

TATTVA BODHA: KNOWLEDGE OF TRUTH

Commentary by Vishnudeva Sanders

INTRODUCTION

Vedanta—also known as self-inquiry—is a means for gaining self-knowledge, the key to permanent freedom. Since everyone values freedom, it pays to understand how self-inquiry works. The first step is to analyze your goals in life which generally fall into four categories, the first three being *artha*, *kama*, and *dharma*.

Artha, wealth, is the pursuit of material security through the acquisition of money, food, shelter, clothing, family, employment, status, fame or power. *Kama*, pleasure, is seeking to enjoy things, whether they be subtle like relationships, art, music, and knowledge or gross like food, drugs and sex. *Dharma*, virtue, means acting appropriately while avoiding wrongdoing. For some, this pursuit takes the form of religion. For others, it takes the form of yoga or psychology, whereby they strive to remove unhelpful tendencies from their minds. And for everyone else who doesn't feel they personally lack virtue, they may set out to change the world by bringing dharma to the rest of society.

But regardless of whether you chase security, pleasure or virtue—or anything else for that matter—you have to ask yourself, “Why do I want these things in the first place? Is it for their own sake?” If you think about it, it's actually for the sake of freedom, freedom from the feeling that you are limited by your lack of security, pleasure and virtue. Freedom translates to a feeling of happiness and limitation translates to a feeling of unhappiness. And being unhappy isn't acceptable to anyone. So since life often amounts to little more than the pursuit of freedom/happiness through gaining security, pleasure and virtue, it makes sense to ask: Is what I'm doing really working?

Say you feel financially insecure so you go out and get a good job. Once you've made some money you *do* feel free from insecurity. But does this feeling last? What happens when you have to spend the money to pay for your bills? The feeling of insecurity comes right back. Even if you make more money, desire itself doesn't stop. It just shows up in a different form—perhaps a desire for a bit of pleasure—and disturbs your sense of freedom all over again. And to make matters worse, indulging that desire might even increase it. Food, drugs and sex are good examples because having them once is usually not enough. For many they're a compulsion, and compulsive behavior robs you of your freedom like none other.

Generally speaking, when you get what you want it's possible you'll realize you didn't really want it; then you have a desire to get rid of it. Or maybe you like what you got but over time it changes and no longer makes you feel happy. Or maybe it stays the same but your desires change.

No matter what the case may be, anything you chase for the sake of freedom/happiness doesn't last. And temporary freedom isn't freedom at all. Since no one wants to be happy part-time it pays to recognize a simple fact: If what you've been doing to get freedom was going to work, it would have worked by now. Continuing to believe it will work is the cause of tremendous suffering.

Despite the fact that the freedom you experience—in the form of happiness—is only temporary, you do still experience freedom. Taking experience at face value, it seems like the feeling of happiness is coming from your interaction with objects. “Objects” means absolutely anything you can experience or know, from physical objects like people, nature, possessions, situations, or your own body to internal objects like feelings, thoughts, memories

or dreams. Experience itself is an object. And although happiness seems to come from objects, it doesn't. If it did, then an object of happiness would give happiness to everyone, equally and at all times.

Peaceful devotional music is enjoyable for the quiet spiritual type but it's terribly boring to his young neighbor. Death metal is exciting to the young neighbor while it's irritating to the quiet spiritual type. A big steak and cheese burrito is attractive to a meat-eater but repulsive to a vegan. An organic sprouted chia and spirulina smoothie might be ambrosia to a vegan but just a cup of green pond scum to a meat-eater. A husband might hate his wife while their son loves her very much. Giving to charity is joyous for a philanthropist but dreadful for a miser. A new video game is interesting to a child but disinteresting to the grandparent that gave it to them.

Perhaps this doesn't matter. As long as something makes you happy, that's what counts, right? But if there were something that truly contained happiness, it would give you the same happiness all the time. Maybe chocolate cake makes you happy. But does the fifth slice of chocolate cake make you just as happy as the first? And would that cake make you happy if it was given to you right after you found out that one of your friends had been in a terrible accident? Even something that initially makes you happy can later make you very unhappy. Any person you've formerly had a relationship with is a good example. How could happiness be in Mr. or Mrs. Right if later on they become Mr. or Mrs. Wrong?

Seeing that the same object can give different people different experiences or that the same object can give the same person different experiences at different times, it becomes clear that happiness is not in the object. So the next question is: If the happiness isn't in the object, where is it coming from?

Since objects include any possible thing that you can experience or know, physically or mentally, then there is only one other option: The happiness must be coming from you, the conscious subject, the one that knows the objects. But why does it seem like it's coming from the objects? The reason is that when you have a desire or fear—which is just a desire to avoid something—it creates agitation in your mind that blocks the appreciation of your true nature, which is freedom. You feel limited by what you don't have or by the presence of something you don't want. But when you either get the object you want or avoid the object you don't want, the desire or fear goes away. Then the appreciation of your ever-free nature floods your mind as an experience of happiness. So while it seems like objects are the source of happiness, they are just catalysts that remove desire and fear. If you follow the logic here, ask yourself, "If what I'm seeking is freedom, and freedom is already my nature, do I have the wrong idea about what I am?"

The answer is yes. By no fault of your own, you think you are limited, incomplete, bound and inadequate, forced to seek happiness in the pursuit of objects. But in truth, you are limitless, complete and ever-free, never dependent on any object of experience for your happiness. When you clearly see that only temporary happiness is possible in the pursuit of objects, and that the happiness is not coming from the objects but from yourself, you are ready for the fourth and final pursuit—*moksha*. *Moksha* doesn't fall under the other three categories of pursuits because it isn't an object. *Moksha* is going for freedom directly, meaning it is an inquiry into your true nature. You want the freedom that is your very self.

Action can definitely get you objects. But is there an action that can give you the freedom that is yourself, the conscious subject? Common sense will tell you that you can't do something to get what you already have or become what you already are. Still, there are many who say that a particular 'spiritual' experience is required to

become yourself or get in contact with yourself and that this experience will make you permanently happy. But since experience itself is a temporary object, then the pursuit of spiritual experience for the sake of happiness is the same thing as pursuing security, pleasure and virtue for happiness. It doesn't work. Nor is it logically possible. The one who does action to get a permanent experience of happiness is limited; they have limited resources, power, knowledge and desire. How could a limited person, performing limited actions create a limitless, permanent result?

The notion that a particular experience is required to get yourself—freedom—is based on the belief that whatever you are experiencing right now is something other than yourself. This is called duality. However, Vedanta says that reality is non-dual, that although it may seem otherwise, there is only you, the conscious subject.

Let's do an experiment to prove it. Ask yourself, "Where am I experiencing this article?" If you believe what your senses are telling you, you'll probably think you're experiencing this article 'out there' on a computer screen or piece of paper. But can you really find an article somewhere 'out there'? No. You can only find the thought of it in your mind, the idea of 'out there' being a thought itself. So how far is the thought of the article from your mind? They are non-separate; you could say the thought is made out of the mind. But how do you know the mind is there? Because you, the conscious subject, know it is there. And how far are you from your mind? Is there a gap? No, your mind is non-separate from you. It is made out of yourself. This means that anything that you ever experience, at any time in any place, is nothing but yourself. So the idea that action is required to gain a particular experience of yourself is based on a misunderstanding: the non-recognition of the non-dual nature of reality. Since success in the pursuit of freedom hinges on understanding this issue, here's a traditional story used by Vedanta to explain it.

Once, a band of ten travelers came to a raging river. There was no way around so they were forced to cross. After they struggled mightily to make it to the other side, the leader of the expedition thought it would be a good idea to take a head count and make sure everyone was there. He asked his fellow travelers to line up and he carefully counted them. But to his dismay, he found there were only nine people. Someone was missing! In a panic he recounted and once again he came up with nine. He and the other travelers fell to the ground, lamenting for their lost friend.

Just then, a kindly old man approached. He asked what the trouble was and the leader of the group explained the situation. The old man smiled slightly and said, "I know where the tenth person is, everyone please line up again." Overjoyed, the travelers eagerly complied. This time, the old man instructed the leader to also get in line. Then, the old man counted slowly from one to ten. The leader, somewhat embarrassed, realized that he had forgotten to count himself.

Now, in this story does the old man, through the action of counting, suddenly turn the leader of the group into the tenth man or give the leader the tenth man that he was searching for? No. The old man only removes the leader's ignorance of the fact that he is, and always has been the tenth person he is seeking. Similarly, the contention of Vedanta is that you are and always have been free, so there is nothing you can do to make yourself free.

