose to answer these questions by bringing the gems of Vedanta Upanisads into this beautifully woven garland of five verses.

The first verse of Manisha Panchakam analyzes the Jeevaatman and concludes that it is none other than Brahman. This is known as 'Jeeva Brahma Vedanta Rahasyam' or the secret of Jeevaatman and Brahman.

In the second verse, Sankara analyzes the Paramaatman (the Atman enshrined in all living bodies and all worlds) and declares that only the Brahman appears as the Jeevaatman in the individual bodies.

Thus within the first two verses, the complete essence of Upanisad, the identification and unification of Jeevaatman and Paramaatman, is delivered for our sweet consumption.

In the third verse, out of compassion, the ever graceful Adi Sankara, offers the methods for acquiring such wisdom and its benefits to the humanity.

In the fourth verse, Adi Sankara further shows that the Atman is the Sat (ultimate noumenal), Chit (infinite- knowledge) and Ananda (absolute-bliss); it is the nearest and the dearest yet remains beyond cognition.

Finally, in the fifth verse, Adi Sankara reveals that the ultimate benefit of Self-realization is the taste of absolute-bliss, which is filled within us as a serene ocean; Those who knows this and contemplates on this wisdom will ultimately merge into that ocean of absolute-bliss. At that stage, he is no more a knower of Brahman but the Brahman itself.

At the end of each verse, Sankara declares as his 'Manisha' that anyone who has this knowledge and remains firmly in that wisdom, he alone, irrespective of his stature in the society, is the preceptor and guru, worthy of worship even by gods.

These verses are the beacons of Upanishads. Its words are the seeds of Advaita wisdom. When One studies these verses with sincere quest, and seeks earnestly, an able teacher will soon be known, to take the One, to greater heights of wisdom.

The deepest and intrinsic meanings of these verses require careful understanding and guidance of competent teacher. So, this feeble interpretation of mine is like showing the light of incense-stick to the blazing Sun. Yet, if this text can trigger any reader towards in-depth study, the work had its rewards.

First Verse

जाग्रत्स्वप्न सुषुप्तिषु स्फुटतरा या संविदुज्जृम्भते
या ब्रह्मादि पिपीलिकान्त तनुषु प्रोता जगत्साक्षिणी,
सैवाहं न च दृश्य वस्त्विति दृढ प्रज्ञापि यस्यास्तिचे
च्चण्डालोस्तु स तु द्विजोस्तु गुरुरित्येषा मनीषा मम ॥ 1॥

**jaagratswapna sushuptishu sphutataraa yaa sam
vidujjrimbhatae
yaa brahmaadi pipeelika anta thanushu prothaa jagat**

saakshinee,
 saiva aham na cha drisya vastwiti drudha prajnaapi yasya
 asti chaet
 chandaalostu sa tu dwijosthu gurur ityaeshaa maneeshaa
 mama. (1)

Meaning

The indwelling Atman which is distinctly shining within all the three states of experiences, namely the wakeful, the dreaming and the deep-sleep states, is the same which is pervading as the invisible thread embedded in every life, right from the Creator to the tiny ant, and remaining forever as the witness. Yet it is not knowable by any amount of external intelligence. Whoever has this wisdom and steadfast adherence to this knowledge, he alone, irrespective of his perceived stature in the world, be it lowly or holy, is the real preceptor. This is my determinate knowledge or conclusive wisdom.

First Line:

jaagrata = In the wakeful-state (of gross body); swapna = in dreaming-state (where the gross body is absent) and; sushupti shu = also in the deep-sleep state (where ignorance prevails); sputa taraa = that which very clearly; sam vidu = lucidly knows everything; jrumbhatae = shines in all beings;

Second Line:

yaa = That which; brahma adi = from the Creator onwards; pipeelika anta = up to the ant (and such minute life-forms); thanu shu = in the living bodies; protaa = embedded and indwelling; jagat saakshinee = bearing the witness to all ;

Third Line:

sa yaeva aham = that is I am; na cha drusya vastvu iti = (yet) this is beyond our cognition; drudha prajnaapi asya = not knowable by external knowledge; asthi chaeth = It remains verily the same;

Fourth Line:

chandaalo asthu = may be a down trodden (outcaste); sa tu = in the same way; dwijo asthu = may be a twice born (who is learned); gurur iti = is the real preceptor; yaesha = that Great one who inculcates this concept; maneesha mama = my determinate knowledge or conclusive wisdom.

Interpretation

In this verse, the first line is about the Jeevaatman. It is about us. To understand the Self, the experiences of the Self are the most appropriate areas of study.

In this verse, when analyzing the Jeevaatman, the human embodiment is viewed in terms of three bodies and the three experiences that these bodies are variably subjected to.

The human embodiment, which is made-up of five sheaths, is also seen as three different bodies of experiences. The gross-body (shtula sarira) is the sheath of food or the annamaya kosa. The subtle-body (sukshuma sarira) is made-up of the three sheaths namely vital air (praanamaya kosa), mind (manomaya kosa) and intellect (vigyaanamaya kosa). The causal- body (kaarana sarira) is the sheath of bliss (aanandamaya kosa).

Every human-being variably suffers or endures three types of experiences of consciousness; the Upanisads define these experiences by the term 'avasta' and correlates these experiences to the different bodies.

The first avasta or experience is known as 'jagrat' or the waking-state. In this state, the experience is due to the existence of gross and subtle bodies; the worldly objects and interactions are experienced. Ordinarily, we consider the waking- state as the only real experience and thus as the core of our life. However Upanisads treat the waking-state as only one of the three states of our existence and as only relatively real.

