

ADVAITA VEDĀNTA OR PHILOSOPHY OF BEING
- According to the Teaching of the Masters –

«To the All is given the name Motionless»
Pamenides

The whole Teaching of *Advaita* is included in this “simple” statement: «*Brahman* is the only Reality, the world is non-real, and “That thou art” (*Tat tvam asi*)». Let us try to comprehend this truth in all its implications.

For *Advaita Vedānta* Reality must be constant, identical to itself, self-evident, indivisible, infinite, and beyond time-space-causality. *Vedānta* probes reality on all systems of co-ordinates or on all levels of Being (from the individual to the universal).

Given that *Brahman* is the only reality, what is all that we see and perceive?

According to *Vedānta*, due to the effect of *māyā* we mistake a simple rope for a snake, to use Śaṅkara’s well-known and meaningful analogy.

What is the meaning of *māyā*?:

The word *māyā* has many different meanings: “what makes possible the impossible”, “taking something to be something else”, “veiling superimposition”, etc. In Western terms we could say that it is synonymous with “appearance”, “phenomenon”, “form-producing movement”.

Can *māyā* be considered as pure illusion?

Māyā is not an “illusion” as the term is meant in the West. An illusion does not produce anything, and if an event or a thing are capable of changing our pre-existing state of consciousness, they cannot be considered illusions. The snake of the analogy that has changed our state of consciousness must have a point of departure or a base of reality responsible for its emergence as it cannot spring forth from nothing. In fact, its base is the rope.

The world were we live, the pain, the fights, the joys, man’s history, all of the conquests of the intellect, all that is just process, or becoming, and all that it implies has its value and its degree of truth until one is involved in the process. Śaṅkara, the codifier of *Advaita Vedānta*, has correctly settled this problem: the empirical world has its meaning and its “raison d’être” up to the time we are identified with it.

On the other hand there are two important points we should underline to avoid all too easy misunderstandings: the metaphysics of Non-duality does not require us to abandon, refuse or disown *māyā* as this attitude would still belong to ignorance-*avidyā*. *Advaita* points out that we should not create an identification or identity with *māyā* or superimpose *māyā* upon Reality, as this would mean mistaking the rope for the snake.

A metaphysical vision of life cannot find itself in opposition to anyone or anything, because for it both the phenomenon and the noumenon merge in the One-without-a-second.

We may also add, *since we believe this to be of a particular importance, that Vedānta is not after increasing its following; Truth, according to this doctrine, needs no street-criers also because everything in any given time finds itself at its proper place.*

We can draw near the supreme Truth in metaphysical terms. By metaphysic what is beyond the particular, universal and principial dimensions.

The Vedantic *Nirguṇa*, Plato's One-Good, Plotinus' One, Parmenide's Being, the Ain Soph of the *Qabbālāh*, etc., represent the Unity-without-a-second even though they have different names.

A realizative metaphysical Way is the Way of the noetic, buddhic Knowledge; *we call it traditional because its Knowledge is cathartic.*

The Tradition we are talking about is not human in nature. It is therefore not the tradition made into history, or anthropology nor any other. One cannot even talk about "revelation" on the part of someone who states that he received it in an exclusive manner.

Truth is within ourselves, it is immanent and at the same time transcending the individual as such. One who has realized the Truth-reality cannot but consider himself a simple "transmitter". And this is precisely because reality is the metaphysical foundation of all that exists.

What keeps us captive is ignorance-*avidyā*; but what kind of ignorance are we talking about?

The term *avidyā*, for *Advaita Vedānta*, does not mean lack of erudition but ignorance of a metaphysical order in that it concerns the Reality or noumenon; in other words, it is ignorance about the nature of Being. *Avidyā* is the "individual" aspect of the universal or cosmic Ignorance, that is *māyā*.

Can *avidyā* be considered as real and permanent?

If it were real and absolute we would never be able to eliminate it, and so we would be forced to live in incompleteness-ignorance; we would always be at fault, with no way out.

Some people consider *Vedānta* as a sort of "philosophical phenomenalism", others equate it with "pantheism" (immanentism); others still identify it either with "subjective idealism" or "objective idealism".

"Philosophical phenomenalism" argues that everything is a phenomenon, including Reality itself and the individual in his wholeness. *Vedānta*, on the other hand, states that behind the phenomenon there is a Reality that is not a phenomenon, and this Reality is, we have already pointed that out, the Constant without generation, time, space and causality. Behind the *māyā*-phenomenon there is *Brahman* as the Absolute and the Infinite. To say that reality is a phenomenon-appearance, something relative and subject to change does not meet with reason, if only for the simple reason that, if everything is relative and changing, even the statement "all is relative" is relative.

"Pantheism" argues that all is nature; for Pantheism there is no transcendent Being, everything is immanent in an absolute sense and the Divine itself becomes the world. Instead, *Advaita* view where it states that the relationship of *Brahman* and the World is non-reciprocal. *Brahman* is indeed other than the sensible and intelligible Universe, and in the final analysis nothing exists apart from *Brahman*. In other words, *Brahman* does not become the World, while the World, although not separated from *Brahman*, appears and disappears.

“Subjective idealism” altogether negates the external material reality and connects everything back to one’s own individual consciousness; as reality is granted only to the subjective idea of the single being this vision cannot but result in a dangerous solipsism.