Knowing that you can't do an action to get free, the situation may seem dire. If not for action, how can you get what you want? Is there another way available? If what you want is yourself, yes. Since freedom is your nature, all you need is knowledge. In other words, you need to understand that you are already free, similar to the way the tenth man needed to understand he was already the tenth man. But in order to get this knowledge, a proper means is required.

Typically, your means of knowledge is your mind and senses. You use perception and inference to gather information and come to certain conclusions. Why won't this work when you are interested in gaining knowledge of yourself? It's because you're not available for objectification. You can't be seen, heard, tasted, touched or smelled. You can't be thought of by the mind. You are formless and free of attributes so to remove ignorance of your true nature, another means of knowledge is needed—Vedanta is that means. It doesn't give you the self, connect you with the self or prove that the self exists. It's just a teaching methodology that uses words to 'reveal' the ever-present and self-evident self that you already are.

It's important to mention that Vedanta was not invented by a particular person or a group of people. Nor is it information that was channeled through a person or group of people. Vedanta is called *apaurushayjnanam*, "knowledge not from people." Instead of coming *from* people, Vedanta came *to* people. But this doesn't mean it's some form of mystical revelation. The logic of Vedanta is simply knowledge that is inherent in the creation itself, similar to knowledge of gravity. Like gravity and its 'discoverer', Sir Isaac Newton, the knowledge of Vedanta was already present; it just required the right kind of person to 'discover' it.

Think of it like radio waves. There are radio waves passing through the air right now. But in order to be heard, there must be a receiver that is properly tuned. When the radio waves become known, it can't be said that they come *from* the receiver or that the receiver created them. They simply came *to* the receiver.

Similarly, when the minds of the original *rishis*, seers, were properly tuned—meaning prepared—they discovered the already present knowledge of the self. But because the *rishis* were people just like you or me, the knowledge they discovered had to be investigated to make sure it was not tainted by their personal biases. And over time, through this process of verification, a universal, impersonal methodology developed in order to communicate the knowledge to others. This is an important feature of Vedanta that shows it is a time tested means of knowledge free from the beliefs, opinions and ignorance of individual people.

If this still doesn't make sense, then try thinking of the laws of physics. Scientists did not personally create them, but with the right equipment, they investigated the laws of physics that were already present in nature. This knowledge didn't come from them or through them. It came to them. They saw what was already there and then they put together what they found into a body of knowledge. In order to do this, the knowledge had to be verified by others. During this process, if someone came to a different conclusion, contrary to proof, it was thrown out. Why? Because truth is truth regardless of a person's erroneous views about it.

This applies to Vedanta insofar as the truth that is discovered by one person is the same truth discovered by another person. This is due to the fact that truth is of the nature of the self and the self never changes, regardless of time, place, circumstance or your personal opinions and beliefs about it. In the case of self-knowledge there is no 'your truth and my truth.' There is only truth—the singular, non-dual self—and the means of knowledge to 'reveal' it, Vedanta, is purified of the bias of subjective viewpoints.

Originally, Vedanta was an oral tradition. Only later was it written down as a group of scriptures known as the Upanishads. Although the word “scripture” may conjure up ideas of authoritarianism or dogmatism, Vedanta being a scriptural tradition is a good thing because it gives the student a third-party objective source to verify the words of the teacher. So the scripture is your friend, protector and guide.

However, this doesn’t mean that you should read scripture with the idea that you are going to teach yourself, no matter how intelligent you are. The subject matter is extremely subtle and contains many apparently contradictory statements. So in order to ensure that you understand its meaning, it’s crucial that Vedanta be taught to you by a competent teacher. But the intention isn’t to make you dependent on the teacher because once Vedanta has been taught to you, you can use the means of knowledge on yourself, consulting the teacher only when you can’t resolve your doubts on your own.

So how does it work? Self-inquiry, Vedanta, has three stages. The first is called *shravana*, listening. This is when you take what you think you know about yourself, temporarily set it aside, and listen to what the teaching has to say with an open mind. Only after you have truly listened without critique or judgment can you take what you currently think and examine it in light of Vedanta—but not the other way around. If you evaluate Vedanta by what you think or feel about it, it won’t work. Because if what you already think is totally in alignment with Vedanta, you wouldn’t be seeking freedom through Vedanta in the first place. So it’s important to examine your views according to the logic of Vedanta, keeping those that are in harmony with the truth of who you are, and discarding the rest. This process is the second stage of self-inquiry called *manana*, reflection.

Once you’ve gotten rid of false ideas about yourself, owing to habit, the negative thought patterns you’ve previously developed from them may continue to arise. When that happens you have to bring your mind back to the knowledge of who you are again and again until the negative tendencies cease or are at least ameliorated. This stage is called *nididhyasana*, assimilation, and it’s getting your thinking in line with who you really are.

And that’s all there is to it. Vedanta isn’t fancy or mystical. It’s just a practical, straight-forward means of knowledge that helps you to reevaluate the unexamined assumptions that you make about your everyday experience, namely, that you are a limited, inadequate mind living inside of a body, a person subject to death, decay and suffering. Your everyday experience is actually telling you everything you need to know about your true self. You simply need a means like Vedanta to examine and understand that information. Since it’s already been mentioned that Vedanta is a means of knowledge based on scripture, the best way to learn more about it is to study the scripture itself. For those unfamiliar with Vedanta and its scriptures, *Tattva Bodha* is the ideal scripture to study first.

A NOTE

This translation is based on the English translations and commentaries of Swami Dayananda, Swami Paramarthananda, Swami Tejoymayananda and my own teacher, James Swartz. It isn't scholarly or literal, nor was that my intention. Instead, I've tried to impart the meaning of the text in easily accessible language, with as little Sanskrit as possible. Some may object to the fact that in a few instances I have added material for the sake of clarity and in others I've condensed or deleted material that isn't absolutely necessary for self-inquiry, examples being the sections on the grossification of the five elements (*panchikarana*) and the presiding deities of the sense organs. However, I have in no way whatsoever deviated from spirit or truth of Vedanta. For those of you interested in an all-inclusive, word-for-word Sanskrit to English translation of *Tattvabodha*, I highly recommend Swami Dayananda's version, published by Arsha Vidya.

Most Vedantic terms in this text have been translated into English. For their Sanskrit equivalents, see the appended glossary.

-Vishnudeva Sanders

KNOWLEDGE OF TRUTH (TATTVA BODHA)

Bodha means knowledge. And in this context, *tattva* means truth. But what is truth? Truth is that which is eternal, exists independently and does not change. Only the self fits this definition so knowledge of truth is *self-knowledge*.

INVOCATION

The teacher dispels the darkness of self-ignorance with the light of self-knowledge.
Salutations to the self in that form.

In a non-dual reality, everything is the self. So when you bow to the teacher, you are bowing to the self that they represent. You are also acknowledging that the teaching comes to you by the grace of the teacher and it came to them by the grace of their teacher etc. So with this prayer you express gratitude for the fact that the teaching tradition has preserved and passed the teaching on, making it possible for you to study it now.

PURPOSE OF THE TEXT

Tattvabodha, the knowledge of truth, is presented here for those seeking freedom (*moksha*). The direct means of attaining freedom is the discrimination between the self (*atma*) and the not-self (*anatma*). The method of discrimination which will be unfolded in this text is for those endowed with the four-fold qualifications.

Freedom is attained through knowledge alone, arrived at by discrimination. But discrimination is only possible for those who are properly qualified, meaning mentally prepared. For this reason the qualifications are listed at the beginning of the text. They're essential prerequisites. Everyone possesses these qualities to some degree but in order to gain self-knowledge, these qualities must be properly developed. If you are having difficulty understanding the teaching, it's helpful to refer to this list of qualifications to see where your spiritual practice needs work. The methods for developing your qualifications—which are not discussed in this text—are karma yoga, meditation, devotional practice and the strict observance of dharma.

THE FOUR-FOLD QUALIFICATIONS

The four-fold qualifications are discrimination, dispassion, the six-fold accomplishments and an all-consuming desire for freedom.

Discrimination

What is discrimination? It is the understanding that the self alone is eternal and unchanging. Thus, only the self is real. All else (the not-self) is finite and ever changing; therefore it is unreal. Distinguishing between the real (the self), and the unreal (the not-self) is discrimination.