The second avasta or experience is the swapna or dreaming-state. In this state, the gross body is absent and the external material world ceases to exist. Yet the subtle body, by using the imprint of memories from the waking-state as the food, creates the subtle world and endures its experiences as dreams.

The third avasta or experience is the sushupti or deep-sleep. In this state, both gross and subtle bodies are covered under the blanket of ignorance; they cease to exist and only the 'I' consciousness remains as un-manifest.

Our life is thus defined by these experiences only. Upanisads ask to analyze these experiences in order to understand the Self. Only through the analysis of experiences, the underlying 'kaarana dhristi' can be acquired.

Generally knowledge gained through experience is different from the knowledge gained through the analysis of the experience which is deeper and profound. For example, as we experience the Sunrise and Sunset every day, we gain the knowledge that the Sun rises in the East and sets in the West. This is relatively correct but not absolutely. As we analyze further, we learn that the Sun never raises nor sets; only the vector of earth's rotation creates the notion of directions and the perception of rising and setting of the Sun. The former knowledge is due to kaariya dhristi while the latter is due to the kaarana dhristi; indeed there is more insightful understanding when we analyze our experiences.

What is the purpose of analyzing the three experiences of the Self? It is to understand that which is real and common across these three apparently different existences. The first lesson from this analysis is that what we seem to own or experience in one state does not exist in the other states. The sumptuous dinner that we had in our dreams does not fulfill our hungry stomachs in the waking-state. In the same way, the material possession of the waking-state does not help in the dream-state. In the deep sleep state, the only possession is ignorance. This means, the body, mind and the world of experience do not remain permanent across these three states.

So what is that, which remain unchanged in all these three states of consciousness?

Every experience includes at least an object of experience, the knowledge of experience and the One who experiences. Across these three experiences of the Self, the objects of experience are proven to be impermanent as these are different for each of the three states of consciousness. The knowledge of experience is the one that seem to remain all three states. This is what is termed as 'samvid' in the first line of the verse. It is only that knowledge which declares 'I performed this today', 'I had a dream like this' or 'I slept well' etc from these distinct states of experiences. As these declarations are made by the knowledge, then the subject of these declarations, namely the 'I' must also refer to the knowledge itself. Therefore, 'I' or the Self must be the in the form of knowledge, that remain constant in all the three sates of experiences. What do we understand from this?

Firstly, the 'I', who is indicating the Self, is different from the body, mind or the worlds. 'I am thus different from these objects of experiences';

Secondly, the 'I' remains in the form of knowledge only; thirdly, the 'I' is unchanged and eternally existing for all three states of Self-experiences. As the human life is nothing but the temporal aggregate of these three experiences, it follows that the 'I' is unchanging, ever present witness during the entire journey of human-life. Only those who see this are the Seers; only they are able to declare 'I am the infinite-knowledge' or 'I am eternal'.

These are the key facts from the first line of the verse, as the result of analyzing the Jeevaatman.

In the second line, Sankara asserts that the same 'I' consciousness in the Self is no different from the 'I' that is the indwelling knowledge in every life form, starting from the mighty Brahmadeva (the god of creation) to the minute ant. While the analysis of Universal-Self is further done in the next verse, what is determined here is that the 'I', indwelling in the Self as shown in the first line, is the same as the 'I', indwelling in very other life forms in the world.

This is denoted by the 'maha-vaakyam' in the third line. 'sa eva aham' meaning 'that am I'.

The Jeevaatman enshrined in individual embodiment and the all pervading Paramaatman embedded in the universal embodiments are one and the same. The Paramaatman which is considered as the indwelling energy in all life forms is also called Ishvara. Therefore, by the declaration 'sa eva aham', Adi Sankara denotes the identification and the unification of Jeevaatman with Ishvara. A doubt may arise!

If the eternal knowledge is within me as the 'Self', why is not possible to know this? Why is it difficult to comprehend? Adi Sankara explains this in the rest of the words of the third line of the verse.

The Self is non-cognizant. It is not knowable. If something is known, then the knower is different from the known. Is it not? As the Self is proven to be in the form of infinite-knowledge, there can be no external knowledge that can know the Self. That is why it is said that the Self, or the Atman is not knowable.

In the last line of the verse, Adi Sankara asserts his determinate knowledge or conclusive wisdom, as the response to the question of the

Stranger. That is, anyone who has the wisdom to understand and hold steadfast contemplation on the above described knowledge, irrespective of his status in the world, be it a lowly outcast or holy brahmin, he alone is the preceptor and guru. This is his Manisha. Thus, Adi Sankara has established in the first verse, the analysis of Jeevaatman to establish its identification with the Paramaatman or Ishvaran. In the second verse, he will reconfirm this assertion by analyzing the Ishvaran as the Universal-Self.

Second Verse

ब्रह्मैवाहमिदं जगच्च सकलं चिन्मात्रविस्तारितं
 सर्वं चैतदविद्यया त्रिगुणयाशेषं मया कल्पितम्
 इत्थं यस्य दृढा मतिः सुखतरे नित्ये परे निर्मले
 चण्डालोस्तु स तु द्विजोस्तु गुरुरित्येषा मनीषा मम ॥ 2 ॥

brahmaivāhamidaṁ jagacca sakalaṁ cinmātravistāritaṁ
 sarvaṁ caitadavidyayā triguṇayāśeṣaṁ mayā kalpitam
 itthaṁ yasya dṛḍhā matiḥ sukhatare nitye pare nirmale
 caṇḍālostu sa tu dvijostu gururityeṣā manīṣā mama ॥ 2 ॥

Meaning

I am Brahman. All the worlds and all things are there due to the indwelling pure and infinite Brahman which is verily I am, the unlimited sentient energy and the infinite-knowledge. All creations and the notion of creator are thus superimposed, due to the Maya or nescience and its triple traits. Whoever understands and hold steadfast knowledge on this everlasting, perfect and absolute bliss, he alone, irrespective of his perceived stature in the world be it lowly or holy, is the real preceptor. This is my determinate knowledge or conclusive wisdom.