“Objective idealism”, on the other hand, posits the object independent from the perceiving subject; everything depends from the individual or universal object.

These two philosophical currents cannot be confused with the metaphysical doctrine of *Advaita Vedānta* for which both the individual and the universal spheres, though having a certain degree of reality, find their solution in *Brahman*.

Human being has only one real and basic need, and that is to know himself. The Greeks knew this perfectly when they proclaimed “Know thyself and thou will know the Universe and God”. Man, in addition to the idea of quantity, has always needed a Teaching of a qualitative synthesis that could tell him who he is, where he comes from and where he is going. Man needs a Teaching that can lead him to discover his own true nature, which is identity with the Divine, the “*Tat tvam asi*” of *Vedānta*.

So the human being has two possibilities before him: a) self destruction, if he goes on following the road of possession, accumulation, oppression, destruction (all of this under the guidance of ignorance); or b) Harmony-Beauty, if he manages a U-turn and is capable of re-directing all of his energies and capabilities toward the discovery of his true Self. As a result, the cooperation among all the kingdoms of nature will ensue and the conditions for a life of dignity will gradually be created so that it may be possible once again for the Gods to walk with mankind. All of this, although very demanding, is possible; indeed, it is the real destiny of the human being.

Only a vision of Life free from opposition and contradiction may solve the conflicting dualism in which today’s humankind is struggling; and this is why the message of *Advaita Vedānta* may be considered as “topical”.

The individual may choose to follow two different ways of life: the Philosophy of Being and the philosophy of becoming. The former Teaches the total make up of the individual and how he may find his Self in himself; it points to a way of Realization and not of self-affirmation. The latter points to a way leading to acquisitions, extroversion, consumerism and to estrangement from one’s own Self. Hence, the state of bewilderment, confusion and evasion the society of becoming is living in, and bring us to the frightening prospect of annihilation. The philosophy of becoming cannot but lead human being to nihilism and traumatic nothingness, and it proposes fighting, opposition against and separation from the others. The Philosophy of Being proposes harmony of oneself with oneself, with one’s own species and with nature.

Although the language here differs from everyday language the opening of one's heart to the values of truth that dwell in our innermost self will undoubtedly happen in time. Even if we do not focus on that.

Tradition: What It means to us

The Primeval Tradition, which must not be confused with the cultural, social and political traditionalism of the various Nations or with a pre-historical condition, receives

direct inspiration from the Principle. It is therefore, not the product of human minds. It expresses itself as Philosophy of Being, a Philosophy that can restore dignity in human beings by pointing out that they belong to universal and principial dimensions. The Philosophy of Being can make human beings aware of their harmonious place in Life, and lead them to realize that they are but one of the links in the cosmic chain. As the Primordial Tradition expresses itself in terms of synthesis¹, unity and vital harmony, its values are beyond the simple psycho-physical level and belong to the Universal sphere and of the Principle one.

According to the Philosophy of Being, individuals, and therefore humanity as a whole, are here for a precise purpose: to know themselves, to comprehend themselves, and to be. The task for human beings is precisely that of comprehending themselves as totality and, therefore, as unity. By doing this, humanity can leave the fragmentary and incomplete dimension in which it lives.

The Tradition teaches the restless and conflicting individual how to find the way of return to Unity. Traditional symbology, both in the Western Mysteries and in the *Veda-Upaniṣad*, refers to the process of “scission” or “fall” of human beings, and to the subsequent process of “reunion” or “reintegration”. According to the Tradition, Being is the ultimate Truth, and our essence is Being. The search for Being, of one’s own Identity, represents the true aim of our lives, in that it allows human beings to reach the state of total Completeness.

«Everything is rooted into Consciousness and is founded on Consciousness: the Universe is driven by Consciousness and is supported by Consciousness; Consciousness is all things’ substratum: Brahman is pure Consciousness.»

[*Ai.*: V, 3]

«That is *Brahman*, without antecedents and consequent, without internal or external... This is the teaching»

[*Br. Up.*]

Tradition is not to be considered as a learning exercise for the sake of erudition, but is to be experienced in life.

From a metaphysical point of view, Tradition is one and only one.

Our Master says: «We speak of realizative Philosophy. This means that it has to be experienced, not memorized. It must become a way of living and being. In order to be one with Truth “experiencing” implies a process of absorption into consciousness . We should not forget that Truth is disclosed to be meditated upon, assimilated and lived by: it has no other purpose... Considering Traditional Philosophy in a different way causes it to deviate from its *raison d’être*, and to lower it to the level of a mere intellectual play».

¹ It is important to comprehend the substantial difference between unity, synthesis and simple syncretism. The latter can be defined as the intent to reconcile in arbitrary and a-critical form irreconcilable doctrines.

This metaphysical aspect that in its true meaning, refers to the Absolute Reality - beyond all and every contingent matter, beyond manifestation in its complete extension and, therefore, beyond time, space and cause.

Synthesis

Raphael teaches us: «In making of Realization our aim, it is our task to look at the essence of every Doctrine because we know that Truth is one and therefore one must be the Tradition, even though it may be considered, just like Truth, from a plurality of apparently different points of view. We must abandon all disquisitions concerning the process of becoming and take our stand on the plane of Being. In other words, the Philosophy of Being must be the Foundation of our search and realization».

To be Continued

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