It's important here to discuss the meaning of "real" and "unreal." In Vedanta, the term for "real" is *satya*, a word used to describe the nature of the self. *Satya* means "existence" or "that which exists independently." The term for "unreal" is *mithya* which means "that which depends on the self for its existence." A clay pot is a common example used to illustrate *satya*, *mithya* and the relationship between the two. The name and form that you refer to as "clay pot" doesn't exist independently. Instead, it depends on clay for its apparent existence because without clay there is no clay pot. But, if you take away the name and form "clay pot," the clay remains. It doesn't depend on the name and form "clay pot" to exist. Even if the clay is formed into a different pot, it continues to exist and stays completely unchanged. So in this example, the clay is *satya* and the name and form called "clay pot" is *mithya*.

Similarly, the self is *satya*. It exists independently before, during, and after all names and forms. The names and forms appearing in the self are *mithya* (the not-self). Like the pot to the clay, they borrow their seeming existence from the self. But also like the pot to the clay, you can take away all of the names and forms and the self remains unchanged. This is an important fact to remember about the self because something can only be real, *satya*, if it never changes. If something is one thing one moment, and something else the next, or if it comes into existence and then stops existing, it can only be said to be *mithya*, unreal. Understanding the distinction and relationship between *satya* and *mithya* is fundamental to discrimination.

To investigate further, think about this: When you experience a tree, your body, or a thought, there is consciousness plus a tree, consciousness plus a body and consciousness plus a thought. In each of these experiences the objects—the tree, body and thought—come into existence, stay a while and then goes out of existence. And while the objects exist, they are subject to change. This means they are *mithya*.

But what about the consciousness present in each experience? It exists prior to, during, and after the presence of the objects. And at each stage of the experience, consciousness remains unchanged. Do you have to get a different kind of consciousness to experience a tree or your body or a particular thought? No. This means that consciousness is *satya*. It is the self.

Another way to look at it is to ask yourself, “How can I say that an external object like a tree or an internal object like a thought exists?” If you think about it, the conclusion you will come to is that an object can only be said to exist when it is seen in the light of consciousness. The object can’t reveal itself without consciousness, so it depends on consciousness for its existence. But, does consciousness depend on the object to exist? Not at all, because consciousness is self-revealing. It is self-evident and independent of the objects it reveals. So consciousness is *satya*, independently existent, and the objects are *mithya*—dependent on *satya* for their apparent existence.

Note: When the word “consciousness” is used in this text, it isn’t referring to a part, property, product or function of the body or mind or a combination of both. “Consciousness” is a word that refers to the nature of the self. And the consciousness that is the self is that which reveals the parts, properties, products and functions of the body and mind. The ever-changing body and mind—which depend on the self for their existence—are *mithya*.

Dispassion

What is dispassion? It is the understanding that the results of all actions are temporary because they are conditioned by time. Thus, they cannot grant permanent freedom from the sense of personal limitation and lack, which is what you are truly seeking, not the results themselves. When this is understood, objectivity and indifference arise regarding the results of your actions. While you may still perform action for the sake of certain results, you are freed from excessive concern and longing for them. This is dispassion.

If you want permanent freedom you have to understand that you can’t get it with action because the results of action are always temporary. It doesn’t make sense that a multitude of finite actions will add up to an infinite result.

However, the way you approach action is very important for *preparing* your mind for freedom. How so? Usually, your mind is preoccupied with getting what you want and avoiding what you don’t want. In other words, you are always worried about the results your actions will bring. This causes considerable anxiety for the mind and an anxious mind is unsuitable for seeking self-knowledge.

But is this anxiety warranted? Since temporary results will not give you the permanent freedom you are seeking, then no. What’s the point of being upset by the fact that action can’t give you something it’s incapable of giving you in the first place? Besides, if you look at action itself, you’ll see that the only part of the process that is under your control is performing an action to the best of your ability. But once you’ve done that you have no idea what is going to happen. You might get what you want, something you don’t want, something you neither want nor don’t want, or something else completely unexpected. Knowing this, worrying about the results of your actions seems unreasonable, doesn’t it?

So when you clearly comprehend that action cannot give you what you truly want and that the results of actions aren't up to you anyway, you can happily perform actions without being anxious about the results. This helps to produce a mind suitable for gaining self-knowledge.

The Six-Fold Accomplishments

What are the six-fold accomplishments? The first accomplishment is a composed mind, available for contemplation.

Discrimination—the key to permanent freedom—requires continuous contemplation. This isn't possible in a disturbed mind filled with excessive fears, desires or negative emotions. But you can't simply will these fears, desires and negative emotions to go away. Instead, they have to be examined in light of Vedanta's declaration that you are non-dual, limitless, whole, complete, and unchanging. This statement will be explained in detail later in the text, but for now you can take it on board conditionally and consider its implications.

The first is that as the non-dual self, there is nothing other than you and you are unchanging. If there's nothing other than you, then there's nothing to fear, unless you are afraid of yourself. And if you are unchanging—which means you can't be harmed or have anything taken from you—then there's also no reason for fear. The second is that since you are whole and complete—meaning you lack nothing—what is the need for desire? The third is that the bottom line of being non-dual, limitless, whole, complete and unchanging is that you are always okay. Since that is the case, what is the reason for holding on to negative emotions?

The second accomplishment is control of the senses.

If the senses aren't properly controlled, the mind will be extroverted, preoccupied with experiencing objects. With the mind's attention tied up in objects, the continuous self-inquiry required for freedom isn't possible. So the senses need to be reined in. And for this to happen you need to reflect on the fact that happiness is not in objects of the senses that you want to experience. If it were, each object would give happiness equally to everyone; if it were, once you had the object of your desire, you wouldn't need to seek happiness again. But different people react differently to the same object. And an object that gives you happiness one moment can give you sorrow the next. By contemplating this, the senses can gradually be withdrawn from compulsively pursuing objects, freeing the mind to seek the true source of happiness: the freedom of your limitless nature.

The third accomplishment is the observance of one's own duty, the ability to consistently do what is to be done and to avoid what is not to be done, regardless of personal preference.

Life has given you absolutely everything: the entire world, as well as a body and mind to experience it. In return, all you have to do is respond appropriately to the situations you encounter. This is called following dharma, which is dictated by common sense or, if you lack common sense, scripture. If you base your choices purely on your likes and dislikes alone, without taking dharma into account, your mind becomes disturbed. Why? Because you are likely to act inappropriately to get what you want or neglect what needs to be done in order to avoid what you don't want. So doing what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, attenuates your likes and dislikes and contributes to a calm mind, capable of inquiry.

This includes doing actions that are properly suited to your nature. It isn't helpful to try to be someone or something you're not because it leads to inner conflict. Appreciate yourself for who you are and act accordingly, always attending to your own affairs, in order to ensure proper growth and maturity.

The fourth accomplishment is the capacity to endure difficult and uncomfortable situations.

The fourth accomplishment could be described as a 'stick-with-it' attitude. With its constant ups and downs, life is difficult enough on its own. Dealing with your life, while constantly discriminating, is even more difficult and requires a lot of determination. But when your goal—freedom—is clear, you will gladly suffer life's little inconveniences in order to accomplish it.

The fifth accomplishment is an open-minded trust regarding the words of the teacher and the teaching.

Essentially, all Vedanta is asking you to believe is that you are okay, until you have done enough inquiry to know for a fact that it's true. Thinking "I'm not okay" is just a belief, a false one at that. So why not trust the scripture and adopt the new belief that, "I *am* okay. I'm whole and complete." This makes inquiry a lot easier. Having doubts is fine. Vedanta gladly gives you the tools to resolve them. But being in love with your doubts and constantly second-guessing the teaching is unproductive. A skeptic remains a skeptic if they are unable to become an earnest inquirer into the truth. In other words, a seeker of truth never becomes a finder of truth without an open-minded willingness to examine—in the light of knowledge—the very beliefs and assumptions that are keeping them in ignorance.

The sixth accomplishment is a single-pointed mind that is able to focus on a given topic.

Discrimination requires constant vigilance. So self-inquiry doesn't work unless your mind is able to focus on it for long periods of time.

All Consuming Desire For Freedom

What is an all-consuming desire for freedom? It is when freedom is your primary desire and foremost priority.

When you fully grasp that you can't get permanent freedom from pursuing objects, you give up chasing them and pursue freedom directly through self-knowledge. All of your desires, which were formerly directed towards pursuing objects, are directed towards freedom.

It's important to mention that this doesn't mean you have to quit your job and run away from your family and responsibilities; keep in mind that the third accomplishment is doing your own personal duty. So understanding that you won't get permanent freedom from your everyday activities doesn't mean you stop doing them or even enjoying them. You just perform the actions with the right attitude and in the correct manner, in order to prepare your mind for self-knowledge. And it's self-knowledge—not the giving up of your responsibilities—that leads to permanent freedom.