First Line:

brahma eva aham = I am Brahman; idam jagat cha skalam = in this very universe and in everything; chinmaatra = only for the subtle conscious form (of causal knowledge); vistharitam = is perfectly unfolding itself;

Second Line:

sarwam cha ethath = All this sentient world; avidya yaa = borne of nescience; thrigunayaa = due to the convolution of three traits; sesham = remains as (creation and creator); maya kalipitam = superimposed by my ignorance;

Third Line:

iththam = thus; yasya = whoever; dhruda matih = understand with steadfast knowledge; sukha tarae = of Absolute-Bliss; nityae = forever; parae = the Supreme; nirmale = perfect (uncontaminated);

Fourth Line:

chandaalo asthu = may be a down trodden (outcaste); sa tu = in the same way; dwijo asthu = may be a twice born (who is learned); yaesha = that Great one who inculcates this concept; gurur iti = is the real preceptor; maneesha mama = my determinate knowledge or conclusive wisdom.

Interpretation

In the earlier verses we learnt that the Jeevaatman is the embodiment of the Atman in individual bodies and remains as the 'Self' within as the unattached witness to the actions of the embodiment. We also learnt that the Atman is the same which is threaded in all things and all worlds and remain as the eternal witness, as Ishvara or the Paramaatman and that Atman when undifferentiated is the Brahman.

In this second verse, the Paramaatman is analyzed and as it represents everything in the worlds, the experiences of the world are taken as the subject of analysis. It starts with the assumption that worlds are created by Ishvara. Why is this assumption valid? Firstly, if we consider all these worlds are the effects or outcomes, there must be a root-cause for these. That root-cause is attributed to a superior God. This is known as nimitta kaaranam or the assigned-cause. Many faiths and religions only take this approach to appoint a God-head as the supreme root cause. Science also assumes in its quest for the 'theory of everything', the assigned-cause of creation as the point of singularity at the origin of time.

The Upanisads go beyond this reasoning. If Ishvara or Paramaatman, is the creator of the world, then where do Ishvara get the knowledge and the material to create. This is reasoned as follows.

The Atman is proven to be infinite-knowledge. So the knowledge to create the world is not external to the Atman. Secondly, the potential of Atman when it is manifest becomes both the power and matter required for the creation of the world. This power of creation is known as the Maya.

What is Maya?

The Upanisads teach that the differentiated and innumerable embodiments and worlds are due to the 'Moolaprakrti' which is the root-cause of anything and everything. This is the power-absolute, the infinite-potential of Brahman. This is also known as 'Shakthi'. When it is manifested, it is known as 'the Maya'.

One of the most important aspects of Advaita is the concept of Maya. It is said 'ya ma sa maya', meaning 'what is really not' is the Maya. The Vedanta declares that the Maya is absolute-unreality since its existence is not real but for the Brahman. The concept of Maya is the most intricate principle to understand and require guidance of a qualified Guru; such scholarship demands certain prescribed qualities and preparation on the part of the learner. Yet, for the context of our study of Manisha Panchakam, a brief introduction to the concept of Maya, through a simple example is offered.

Imagine that my hand is moving to pick an apple which is on a table.

What is evident here is an action on my part – the motion of my hand. By analyzing this activity, it is learnt that the action is due to the motor-effect of the physiological faculties such as the movement of muscles, the impulses on the nerves etc. By inquiring, we infer that the cause for this motor-effect is due to a particular mental-state or volition, which we shall call as 'the will'. We confirm that it is the will that caused the action of picking up the apple. By further analyzing, we infer that the will has its cause on another mental-state or volition, namely 'the desire'; It is the desire that caused the will to act. We also observe that the awareness of the existence of an apple, or simply the knowledge is the root cause of the desire and thus the root-cause of the action.

If we pursue the analysis, it becomes clear that the knowledge, the desire and the will are the effects and possible only because there exist the

corresponding powers, namely, the power-to-know, the power-to-desire and the power-to-will. These powers are possible only for the witness, the Self. This would mean, these powers are the potentials of Atman and when manifest, exist as the temporal powers of nature. Ordinary minds do not analyze the root causes and thus have no appreciation of the differences, for example, between the power-to-will and the will. In this example, when the movement of hand is viewed ordinarily, it depicts a real action, and therefore, the power is real. Then for the ordinary mind, the Maya is real.

However for the student of Self-inquiry, the definition of Maya is not so straight forward. Firstly to him, if something is real, it must exist at all times – the past, present and future. On that basis, the power, as the cause for the witnessed action is evanescent and therefore must be unreal. But the movement of the hand to pick the apple is seen as a real activity. How can an unreal cause create real effect? Therefore, he deduces that the power must be real too. He thus moves towards a position of contemplation that the power must be both unreal and not unreal at the same time. For him, thus the concept of Maya conjures infinite complexities. When One sees One's image in the mirror, is the image real or unreal? The image really exists as a true reflection yet it is unreal.

For the Seers, there is no confusion. To them, as the phenomenal world is temporary and unreal, its root cause, the manifested Maya is absolutely unreal. Like the movement of hand in this example, all worldly actions are therefore unreal but appear to be real in the phenomenal world. Therefore they declare that the Maya and all its effects are unreal.

Although these perspectives on the Maya appear to be contradictory among the ordinary person, the spiritual-seeker and the Seer, their views are all true within the context and the orientation of these observers. When it is learned under the guidance of the Guru and contemplated, this seemingly contradictory theory unfolds towards the wisdom imparted by the Vedanta.

The Upanisads call these three powers – the power-to-know, the power-to-desire, the power-to-will, respectively as gyaana-shakthi, icchha – shakthi and kriyaa-shakthi and the derived results of exercising these powers as gyaanam, ichhai and kriyai. The combination of these powers or the Shakthi when is not manifest, is the potential power in the Brahman. When it manifests, the Brahman is differentiated and known as 'Ishvara'.

We also learn from the Upanisads that the manifestation of the Maya

corresponds to the three aspects of the Atman, namely, Sat- Chit-Ananda, such that the power-to-will (kriya Shakthi) corresponds to the 'Sat' , the power-to-know (gyaana shakthi) to the 'Chit', and the power-to-desire (ichcha Shakthi) to the 'Ananda' aspects respectively. The Upanisads show that the multitude and infinitely varied worlds are only due to the infinite power of Maya and the interplay of her three attributes or the gunas.

How can we determine the attributes of the Maya as we cannot even define her nature precisely? What the learned have shown is that by studying the attributes of the effect (the world and everything therein) the attributes of the cause (the Maya) can be ascertained. On that basis, there are three distinct guans or attributes assigned to the Maya. These are known as Tamas, Rajas and Satvic.

Tamas represents dark ignorance and comparative inactivity or inertia.

Rajas refers to the illusive light and the passionate and divisive or disruptive activities.

Satvic refers to the pure light or knowledge and the harmonious flow of activities.

Depending on the predominance of the attribute present, the Maya when it is manifest is named differently. When the Tamasic attribute is in the ascendant, the Maya is known as Tamasi. When the 'Rajasic' attribute is predominant, it is known as 'Avidya' and with the overwhelming 'Satvic' attribute, it is known as 'Satvic Maya' or simply the 'Maya'.

Through the Maya only, the Self is exhibited in three types of embodiments.

Firstly, when the Atman is exhibited through 'Satvic Maya', it is known as Ishvara or Paramaatman. This is the primary cause and the emanation of the universe. In other words, with Satvic Maya as his Causal-body, Ishvara pervades all the worlds, embedded as the thread and remaining as the witness.

Similarly, with 'Avidya' or ignorance as the causal-body, the witnessing 'Self' within the individual embodiment of life is exhibited as Jeevaatman. Finally, 'Tamasai' being the casual body, the inert matters exist.

In the inert matter, only the 'Sat' aspect of the Atman is predominant and the Chit and Ananda aspects are completely subordinated. Contrary to this, in the case of Jeevaatman, both 'Sat' and 'Chit' aspects prevail and the 'Ananda' aspect is marginally indicated. Only in the Ishvara is the fullness of absolute Sat-Chit-Ananda. All that exist do exist in Ishvara. The universe

is thus one organic body enlivened by Ishvara, the One Supreme Self. This is indicated by the Shvetashvaropanisad as

अस्यावयवभूतैस्तु व्याप्तं सर्वमिदं जगत ।

asyavyava bhuthaistu vyaaptam sarvamidam jakath

Thus we understand that when it is not manifest, the Maya is unqualified and rests within the Brahman as the moolaprakirti. When it is manifest, it takes three forms 'Satvic Maya', 'Avidya' and 'Tamasi', each giving rise to three principles namely, 'Ishvara', 'Jeeva' and 'Matter' respectively. These three principles are what the Bhagavad Geetha calls as Purushotma, Akshara, and Kshara as well as Paramaatma, Kootastha and Bhuta.

We also understand that the qualities of the Maya can themselves never be but for the absolute reality namely the Brahman. When the Maya or nescience is removed, Ishvara is Brahman. Similarly, when the avidya or ignorance is removed, the Jeevaatman identifies with Paramaatman. Only with such wisdom, the learned are able to declare that the phenomenal world or separated existence is indeed unreal, and its cause the Maya is absolutely unreal.

Truth is always simple and trivial. Yet the profound truth about Self is incomprehensible only due to our ignorance or the nature of avidya. To aid understanding, Vedanta often sites examples such as the perception of a 'snake-in-rope' and the case of spider that creates a web of an exquisite nature by its own part, sustains it and ultimately consumes it. These examples appear to be trivial yet conceal infinite wisdom.

It is Mandukya Upanisad that provides a synthesis of the different embodiments and the experiences of bodies under the different manifestations of the Maya. For the Self, when subjected to three experiences as shown in the previous verse, there exist three worlds.

The gross world is known as 'visva' and it exists only in the waking-state of the Jeevaatman. The subtle world of Jeevaatman is known as 'thaijasa' or the dreaming-world and it operates in the dream-state only. The causal world for the Jeevaatman is known as 'prangya' and it exists in the deep-sleep state as full of potentials only.

For the Universal-Self or the Paramaatman, similarly there are three experiences and associated worlds. These are respectively, 'virat' or the gross world, 'hiranya garpa' or the subtle world and 'prakrithi' as the causal world.

Both the Self and the Universal-Self remain as the witness during these

three distinct experiences, resulting in distinct world of operations, due to the distinct manifestation of the Maya.

Thus the Maya is the power that creates the worlds; so all worlds are only relatively real. Only with the true knowledge, this veil of nescience can be removed. At that stage, in the absence of The Maya, the Ishvara is realized as the undifferentiated Brahman. The process of creation is also revealed in the Vedanta. This is briefly introduced.

From the Prakriti, the causal-body of Ishvara, the hiranya garpa or the subtle world is created by the Maya. Within the subtle-world, first the Akash (Space) is created, and successively other primordial elements namely the air, fire, water and earth are created. These five-primordial-elements are subtle and known as shukshma- avasta.