These are the four-fold qualifications that are required for making the discrimination between the self and the not-self. This discrimination is necessary owing to the fact that the self, which is ever free, limitless, and unchanging is mistaken to be the not-self: the body, mind and all forms of experience. Owing to this ignorance (avidya), the self is falsely believed to be subject to bondage, limitation and change. Thus, suffering arises and a means is required to remove it. That means is the knowledge of truth, arrived at by discrimination.

What is the knowledge of truth? It is the settled understanding that the self alone is real, all else (the not-self) is unreal and, "I am that self, ever free of the body, mind and experience. I am existence, consciousness and limitlessness."

Reality is non-dual but experience seems to tell you otherwise. So, for the purpose of discrimination, Vedanta conditionally posits two categories in existence: "I", the self, the conscious subject and "that", the not-self, unconscious objects. Owing to ignorance, you take the "I", the self, to be the "that", the not-self, and you suffer. Since there is a confusion between the two, you need to understand what you are and what you are not in order to sort it out. So the next section of the text outlines what you are not—the not-self. Objectifying and understanding the not-self is the first step in destroying your belief in its reality, and—more importantly—your identification with it.

THE NOT-SELF

Because reality is non-dual, there is no actual not-self. But despite this fact, you seem to experience a not-self. So to simply deny your experience because it isn't actually real is completely unproductive. Instead, the seeming not-self needs to be properly understood, along with its 'relationship' to the self. For this reason the text introduces the concepts of the three bodies, five sheaths and three states. The intention is not to prove their actual existence. Instead, they are presented in order to give you several different ways to objectify your everyday experience, and by doing so, understand how you are neither involved in it nor affected by it. By negating every facet of your experience as being unreal—not-self—it's possible through implication to understand yourself, the self. Here is an established criteria for discrimination:

1. All forms of experience, both mental and physical, are objects known to you, the self. But the objects don't know you because they aren't conscious. You, the self, are conscious, so you can't be the unconscious objects.
2. You, the self, are eternal, ever-present, and unchanging—you are real. All objects known to you are temporary, constantly coming, going, and changing—they are unreal. You, the self, are real, so you can't be the unreal objects.
3. You, the self, exist independently. That you are existent and conscious is self-evident, requiring no external means to be known. But objects depend on you, the self (consciousness), for their existence because nothing can be shown without consciousness. Therefore, you, the independently existent self, can't be the dependently existent objects.

Summary: You are conscious, real and independently existent. So you can't be the unconscious, unreal objects that depend upon you for their seeming existence. You can apply this discrimination to each part of the not-self, starting with the three bodies.

THE THREE BODIES

THE GROSS BODY

What is the gross body? It is inert, insentient matter, a combination of the physically manifest forms of the five elements (space, air, fire, water, earth). It is born due to good actions in the past and is the instrument with which experience of the world is gathered. After it comes into existence it is born, it grows, it undergoes changes, it degenerates and it dies.

The body is nothing but a combination of the five elements, matter, and matter is not conscious. Yet you, the self, are conscious. The body is continuously subject to change but the self is unchanging. The self is ever-present but the body isn't because it disappears in dream and deep sleep. Furthermore, if the body were ever-present, then your baby-body, childhood-body, or even your body from last week would still be here, but they aren't. They've all disappeared but you, the self, remain. Also, while the body previously did not exist, and will not exist in the

future, the self always has and always will exist. This existence is independent, unlike the body. The body depends on matter for its seeming existence, and matter depends upon consciousness (the self) for its existence. For all of these reasons you, the self, cannot be the gross body.

THE SUBTLE BODY

What is the subtle body? The subtle body is made of the five elements in their non-physical forms. It is born due to good actions of the past and is the means for enjoyment of pleasure, pain, etc. The subtle body is composed of the five organs of perception, the five organs of action and the five physiological functions. In addition, it contains the inner instrument made up of mind, intellect, ego and memory.

Owing to previous good actions, you have a human subtle body. This is only relevant to self-inquiry insofar as discrimination requires the capabilities of a human intellect. A dog, for instance, can't do self-inquiry because it lacks the ability to self-reflect. So what is the subtle body made of? It is composed of energy, matter in its non-physical form. Energy is not conscious and you, the self, are conscious. On this basis alone you can negate the possibility of yourself being the subtle body. However, we can look at each part of the subtle body in more detail in order to understand and objectify it better.

The Organs of Perception

The five organs of perception are: ear for the perception of sound; skin for the perception of touch; eye for the perception of sight; tongue for the perception of taste; nose for the perception of smell.

Each organ of perception corresponds to its physical counterpart in the gross body. For instance, the organ of ear in the subtle body is what allows the physical ear of the gross body to hear. You can infer the existence of the organ of ear because someone may have a physical ear but be unable to hear. The same is true for the organ of eye etc.

Why are these organs of perception not-self? Because perception is an unconscious object known to you. Also, perception is ever-changing. One moment the eye sees one thing, the next moment something else. Or one moment the ear is hearing something, the next moment the skin is feeling something etc. If you were changing with the perceptions, the you that was present a moment ago would be gone, and a new you would be present. But the new you would be unable to report a different perception because it was previously absent, and therefore unable to witness the change in perception. In order to say that perception is changing, you, the unchanging self, have to be present to reveal it.

Furthermore, the objects of perception depend on you, the self, to exist. An object can't be said to exist without being revealed by the light of the self, consciousness. If you could take away the self—which isn't actually possible—there would be no objects. But if you take away the objects, there is still the self. For example, when the perception of the eye is not present, you are still there. You exist prior to, during, and after all perceptions. For all of these reasons, you cannot be the organs of perception.

The Organs of Action

The five organs of action—speech, hands, legs, excretion and procreation—animate their physical counterparts in the gross body. The organ of speech enables the vocal chords to speak; the organ of hands enables the functions of the physical hands and arms; the organ of legs makes the movement of the physical legs possible; the organ of excretion allows the anus to expel waste; the organ of procreation enlivens the genitals.

Again, we infer the presence of the organs of actions because someone can, for instance, have vocal cords, but be unable to speak, have legs, but be unable to move them etc. The organs of action are unconscious matter, in the form of energy so they can't be you, the conscious self. The organs of action continuously change and even disappear in deep sleep so they can't be you, the unchanging, ever-present self. The organs of action depend upon energy to exist. In turn, energy depends on you, the self, to be said to exist. For these reasons you can't be the organs of action.

The Inner Instruments

The inner instruments are mind, intellect, ego and memory. The mind receives information from each individual sense organ and combines it into a unified experience. The mind is also the seat of emotion. Doubt, the vacillation between two thoughts or ideas, is another function of the mind. Discriminating between two thoughts or ideas, analyzing them, and then making a determination, is intellect. Ego is notions in the intellect such as, "I am the doer of actions, I am the enjoyer of the results of actions." It is also the notion of ownership such as, "This is my mind, this is my body etc." In general, it is any notion one has about themselves such as, "I am short, I am intelligent, I am generous, I am poor, I belong to a particular group, party, family etc." Recollection of previous experience is memory.

In everyday situations, the collection of inner instruments is generically referred to as "mind" and the mind is thought to be the source of consciousness. But this isn't true. From the standpoint of consciousness, the self, the inner instruments and their functions are known objects and are therefore unconscious. It's exceptionally important to remember this when doing self-inquiry. The inner instruments are simply a collection of thoughts:

perceptions, doubts, determinations, ideas of ownership and doer-ship, notions about yourself, and memories. These thoughts don't constitute consciousness because they are revealed *by consciousness*. This means that the inner instruments depend on consciousness for their seeming existence and can't be you, the independently existent self. And since the inner instruments are subject to change, they can't be you, the unchanging self. Finally, the inner instruments are not always present, such as in deep sleep, so they can't be you, the ever-present self.

THE CAUSAL BODY

What is the causal body? It is indefinable, beginningless ignorance, free of forms and divisions. It is the cause of the subtle body, the gross body and ignorance of one's true nature.

Why don't you know that you are the self? Because of self-ignorance. Where does this ignorance come from? The causal body, which is also the cause of the subtle body and the gross body. Now, the existence of the gross and subtle body is obvious because you experience them. But how do you know there is a causal body? Through inference.

For instance, it's clear that you aren't the creator of your physical body. And your mind—which is nothing but a string of thoughts, feelings, emotions and memories—appears to you unbidden and unexpectedly, the proof being that you never know what you are going to think next. So you can be certain you aren't the creator of the mind either.

Since you aren't the creator, you have to infer that the body and mind have an unseen cause. But just in case you think the self is the cause, the text introduces the causal body. Like a seed containing the unmanifest potential of a tree, the causal body contains the unmanifest potential for the gross and subtle body. But unlike a seed, the causal body is formless and can't be experienced directly. Only its effects—the mind and body—can be experienced.

The causal body is a complex topic, parts of which will be dealt with later in the text but for the time being, here are some important things to know about the causal body.

"It is...ignorance...the cause of the subtle body etc..." The fundamental tenet of Vedanta is that reality is non-dual: There is only the self and nothing else. So how can it appear to be a multiplicity of things like the subtle body etc.? Ignorance. In other words, through misunderstanding you see innumerable different objects where there is only non-dual formless consciousness.

For instance, say you walk into a jewelry store. In a glass case you believe you are seeing various kinds of gold rings, bracelets, earrings and chains. But are you really? No, you are only seeing gold. If you are ignorant of what gold is, you will take the appearance of individual pieces of jewelry to be real. But when the gold is known to you, they are seen to be only gold.

It is a similar situation with the self. When you are ignorant of the self, you take the appearance of various objects such as the body and mind to be real. But unlike the appearance of the jewelry, you identify with the body and mind and think they are you! However, when the self is known, they are seen to be only the self. So ignorance ‘causes’ the objects insofar as it makes the non-dual self appear to be something other than what it really is. How this happens will be discussed in the upcoming section of the text about *maya*.

But before moving on, here’s something to think about as you continue your study of this text: If ignorance, not you, is the cause of the body and mind, is the sense of responsibility for what the body and mind is and what it does—and the sorrow that results from that sense of responsibility—really warranted?

“It is...beginningless ignorance...” This can be looked at two ways. First, ignorance is synonymous with the causal body and the causal body is the cause of the mind and body. Since the causal body *is* the cause of everything, it itself doesn’t have a cause. So in that regard it is beginningless, or more precisely, causeless.

Second, to say that ignorance has a beginning means it had a prior non-existence. How can something that doesn’t exist—like the son of a woman who cannot have children—ever come into existence? It isn’t possible, so ignorance must have always existed. Besides, if ignorance had a prior non-existence, what would have to be there in its place? Knowledge. And if knowledge was already present, ignorance couldn’t come to be. So for all of these reasons, ignorance has to be beginningless.

In truth, it’s not important whether ignorance has a beginning or not. You do not need to know where it comes from. You only need to know what it is so you can get rid of it.

“It is...indefinable...ignorance...” In this context, the word “indefinable” is synonymous with the word “*mithya*.” *Mithya* is indefinable because it is neither truly real nor truly unreal, neither truly existent nor truly non-existence. It defies categorization. You can’t say ignorance is truly real or existent, *satya*, because it depends on consciousness, the self, to exist. You can’t be ignorant if you aren’t conscious. But you can’t say ignorance is truly unreal or non-existent either because it can be experienced. Therefore ignorance is *mithya*. And this is good news because anything that is *mithya* is impermanent. So even though ignorance has no beginning, it can definitely have an end.

“It is...free of forms and divisions.” Whether you are ignorant of your true nature, the particulars of cellular biology or even what’s happening in the next room, the object of ignorance may differ, but the ignorance itself is the same. Ignorance is one, so it is “free of forms and divisions.”

Also, since the causal body contains the potential objects and this potential is undifferentiated and unmanifest, the causal body is said to be “free of forms and divisions.”

THE FIVE SHEATHS

What are the five sheaths? They are another way of viewing the three bodies. They are the food sheath, the vital air sheath, the mind sheath, the intellect sheath, and the bliss sheath.

This section of the text offers an alternate way to look at the three bodies: the five sheaths. The food sheath is the gross body. The vital air, mind, and intellect sheaths are the subtle body. The bliss sheath is the causal body. They are referred to as sheaths because they seem to ‘cover’ the self. But since the self can’t actually be covered, it’s more appropriate to think of the sheaths as ‘universal errors.’ In other words, each sheath is a way that everyone mistakes the self to be the not-self. For instance, when you think “I am the body,” you are mistaking the “I”, the self, to be the food sheath, the not-self.

Each time these mistaken thoughts occur, the sheath can be discriminated from the self in the same way as the three bodies. First, the sheaths are unconscious, ever-changing objects so they can’t be the conscious, unchanging self. Second, the sheaths depend on matter for their existence. Matter, in turn, depends upon you, consciousness, for its existence. Since this is the case, the five sheaths cannot be you, the independently existent self.

The point isn’t to stop these mistaken thoughts from happening because that would be impossible. But when they do happen, they need to be recognized for what they are: errors where the self is being identified with the not-self. And then they need to be negated with discrimination. Through continuous discrimination, the identification with the not-self can be broken and identification with your true nature—the self—can be established.

THE FOOD SHEATH

What is the food sheath? The gross body is composed solely of what you have eaten in the past. Therefore it is called the food sheath.

When you see an apple sitting on the table, you don’t mistake it to be yourself. But as soon as you eat the apple, you start referring to it as ‘me’ because the body is nothing but what you have previously eaten. So if you find yourself identifying with the body, aside from applying the discriminations that have already been mentioned, contemplate the fact that it’s nothing more than a moving collection of reprocessed fruits, vegetables, grains, meats and dairy. So you can’t be the food sheath unless you think you’re the contents of your refrigerator and pantry.

Identification with the food sheath is indicated by thoughts pertaining to the body such as, “I am tall, I am fat, I am male, I am female, I am black, I am white, etc.”

THE VITAL AIR SHEATH

What is the vital air sheath? It is the five physiological functions of which the first four are: respiration, evacuation (excretion), circulation and assimilation. The fifth physiological function is a power that reverses other vital air functions: it is the cause of vomiting, sneezing, belching etc. It also ejects the subtle body from the gross body at the time of death.

Additionally, the vital air sheath includes the five organs of action.

The vital air sheath is responsible for the health and proper functioning of the food sheath. It animates and enlivens the physical body. Identification with the vital air sheath is indicated by such thoughts as, "I am sick, I am breathing, I sneezed, I am digesting my food, I have to urinate, etc."

THE MIND SHEATH

What is the mind sheath? It is the mind together with the five organs of perception.

The mind sheath is where perception, emotion and doubt occur. Identification with the mind sheath can be indicated by such thoughts as, "I see, hear, taste, etc. I am happy, sad, etc. I don't know what to do, what is going on, etc."

THE INTELLECT SHEATH

What is the intellect sheath? It is the intellect together with the five organs of perception.

The intellect is the faculty of reason and the instrument used to come to conclusions. It is the seat of the ego, the notion of your apparent self and the idea of doership. The organs of perception are included in this sheath as well because perception is often required in making determinations. Identification with the intellect sheath can be indicated by thoughts such as, "I am thinking, I know such and such, I am the doer of actions and the enjoyer of the results. I am a good person, bad person, father, daughter, husband, aunt. I am a fireman, a postal worker, a political conservative or a liberal etc."

THE BLISS SHEATH

What is the bliss sheath? It is self-ignorance and the experience of limitlessness. It is the source of the various degrees of pleasure.

Since the bliss sheath is the causal body, the cause of experience itself, it can't be experienced directly, only its effects. Pleasure is one such effect. But why mention pleasure specifically and not another experience, like sorrow, which also must come from the causal body?

Because when you analyze sorrow, what do you find? There is you, the subject, experiencing an object that you don't like and there is a desire for that object to go away or change into an object that you do like. In other words, there is a division between the 'wanter' and the wanted and there is desire, which is inherently uncomfortable because being separate from something you want is unpleasant. But what about pleasure?

In an experience of pleasure, you get what you want and the division of the 'wanter' and the wanted disappears, along with the uncomfortable desire that caused it. When there is no division in the mind, it has essentially resolved into the divisionless causal body. And without any agitating desire present, the undivided mind is able to accurately 'reflect' or 'appreciate' the nature of the self—which is limitless and whole—and this translates into an experience of pleasure or bliss. This is why the experience of pleasure is mentioned and not sorrow.

Another experience that is an effect of the bliss sheath is ignorance, because it is the cause of ignorance itself. Identification with the bliss sheath is indicated by such statements as, "I feel good, I feel whole, etc. I do not know, I did not know, etc."