Only from these five-primordial-elements, everything else is created. From their 'satvic' aspect, our mind and the organs of perceptions were created. That is why the mind and the organs of perceptions are considered as the instruments of knowledge.

Similarly from these five-primordial-elements, based on their rajasic aspect, the praanan (or vital air) and the organs of actions were created. The tireless functioning of respiration in all life-form is only due to the 'rajasic' aspect only. Similarly based on the tamasic aspect of these five-primordial-elements, the five- natural- elements namely the sky, air, water, fire and the earth of the gross worlds are formed. These are inert.

Subsequently, these five-natural-elements intermixed as the food to permute innumerable physical bodies in the world. In a concise text called 'Pancheekarnam', the five-fold mutations of universe from these five-primordial-elements to five-natural-elements and conflate to make everything gross, is succinctly described by Jagadguru Adi Sankara.

The Mandukya Upanisad shows that the three worlds of experiences for the Jeevaatman and the three worlds of experiences for the Ishvara although appear to be different, these are in fact one and the same; the differences are due to the Maya only. It describes the assignment of the seed-letters 'A', 'U' and 'M' respectively for these three sets of worlds and the sound 'AUM' as the indication of their unification as Brahman.

The letter 'A' denotes the waking-state of Jeevaatman and the physical worlds of Ishvara. The letter 'U' denotes the dream-state of Jeevaatman and the subtle hiranya garpa of Ishvara. The letter 'M' denotes the deep-sleep state of Jeevaatman and the Maya of Ishvara.

As the seed-letter 'A' produce the sound of expansion, 'U' the contraction and 'M' the assimilation or completion, the representation of the corresponding worlds of experience through these letters is apt and beautiful. The primordial sound 'AUM' denotes the Brahman. In AUM, everything is born, everything is sustained and everything is consumed. Only to remind us of this wisdom, the Veda mantras always include the sound of 'AUM' in the beginning as well as in the end.

Therefore what we understand is that Ishvara is also the upadhana kaarana or the material cause of the world and thus, the world and everything therein are nothing but Ishvara; The names and forms are infinitely explored by His power of the Maya, yet the same divinity of the Self is prevailing in all. That leads to another question.

As Ishvara is everything in the world, then all good and evil, all rights and wrongs must be due to Him and for Him only. Is that so? The answer to this question according to the concept of non-duality or Advaita is this: It is kalpitam or Superimposition, as quoted in the above verse. The word kalpitam or super-imposition is a key representing the most important concept of the theory of Advaita. The creation of Maya is the deliverance of the kalpitam that projects what is not there as to be there and veils what is there to be not there.

When we see an elephant in a sculpture, we are aware that the elephant is a kalpitam on the stone. We understand the super-imposition and able to deal with it. The multiplicity of the world is also seen as the kalpitam of the One Universal Self due the Maya. But this is not easily comprehended or appreciated as our domain of intelligence ordinarily does not probe into the subtle and causal worlds of existence.

The scientific pursuits and the discoveries that are only focusing on the gross world will continue to evolve, turning what is unimaginable at present time into the relative realms of the future. Such gross-world changes, according to Vedanta, have their cause in the deep desires of the subtle-world and the root in the Maya. As long as the scientific minds seek the theory of everything only through the gross matter, without the

concept of non-duality, diversity will only multiply and the kalpitam will continue to guide us through her weaves of infinite web.

Therefore for the so called rationalists and scientific minds of the gross world, the concept of kalpitam is a philosophical challenge and for the aspirants of Self-inquiry, the concept of kalpitam is a spiritual challenge. The most daring declaration due to the concept of kalpitam in the Advaita Vedanta is that the creations and also the position of a creator are therefore unreal and appear to be real only because of the kalpitam of the Maya! So even the initial assumption that the Ishvara is the creator of the world is also not valid! When the Maya is not manifest, there is nothing other than the undifferentiated Brahman.

When the pursuit of contemplation on the principles of Advaita turns to fruition, at that light of wisdom, the nescience or the Maya is cut asunder. In that state, there is none other than the Self; no other creations and none as the creator exist! The Self remains as the ultimate noumenal, infinite-knowledge and absolute-bliss. Only this is declared by the Seers as 'sarvam brahma mayam', everything is nothing but Brahman.

Unless and until this truth is realized, the cycle of life and the recursive creation and destruction of the worlds and the experiences therein will continue. Such perpetual cycle of kalpitam is known as 'samsara' and as long as we are merged in the avidya or ignorance, our entrapment in this illusive web is permanent.

Thus within the first two verse, by showing the identification and unification of Jeevaatman and Ishvara, Jagadguru Adi Sankara has revealed the salient wisdom of Vedanta. In the following verses, Sankara continues to expand on the wisdom and offer guidance to the seekers of Self-Realization.

Third Verse

शश्वन्नश्वरमेव विश्वमखिलं निश्चित्य वाचागुरोरः
नित्यं ब्रह्म निरन्तरं विमृशता निर्व्याज शान्तात्मना,
भूतं भावि च दुष्कृतं प्रदहता संविन्मये पावके
प्रारब्धाय समर्पितं स्ववपुरित्येषा मनीषा मम ॥३॥

**śaśvannaśvameva viśvamakhilam niścitya vācāguroraḥ
nityam brahma nirantaram vimṛṣatā nirvyāja śāntātmanā,**

**bhūtaṁ bhāvi ca duṣkṛtaṁ pradahatā samvinmaye pāvake
prārabdhāya samarpitaṁ svavapurityeṣā manīṣā mama ||3||**

Meaning

The entire universe, although appear to be continuing, is perishing and forever changing. The Brahman, indeed, is permanent, everlasting and is undifferentiated and peerless. With clear intellect and serenely focused mind, whoever engages in the steadfast contemplation of this truth (that Brahman is Permanent, everything else is not), attains the infinite-knowledge in the flame of which all his burdens due from past, present and future actions are completely burnt, completely accepts the prevailing bodily existence as only due to his past actions, and merely be the witness to its consequences, such a person is the preceptor. This is my determinate knowledge or conclusive wisdom.