CONCLUSION: THE SELF IS NONE OF THESE

Although you refer to your possessions as 'mine' in statements such as, "My clothes, my house, my family etc." they are different from yourself. Similarly, although you refer to the three bodies or the five sheaths as 'mine,' in such statements as, "My body, my physiological functions, my mind, my intellect, and my ignorance," they are different from yourself. They are not-self. You are the self, ever untouched or unaffected by the three bodies and five sheaths, just as a seer is untouched by what is seen or just as a sword is unaffected by its scabbard.

You don't take your possessions to be yourself, even though you refer to them as 'mine.' If you don't confuse yourself with your house, for example, then why would you do it with your body and mind? Your body and mind are unconscious objects that are known to you the same way you know your home, your car, and your family members.

Discriminating between yourself and the body and mind requires you to continuously monitor your thoughts. When you find yourself saying "I", stop yourself and ask: What "I" am I referring to? For example, say you think "I am angry." At that point you can stop and see that the "I" you are identifying with is the mind sheath and you can dismiss it as not-self. But if recognizing the identification alone isn't enough to negate it, walk through the supporting logic. After all, we're after understanding here, not denial.

First, the emotion is an unconscious object known to you, the conscious subject. Second, the emotion was not previously present and will eventually go away but you are there before, during and after the emotion. You are ever-present. Third, the emotion depends on matter to exist, which in turn depends on consciousness to exist but you are independently existent consciousness itself. For all these reasons you can't be the mind sheath.

This line of inquiry can and must be applied to every instance of identification with the five sheaths or three bodies. And once the identification with the not-self has been recognized and negated through understanding, it's important to assert your identity as the conscious subject, the self, which is unaffected by the sheaths and bodies. In fact, that's the whole point of discrimination: to re-establish your true identity, which you seem to have forgotten. At first, it may seem disingenuous to say, "I am limitless, non-dual consciousness," but it's actually the truth. Over time, by negating the not-self and asserting yourself as the self, the back of ignorance is broken and who you really are becomes perfectly clear. This is *moksha*, freedom or enlightenment.

THE THREE STATES OF EXPERIENCE

What are the three states of experience? They are the waking, dream and deep sleep states.

The final way to objectify the not-self is to think of it as experience in general, which is divided into waking, dream, and deep sleep. The discrimination between yourself and experience is, "I cannot be what I experience because experience itself is an ever-changing, unconscious object known to me. Every experience requires consciousness so it depends on me, the self, to exist. I am the witness of the experience, not the experience itself."

THE WAKING STATE

What is the waking state? The state of experience when the gross body is present and the sense organs are perceiving sense objects such as sight, sound, etc. When the self seems to identify with the gross body it is called the waker.

Unless you know that you're the self, the waking state seems real and the person in the waking state is who you think you are. This is a universal mistake. But can this be true? Aside from the previously mentioned reasons that you can't be what you experience—the waking state being nothing but an experience—let's take the analysis of the waking state a little further.

In the waking state, the external world is present. And while you would never mistake yourself to be certain parts of the external world like a tree, you do think you are the body. But is there a real difference between the two? Ask yourself: How are the body and the tree known? The answer is that they're both known by the sense organ of the eye. You know a tree because the eye sees it and you know your body because the eye sees it. It's the

same situation for the other sense organs too. You feel the leaves of the tree with the same organ of skin (touch) that you feel the hair on your head. So by looking at your experience in this way you can see that your body and a tree share the same level of existence. They are both just thoughts, objects of perception.

And what knows the perceptions of the sense organs? It has to be the mind because sensory perception is only possible when the mind is functioning. If for some reason you don't think you're the body, you almost certainly think you are the mind. But you have to ask yourself: How is the mind known? The answer is that it's known by you, consciousness, the self. If the mind wasn't something known to you, you wouldn't be able to say that it was there. This means that both the mind and its thoughts/perceptions are objects known to you and therefore can't be you. If you can follow the logic here, you can negate your identification with the entire waking state.

But there may still be a doubt. You might wonder: What knows the self? The answer is that there is no knower of the self because it is self-revealing. It doesn't require anything else to be known because it is self-evident pure consciousness, knowing-ness itself. Look at your own experience. Do you need anything to know that you are conscious other than the fact that you *are* conscious? No. So consciousness doesn't need another consciousness to be conscious of itself.

But if you still think there is something that knows the self, you run into the problem of infinite regression. In other words, if you say there is something that knows the self, it can then be asked what knows the something that knows the self. And then it can be asked what knows what knows the something that knows the self, *ad infinitum*. The point is that it's an unresolvable inquiry with no logical answer. So knowing stops with consciousness because it is knowing itself.

Besides, if there were something that knew the self, the self would become an object known to it and cease being the conscious subject. This isn't possible because the self doesn't change. Furthermore, there's no way for something to have two contradictory natures. In the same way that the sun can't be both light and dark, hot and cold, the self can't be both subject and object, conscious and unconscious. So it is always the conscious subject and never an unconscious object.

But getting back to our analysis of the waking state, if the fact that the waker and its experience is an inert, ever-changing object known to you doesn't rid you of your identification with it, ask yourself: How can I be the waker if I disappear every time I go to sleep?

THE DREAM STATE

What is the dream state? It is the state of experience when the gross body is not present and the sense organs are not perceiving external objects. Impressions left on the causal body from previous experiences in the waking state are projected into the subtle body, creating the dream world. When the self seems to identify with this experience in the subtle body, it is called the dreamer.

The waker doesn't exist in the dream state because neither the body nor the perceptions of the external world are present. In the dream state, only the subtle body (mind) and causal body are active. The causal body projects thoughts—based on previous experience in the waking state—into the mind, creating the dream. Similar to the way you think the waking state is real when you are awake, you think the dream state is real when you are dreaming. And in this case the “I”, the self, is mistaken to be the dreamer. Just like the waking state, no aspect of the dream state can be you because it is ever-changing and known to you.

But leaving that aside, consider this: If you were previously the waker, how could you now be the dreamer? Has the one transformed into the other? Even if this is the case, neither one can be you because you are the self and the self doesn't change. The proof is that you are aware of the coming and going of both the waker and the dreamer. You have to be present before the waker shows up in order to say that it showed up. And then you have to still be present to say that it disappears and that the dreamer appears. If you actually were the waker, you would disappear when the dreamer showed up and you wouldn't be able to say that the dreamer was there and *vice versa*. So you are there before, during and after the waker and dreamer as the consciousness that reveals them.

THE DEEP SLEEP STATE

What is the deep sleep state? It is the state when both the gross and subtle bodies are not present and only the causal body remains. Since there is no subtle body available to facilitate thought or perception then all objects—including time and space—are absent. Therefore, no problems exist in deep sleep. Hence, upon waking you say, “I remember that I did not perceive anything. I experienced limitlessness.” When the self seems to identify with the causal body it is called the sleeper.

The discussion of deep sleep is tricky because almost everyone thinks that they are non-existent in deep sleep. Before going into any fancy logical arguments that prove otherwise, ask yourself: Do I fear death? The answer is probably yes. Even if you don't fear death, you definitely don't welcome it. The proof is that you are sitting here reading this commentary and not plotting your own demise.

Why do you fear death or hope that it stays away for as long as possible? Because death is the non-existence of the body and mind—the person you think you are. So if you truly don't exist in sleep, then it's essentially the same as death—they don't call it the ‘cousin of death’ for nothing. Since your non-existence is not desirable, as evidenced by your aversion to death, then why would you willingly seek sleep each and every night?

The answer is because you do exist in deep sleep. If you didn't, you couldn't wake up feeling rested because a non-existent entity can't be changed by a non-existent experience. So not only do you exist in sleep, you also experience. We'll discuss that in more detail shortly.

But let's go back to the existence issue. The main reason for people thinking they do not exist in sleep is the absence of the body, mind and world—objects. You might say, "I don't remember anything. Since nothing was there, I wasn't there." This line of reasoning is understandable but inherently flawed. It implies that your existence depends on the presence of objects. If this were true, it would apply equally to the waking state as well. But does the presence of objects in the waking state make you exist? Does your existence depend on you seeing a tree, tasting food, smelling a flower, hearing music, or feeling your own body? Not at all. You exist before, during and after the experience of the tree, food, flower etc. This means the appearance of an object does not bring you into existence. And its disappearance does not render you non-existent. Since this is the case, how does the disappearance of all objects in sleep prove that you are non-existent?

If this doesn't remove your doubt, remember that the word "existence", *satya*, is synonymous with consciousness and consciousness exists independently of objects. This is self-evident, but all you have to do is look at your experience for confirmation. Objects come, go and change but consciousness is always there. And instead of consciousness depending on objects to exist, objects depend on consciousness to exist because you can't have an object without consciousness. However, in a state like deep sleep, you can have consciousness without objects.

Now, you might say, "Wait a minute, I don't see how I am conscious in deep sleep." If you exist in deep sleep—which you do—then you are conscious because they are the very same thing. But it may not seem like it because you are not conscious *of* anything. Even though we've already seen that consciousness does not depend on the perception of objects, let's analyze the situation a little further.

Earlier it was mentioned that sleep is an experience. But what kind of experience? It's the experience of the *absence of objects*. Because how can you say there are no objects in deep sleep if you aren't there to experience their absence? For instance, say someone asks you, "Was the President of the United States at your house yesterday?" If you definitively say, "No," how is that possible? Because you were there. If you weren't home you couldn't say you experienced the absence of the President. It's the same with deep sleep. For you to say there were no objects present, you had to be present to know there was an experience of their absence. And since there is an experience in deep sleep, there is consciousness, because you can't have experience without consciousness. Without the presence of any limiting objects, deep sleep is the experience of limitlessness.

It's true that the normal instrument of experience, the body and mind—the person you think you are—is not there in deep sleep. But there is a very subtle thought present, called the *nidra vritti* or *avidya vritti*, that registers the experience. And since a thought is unconscious, this means the conscious self, the real you, has to be there making the experience possible.

CONCLUSION: THE SELF IS PRESENT AND UNCHANGED IN EACH STATE

As man is called a brother in relation to his sister, a son in relation to his mother and a father in relation to his daughter. But the man himself remains the same. Similarly, the self is called the waker, dreamer and sleeper in relation to each state of experience. The self, that which is present in all three states, remains unchanged.

The self is referred to as the waker, dreamer, or sleeper depending on which state of experience is appearing in it. But this is a mistake because the self is present and unchanged as the states of experience come, go and change. To say that the states change is only possible because of the presence of the unchanging self.

If this doesn't make sense, consider this scenario: You are going to a party to meet a friend. When you arrive, he is already there. After talking with him for a while you have to go outside to take a phone call from your boss who is working late trying to finish a project for an important client. She asks you to come back to the office and help out, so you go back inside, say goodbye to your friend and leave.

When you get to the office, your boss wants to know when your friend arrived at the party, how long he stayed and when he left. You start to reply but you realize you can't tell her when he arrived because you weren't there yet. And because you went out to take her call, you can't be certain that your friend was still at the party while you were outside. And since you had to return to work, you can't say when your friend left the party. To know those things you would have had to been at the party before his arrival, during his stay and after his departure.

It's the same with the three states of experience. The only way you can report the arrival, presence or absence of a particular state of experience is because you—consciousness—are there prior to, during, and after the presence of each state of experience. If you went away when the waking state went away, you wouldn't be there to say that the dream or deep sleep state had arrived and *vice versa*.

THE SELF

What is the self? It is non-dual consciousness, the unchanging, indivisible, independently existent, eternal, infinite, imperceptible essence of everything, ever-free of all action and experience. It is distinct from the gross, subtle and causal bodies. It is beyond the five sheaths. It is the witness of the three states of experience. It is you.

After thoroughly describing what you aren't, the text gives a description of what you are. While it's true that limitless consciousness can't ultimately be described or contained by limited, unconscious words, they are all we have to work with because the self isn't an object of thought or perception. But thankfully, the proper use of words *can* remove erroneous notions about the self and show that you are it. That's all that's needed because the self doesn't have to be demonstrated as an object. It's self-evident because your existence and consciousness are obvious. But since what the self *is not* and what it means to be the self isn't entirely clear, a teaching in the form of words is necessary.

For this teaching to work, the words have to be exact because a definition of something that is imprecise or that applies to more than one thing leads to confusion. For instance, if you're trying to describe something and you say that it's "big", you'd have a problem because the word "big" can refer to more than one thing and its meaning changes depending on what it refers to. You can have both a big mouse and a big mountain. So words like this aren't suitable for teaching about the self.

The translation of the verse above uses many precise words to give an exclusive definition of the self but the original Sanskrit text only uses three: *sat-chit-ananda*. *Sat*, *chit* and *ananda* aren't three different functions or qualities that belong to the self. They are literally what the self is, it's very nature.

The meaning of *sat* (or *satya*) was discussed earlier in this commentary. It is that which is beginningless, endless, unchanging and independently existent. *Chit* means consciousness. Not to be redundant but the self—consciousness—is conscious. It's not what the self does, it's what self is. And because this consciousness is *satya*, it's not a part, product, property or function of the body or mind or a combination of both. Some say the brain is the source of consciousness but does that makes sense? Brain tissue and electrical current—which are both just matter—are unconscious. If they have no consciousness to give, then putting them together can't create consciousness. The brain, like a computer, does perform certain functions but also like a computer, it is unconscious. So similar to the way a conscious person observes the unconscious functions of a computer, the conscious self witnesses the unconscious functions of the brain. Besides, brain function is described in two ways: as electrical activity—which we've already established is unconscious—and the flow of thoughts. Are thoughts conscious? No, because they are revealed by consciousness. So consciousness can't be the flow of thoughts because it is independent of the flow of thoughts or even its absence, like in deep sleep. If you exist in deep sleep then you are conscious because existence, *satya*, and consciousness, *chit*, are the same thing.

So what about *ananda*? *Ananda* means bliss but bliss doesn't apply to the self in a literal sense. Why? Because bliss is experiential, and as you have seen, experience is the not-self. But *ananda* is used here because analyzing the experience of bliss, which is familiar to everyone, is useful for describing the nature of the self *through implication*. How so? When you are blissful, there is no separation between you and what you want. You are happy because you are temporarily free from the constraints of limitation. So the implied meaning of bliss (*ananda*) is limitlessness (*ananta*) and the word "limitless" applies to the self because it is unaffected by time, space and all other objects that appear in it. It is also limitless because it is non-dual and all-pervasive; there is nowhere it isn't and there is nothing that it lacks.

Existence-consciousness-limitlessness is a precise definition of the self because it's unambiguous and it only applies to the self. For example, what object of your experience is *sat*? There are none to be found because all objects are time-bound, coming into being, staying a while and then disappearing. They are also not *sat* because they depend on consciousness to exist. What in your experience is *chit*? Nothing, because all objects are known to you and therefore unconscious. And what in your experience is *ananta*? Again, there is nothing because all objects are bound by time and space.

You can start to see how Vedanta's proper usage of words is a valid means to know the self. The words themselves aren't the self but by contemplating their implied meanings, the nature of the self is made clear. How? At first, the definition *sat-chit-ananta* negates the possibility of the self being any kind of object. Since it's not an object, it has to be *chit*, consciousness, the knower of objects. And because it's the knower of objects, it isn't affected by them. So the self is known to be *ananta*, limitless.

Through these words, it becomes clear what you are not: an object, the experiencing entity or any form of experience. And by thinking about the implied meaning of these words it becomes clear what you are: the limitless consciousness by which all objects are known. When you come to this conclusion it's not as if you *become* the self. You just understand what the self is and how you already are the self. It's only a matter of

knowledge (understanding) not becoming (action). And this is why words work. Words can yield knowledge but actions can't because action and ignorance aren't opposed to one another. A person under the influence of self-ignorance can perform all kinds of action to get, change or get rid of objects. But since the self is not an object, they can't get it through an action. They can only 'get' the self through the knowledge that they already 'have' the self because they *are* the self.

THE CREATOR AND THE CREATION

How can there be a creation—a not-self—if the self is non-dual, unchanging and actionless?

This is a logical question because once you've used discrimination to break the belief that objects are real—and that you are somehow associated with them—you're still left with the fundamental duality of self and not-self. Since reality is non-dual, ultimately the two have to be reconciled.

In order to do this, the text categorizes the not-self a little differently than before: as the individual, the creation and the creator. First it explains the nature of the creator and how the creation and the individual come into being. Then the individual is shown to be non-different from the creation as matter and after that, the individual and the creator are shown to be non-different as the self, thus facilitating the knowledge of non-duality.

It is owing to *maya*, a power that depends on the self for its apparent existence.

Maya makes the impossible possible: it makes the non-dual self seem like it's a multitude of different objects. The text makes a point of saying that *maya* depends on the self, which is *satya*, for its apparent existence. This means that *maya*, along with its effects, is *mithya*. Even though *satya* and *mithya* seem like a duality they aren't because there can't be a real duality between the self and something that doesn't actually exist.