First Line:

saswan yayeva = (although) appears to continue; naswaram = perishing and impermanent; eva viswam akhilam = all such worlds; nischitya = clearly understand and affirm; vaachaa guroh = based on the teaching of the Guru

Second Line:

nityam = everlasting; brahma = Brahman; nirantaram = changeless; vimrisataa = by contemplating (on this knowledge); nirwyaaja = clear mind or blemishless intellect; saantatman = focused and peaceful mind;

Third Line:

bhootam = past; bhaavi cha = present and the forthcoming; dushkritam =(results due to the knowingly and unknowingly) performed actions; pradahataa = completely burnt; sam vinmayae = in the knowledge absolute; paavakae = that burns;

Fourth Line:

praarabdhaaya = The root cause of this present life form; samarpitam = completely accepted; swavapur = gross bodies; ityaeshaa = (beholder of) such wisdom (is the real preceptor); maneesha mama = my determinate knowledge or conclusive wisdom.

Interpretation

Jagadguru Adi Sankara, after explaining the identification and the unification of Jeevaatman and Ishvara in the first two verses, gives the instruction to the aspirants on the method by which such superior wisdom can be obtained and upon achieving, the need for unwavering commitment to that wisdom and to realize the ultimate benefit in this third verse.

Knowing the Self as the Atman and its oneness with the Universal-Self is the highest order of human endeavor. The first lesson in this verse is to identify the chief qualifications to acquire such wisdom in this birth itself.

The foremost quality is the blemish-less intellect or untainted mind. It is very difficult to achieve and maintain a clear intellect, free of blame, for it requires complete annihilation of desires. Yet, there is another way to progress towards this goal. That is to change the character of the mind itself. Since desires color the mind, if One's desires are pure and only towards things that can offer goodness to One's heart, then the mind will become taintless and the intellect clear. This requires, therefore, firstly to know what brings goodness in our hearts and secondly to faithfully seek only those, so our desires are forever pure. This is what is said in the word 'nir vyaja' in the second line of the verse.

With such clear intellect and untarnished heart, 'saantatman' or the serenely focused mind will be attained. A calm or serene mind is the result of avoiding passionate desires and tendency towards only good and virtuous. A calm mind is the perfect instrument for focus, so with the practice of 'yoga', the calm mind becomes a supremely focused mind towards the objective. Qualifications such as 'yamam', 'niyamam' prescribed as the eight-fold practices in the science of Yoga are the fundamental requirements for the aspirants.

To learn is to study directly under a teacher and also indirectly through reading and listening to the words of the truly learned. However only through the Guru self-realization can be achieved. When our search is

sincere and the personal qualifications appropriate, it will be indeed easier and certain to identify an able Guru.

So clear intellect, serenely focused mind and guidance of the Guru are the most fundamental requirements for Self-Realization as declared in the first two verses.

The word 'nishchitya' in the first line of this verse indicates the next important quality required for the student of Self-inquiry. This means, having a very clear understanding and holding a unwavering devotion or adherence to that understanding. The identification and unification of the Jeevaatman and Ishvara is the supreme knowledge and once it is acquired, a steadfast commitment to that wisdom is necessary. The main impediments to endure commitment are recurrence of undue doubts.

In the process of learning, doubting is healthy, as long as the doubts are geared towards further pursuit of knowledge. When the knowledge free of doubts is achieved, it must be endured in our contemplation with absolute faith. By subsequently inflicting with doubts only means the lack of faith in the knowledge and the erosion of knowledge itself. This may be due to the volitions of the mind from the intervention of other worldly acts and external desires. That is why 'nishta' or unwavering adherence to the principles is a very difficult and tedious task, demanding care and precise tending to our way of life. Only with such nishta, One can achieve the true equanimity and progress towards Self-realization.

Such a Seeker raises above others in the world; in the glowing light of his wisdom, the burden of outcome due to him from all his actions in the past, present and the future are completely burnt. With no expectations, he is able to dwell in the Self, with the realization 'all worlds are but unreal; I alone as the Atman persist forever, as the ultimate-noumenal, infinite-knowledge and absolute-bliss'. With such determination, he disowns even his own body and completely submits his bodily existence to the discretions of the 'prarabdha karma'.

The prarabdha karma refers to the burdens of One's actions that have already started to fruition. It starts from determining the type of embodiment for the Jeevaatman in the current birth and persists until the embodiment is destroyed. Therefore, everyone ought to submit to this 'prarabdha' while living in this world. Knowing thus, the Seeker completely surrenders his body to the course of actions as dictated by his prarabdha karma. To him, the body is a detached laden weight and

disowned. Therefore, there is no 'I' consciousness attached to the body, thus none of his actions are subjected to the Laws of karma. He is eternally free. Such a Seer is known as 'Jivanmuktha' or a realized soul.

It is said that the Laws of Karma are instrumental in apportioning the consequences of all our actions during the current and the future lives of the Jeevaatman. The deep desires and the attachments to our actions and their consequences, both good and bad, are permanently stored in our mind. As long as these stacks of entries remain in the buffer of mind, they are to be expended through appropriately embodied life in this world. When these are not completely exhausted in the current life, then a new birth is required in order to carry-out these burdens of karma; The choice of embodiment and the course of that life at every birth are governed by these deeply buffered imprints of the mind, known as 'vaasana'. The prarabdha karma operates on this basis.

For the Jeevanmuktha such fears no more. He has no burden of accumulated karmas as these are already burnt in the fire of wisdom. He is free of consequences of any actions due to his complete disengagement with the current embodiment. He is no more bound by the Laws of karma and free. As his mind is on the Atman only, his 'vaasana' can only elevate towards the Atman, to the absolute oneness with the Brahman. Therefore when he leaves his mortal body in this world, he is born no more. He is said to have attained the immortal unification with Brahman. This is known as 'videha mukthi'.

Fourth Verse

या तिर्यङ् नरदेवताभिरहमित्यन्तः स्फुटा गृह्यते
यद्द्रासा हृदयाक्षदेहविषया भान्ति स्वतो चेतनाः,
ताम् भास्यैः पिहितार्कमण्डलनिभां स्फूर्तिं सदा भावय
न्योगी निर्वृतमानसो हि गुरुरित्येषा मनीषा मम ॥४॥

**yā tiryāṅnaradevatābhirahamityantaḥ sphuṭā gr̥hyate
yadbhāsā hr̥dayākṣadehaviṣayā bhānti svato cetanaḥ,
tām bhāsyaiḥ pihitārkamaṇḍalanibhām sphūrṭim sadā
bhāvaya**

nyogī nirvṛtamānaso hi gururityeṣā manīṣā mama ||4||

Meaning:

The knowledge by which all life forms – animals, human-beings and the

gods – project the ‘I’ consciousness, by which the mind, the organs of perceptions and such otherwise insentient bodies appear to become alive, and which is the source of light yet being eclipsed by the very mind that is lit due to its presence, that is the supreme knowledge and whoever has the steadfast contemplation and complete gratification on this wisdom is the preceptor. This is my determinate knowledge or conclusive wisdom.

First**Line:**

yaa = Which (knowledge); thiryag = (in) animals; nara = human-beings; dhaevathaa bhir = gods and all; aham ithy amthah = (creates) the existence of “I”; sphutaa = clearly; grihyathae = realized;

Second**Line:**

yadh bhaasaa = by which means; hridhaya aksha dhaeha vishayaa = mind, eye and such instruments of perception, gross body and things; bhaanthi = perform the functions; swatho chaethanaah = insentient bodies acquire intelligence;

Third**Line:**

thaam = that the Atman (is like); bhaasyaih = (the illumination of which shows the existence of) organs of perception; pihitha = clouding; arkamandala = the Sun; nibhaam = This is an example; sphoorthim = This complete and everlasting (the Atman); sadhaa bhaavayan = whoever holds forever in their contemplation;

Fourth**Line:**

yogee = yogi who is absorbed in the complete knowledge; nir vritha = perfectly happy; maanaso hi = within the mind; gurur iti = is the real preceptor; yaesha = who inculcates this concept; maneesha mama = my determinate knowledge or conclusive wisdom.

Interpretation

It appears that the fourth and final verses are declared to expand on the knowledge already revealed in the first two verses. Is the ‘I’ consciousness applicable only to human-beings? Or is it true for all life-forms? Besides independent of the ‘I-consciousness’, the instruments such as the mind and the organs of perceptions are also seem to have their own local intelligence.

These doubts are clarified in the first two lines of this verse.

The notion of ‘I’ exists in all lives. That is how, according to their embodiment in the world, these life-forms behave. But the ego or ‘I’ which is the identification with the bodies is not real. The true ‘I’ is the Self, which

is the infinite-knowledge. Only due to the Self, the mind, the organs and the bodies come to life. Only the light of the Self shines through the mind and body. Without the light of the Self, all these are unanimated and insentient.

A doubt is raised.

If the Self is light eternally shining within, why is not directly comprehensible? It is because it is eclipsed by the mind. How can the mind eclipse the Atman? If the mind itself is lighted by the Atman, how is it possible for the mind to hide the view of Atman?

Jagadguru Adi Sankara shows an example to explain this.

The Sun cannot be hidden by the clouds. Yet we speak of the Sun being hidden by the cloud, only to mean that the cloud is blocking our view of the Sun. The cloud does not and cannot hide the Sun. In fact, even the existence of the cloud is due to the light of the Sun only. Similarly, the mind exists only due to the Atman. Yet, due to Avidya or ignorance, the mind is blanketing our comprehension of the Self.

Whoever understands this and completely contemplates on this wisdom, he alone is the yogi and the preceptor, who is absolutely fulfilled. This is the

Manisha of Sankara that is revealed in this verse.

The absolute-bliss is the ultimate benefit of Self-realization. This is indicated here and further explained in the next and final verse.

Fifth Verse

यत्सौख्याम्बुधि लेशलेशत इमे शक्रादयो निर्वृता
यच्चित्ते नितरां प्रशान्तकलने लब्ध्वा मुनिर्निर्वृतः
यस्मिन्नित्य सुखाम्बुधौ गलितधीर्ब्रह्मैव न ब्रह्मविद्
यः कश्चित्स सुरेन्द्रवन्दितपदो नूनं मनीषा मम ॥5॥

**yatsaukhyāmbudhi leśaleśata ime śakrādayo nirvṛtā
yaccitte nitarām praśāntakalane labdhvā munirnirvṛtaḥ
yasminnitya sukhāmbudhau galitadhīrbrahmaiva na
brahmaavid**

yah kaścitsa surendravanditapado nūnaṁ maṇiṣā mama ||5||

Meaning

By realizing, only a few droplets of the ocean of the absolute-bliss, Indra and other gods are enjoying immense pleasures in their worlds; In this world too, so are the Seers of clear intellect who are immersed in much greater bliss only within their serenely focused mind. Through unwavering commitment, when the Seer ultimately and completely merges in the Self, the ocean of Absolute-Bliss, he is no more the knower of Brahman, but verily the Brahman. Whoever understands and holds steadfast knowledge on this everlasting, perfect and absolute-bliss, he alone, irrespective of his perceived stature in the world be it lowly or holy is the real preceptor, having the feet worthy of worship by Indra. This is my determinate knowledge or conclusive wisdom.

FirstLine:

yath = In which; saukhya = the perfectly happy and blissful state; ambudhi = ocean; laesa laesatha = from the minute droplets; imae = this happiness; sakraadhayo = for Devandran and such celestial gods; nir vrithaa = uncompromising (experiences exist);

SecondLine:

ya = Which; chchiththae na itharaam = only through the mind (without any other efforts); prashaanthakalanae = faultless and pure; labdhvaa = experiences; munir = For the Seers (in this world); nirvrithah = uncompromising (experience exist);

ThirdLine:

yasmin = whoever (is); nithya = forever; sukha ambudhau = (in this) ocean of bliss; galitha dheer = (remain) completely mixed; brahmaiva = is Brahman; na brahmavidh = (thereafter) not the knower of Brahman;

FourthLine:

yah kaschit = whoever is such a person; sa = if so as said (in the above lines); suraendhra vandhitha pado = (such person) has the feet worthy of worship by Indra the head of celestial gods; noonam = Strong assertion; maneesha mama = my determinate knowledge or conclusive wisdom.

Interpretation:

The first two verses indicate that the Atman is eternal as the ultimate noumenal (Sat). The next two verses show that the Atman is infinite-knowledge (Chit). The fourth verse, indicated the Absolute-Bliss (Ananda)

nature of Atman. In this final verse, this is further elaborated and also in response to the second question of the Stranger, where he indicated this very nature of the Atman.

The Atman is the ocean of Absolute-Bliss (Ananda).

Here, Sankara uses the word 'saukyam' to denote the nature of Atman. In Sanskrit the word 'saukyam' refers to the state when one is absolutely and completely happy – in body, mind, intellect. 'suakasvarupam saukaum' – implies that happiness is our nature. As we are forgetful of our nature due to ignorance, we long for it.

Not knowing, what is the true happiness or our true nature, we wander hither and thither in life, searching for the non-terminating joy in our relationships, possessions, actions and all only in vain.

Seeking happiness in such external objects is known as 'vishaya aananda' in the Upanishads. Ordinarily, we only associate with 'vishaya aananda' and think happiness exists in the objects of desire. Money, ornaments, real estate, position, fame and such material possessions are believed to provide the happiness we seek, but are eventually proven to fail. We eventually realize that happiness thus achieved is impermanent and turns out to be distress and sorrow in the end.

The Vedanta offers some help to understand this.

Generally, the happiness from the external objects is of three types. The knowledge about the existence of the object of desire creates a sense of anxiety and excitement towards the object of desire. This is known as priyam or attachment. Once we obtain the object of desire, we have different type of emotions known as moham or passion. Finally, when the object of desire is enjoyed, there is yet another type of emotions raised, which is referred to as pramodam or possessive pleasure.

Each of these emotions is transient. When the object of desire is not reached, it gives distress. Even when reached, anxiety or fear of losing the object arises. The possession of desired object also increases the dread of losing or the boredom of its prolonged ownership. Even the enjoyment is mixed with fear and sadness. Excessive consumption breeds distaste. None of these are true happiness and none of these external objects are the source of true happiness.

By analyzing, we deduce that only complete objects can give complete happiness. The reason why the external objects of desire are not able to provide complete happiness is that none of these are complete.

When such maturity is achieved, we also realize that happiness, in fact, is not on the objects of desire, but only on the completion or termination of the desire. When a desire is fulfilled, there is happiness. In another words, when a desire is released, happiness arises. So we conclude that in the existence of desire, there is no true happiness, but in the release of the desire, there is.

Then we change our view that the happiness is not in the desire at all, but only in its absence. Every action when done without any desire of its benefits, must give true happiness. This is what Sri Bhagavad Geetha describes as 'tyaaga aananda' or the joy of detachment. By dispassionate service and through unconditional sacrifices, a more refined joy is achieved. This is better and reflects an evolved state, yet the search for the absolute-bliss continues.

A different, but a nobler desire roots in our heart that seeks the absolute and complete happiness. We begin to understand that the Self is the absolute-bliss and it is shielded only by our ignorance. We learn that only with clear intellect and serene and focused mind devoid of undue desires, the underlying ocean of bliss-absolute can be seen.

By realizing only a few drops of that bliss, the gods in their worlds have immense pleasures. Similarly by contemplating on the Self, the Seers on the earth acquire far more happiness within their mind. That is the true and eternal happiness, which the Vedanta calls 'gyaana aananda'. Only those, who have immersed in the 'gyaana aananda' are able to declare such as 'there is none other than the Self, there is none to desire none to deny, I am the Self, I am the Brahman,' etc. They are the Jeevanmukthas who are truly the happiest souls wandering in the world. Such a Seer continues in this supreme contemplation; ultimately in efflorescence, he becomes one with that ocean of absolute-bliss. He is no more a knower of Brahman but Brahman itself.

Merging into this eternal Sat-Chit-Ananda is the only destination and destiny for all lives. This is natural. This is the eternal law! Out of compassion, the highly profound and ordinarily incomprehensible yet the simplest of the simple truth of Vedanta has been beautifully presented for our understanding so as to raise with equanimity that is free of pride and vain ego, to raise the world that is free of discriminations and

hatred, to raise the Self to the Universal-Self, by the greatest Jagadguru Adi Sankara, in his magnum opus – Manisha Panchakam.

Aum! Adorations to Guru|