But since the appearance of duality can't simply be dismissed, the relationship between *satya* and *mithya* needs to be explained: while *mithya* (*maya*) is always *satya* (the self), *satya* is never *mithya*. What is called *mithya* is only the self appearing as, but never actually becoming, *mithya*.

It's like the aforementioned example of the clay pot. While the name "pot" and the form it refers to are always clay, the clay is never the name and form. The clay doesn't become a substance called pot because the pot is only an appearance with no actual existence. And before, during and after the appearance of the pot, the clay remains the same.

You might say there is a clay pot because you experience one. But when you try to demonstrate one you can't, because the appearance of the clay pot resolves into its basis, the clay. Similarly, although *mithya* can be experienced, upon investigation it resolves into *satya*, the self.

For example, in any experience there are two factors: objects, *mithya*, and consciousness, *satya*. The word “factor” is being used here because even though consciousness is inherent in every experience, it isn’t an object of experience. Now, if both consciousness and objects were real then neither would be capable of change. If this was so, there would be two independent realities that couldn’t affect each other and you would be stuck with duality.

But this can’t be the case because objects are transient and ever-changing; they aren’t real. And since objects aren’t self-revealing—meaning independently existent—they have to depend on something else for their apparent existence, like the name and form “clay pot” depends on clay. The only other factor besides objects is consciousness, so what appears to be objects must really be consciousness. Let’s examine an object such as a chair to see how this is true. The logic of this example can be applied not only to physical objects but subtle objects such as thoughts as well because both are matter.

So what are you referring to when you say there is a chair? If look closely, you see there is no chair, only wood. Is wood a reality? No, wood is only atoms. Are atoms a reality? No, because they are made of protons, neutrons and electrons, which in turn are made of quarks and various other subatomic particles that periodically appear out of and disappear into, space. So at the end of the chair investigation, all that is found is space. But is space a reality? If it were, it would exist independently. But it doesn’t because space can only be said to exist in the presence of consciousness. Since space isn’t conscious, it’s not logical to conclude that consciousness comes from space. So space comes from consciousness and ultimately is nothing but consciousness.

In this way all objects, *mithya*, resolve into consciousness, *satya*, the self. The experience of *mithya* is just an appearance that is actually the self. It’s similar to thinking you are experiencing a wave where there is only water, a ring where there is only gold or a shirt where there is only cotton.

Before proceeding, it’s a good idea to reiterate these two facts:

1. *Maya* is *mithya*—it is unreal. Therefore, any of its effects are equally unreal.
2. *Mithya* depends upon *satya*, the self, for its apparent existence. Therefore, *mithya* resolves into, and is nothing but, *satya*—but *satya* is never *mithya*.

Now, the text will explain how *maya* evolves into the creation.

Maya is composed of the three *gunas* (qualities): *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. From these three qualities evolve the five elements (space, air, fire, water, earth) in their subtle, non-physical forms. In turn, from these subtle elements the subtle body develops. When the five elements divide and recombine, the gross forms of the elements are created. From the gross elements the gross body develops. Consequently, there is an identity between the individual and the entire universe. They are both composed of the five elements (matter) and are therefore essentially non-different.

As previously mentioned, the causal body is the unmanifest potential for the individual mind and body. But it is only part of the total causal body, *maya*, the unmanifest potential of all bodies, all minds and the entire creation. In this regard *maya* is the creator and it is composed of the three factors required to create: knowledge (*sattva*), power (*rajas*) and substance (*tamas*).

Think of what is needed to build a house. First you have to have the knowledge to draw a blueprint and skill in construction. This is *sattva*. But knowledge and skill aren't any good if you don't have the power or energy to implement the construction itself. This is *rajas*. But knowledge of how to do the job and the power to do it isn't of any use if there aren't any materials to build with. This is *tamas*.

Initially, these three *gunas* manifest as the five elements, the five elements being a way of describing matter. Initially, they are in their subtle forms, which could be thought of as energy, matter in its non-physical form. From the subtle elements, the subtle bodies are formed. Then, when the subtle elements divide and recombine they become the gross elements—physical matter—from which the body and the cosmos are formed.

This complex process is laid out in detail in the original text but I have simplified it here because the whole point is this: the creation and the individual, in both their subtle and gross aspects, are just matter, the five elements. Why is this important? Because normally you draw a boundary between yourself and the world and see it as different from yourself. But in truth, there isn't a distinction between the matter that makes up your body and mind and the matter that comprises the world. From the point of view of matter, the creation and the individual are one and the same; they are essentially non-different and this fact resolves the one into the other.

Now, since matter is inert and unconscious, it doesn't make sense that it arranged itself into a creation. Thus, the existence of a conscious, intelligent creator is inferred. So right after determining the oneness of the creation and the individual, you arrive at another duality: the creator and the creation. To reconcile the two, the text explains the nature of the creator, *Isvara*, and the creation/individual, the *jiva*.

ISVARA

The self in association with *maya* is called *Isvara*.

Although *maya* contains all of the knowledge and power needed to create, that knowledge and power is useless without consciousness. This is why it is said that the creator, *Isvara*, is *maya* associated with the self. So the non-dual actionless self can't create without *maya* and *maya* can't create without the conscious self.

Most of the time, *maya* and *Isvara* are used synonymously. But sometimes *Isvara* is referred to as the self in association with *sattva* alone, the idea being that *Isvara* is the total knowledge and skill required to create and *rajas* and *tamas* are two powers it wields, similar to the way an artist wields his abilities. And like an artist is non-separate from, but unaffected by his abilities, *Isvara* is non-separate from, but unaffected by *rajas* and *tamas*. Why make this distinction? Because *rajas* projects and *tamas* conceals. They are responsible for self-ignorance and all its effects. And since self-ignorance holds sway over *jivas* and not *Isvara*, this distinction needs to be made to show that *Isvara* is neither self-ignorant nor responsible for the negative behavior that stems from self-ignorance.

But this is a technical issue. In general, *Isvara* can be thought of as the intelligence that creates and sustains the creation as well as the creation itself. A common example is a spider because a spider is both the intelligence that creates its web as well as the substance of the web itself. However, unlike the spider that can detach itself from its web, *Isvara* is never separate from its creation because it *is* the creation. So an even broader way to think of *Isvara* is as the external and internal world that you find yourself in. In this way, *Isvara* is just whatever you are experiencing at any given time, as well as the creator and sustainer of that experience. And because this *Isvara* is *maya*, it is *mithya*.

THE JIVA

This reflection of the self (in the subtle body) which ignorantly identifies with the gross body is called the *jiva*. The *jiva*, without proper inquiry, thinks itself to be different from *Isvara*.

Essentially, the *jiva* is a conscious embodied being. But since the body and mind are unconscious matter, how can this be? It's because the subtle body can 'reflect' consciousness from the self, similar to the way the moon—which has no light of its own—reflects the light of the sun. The reflection of consciousness makes it possible for the ego, an unconscious thought of individuality and ownership, to claim the body and mind as itself, creating the apparent individual. The reflection of the self, the ego, the mind and body—the *jiva*—are *mithya*.

***Isvara* is the self in association with *maya*. The *jiva* is the self in association with ignorance. Owing to the difference in their limiting adjuncts (*maya* and ignorance respectively), it is falsely concluded that there is an actual difference between *Isvara* and the *jiva*.**

A limiting adjunct (*upadhi*) is something that superimposes its attributes onto the self which has no attributes. A good illustration is water in a green glass, water being the self and the glass being the limiting adjunct. When the water is associated with the glass, it takes on the appearance of being green and cylindrical when it's actually formless and colorless.

In the same way, when the self is associated with the limiting adjuncts of *maya* and ignorance it appears to be *Isvara* and *jiva* respectively, even though it is really formless consciousness. Now, in the example of the water and the glass, the water and the glass are separate objects that exist independently of each other. But this doesn't apply in the case of *Isvara*, *jiva* and the self. Both *Isvara* and *jiva* are *mithya*, which is non-separate from and dependent on *satya*, the self. And since *Isvara* and *jiva* are *mithya*, their 'association' with the self is also *mithya*. There is no actual association, only the appearance of one.

Samsara, the continuous suffering caused by identification with the body and mind, persists as long as this incorrect conclusion remains. Therefore, the conclusion of difference between the *jiva* and *Isvara* is not to be accepted.

Suffering persists until the non-difference of *jiva* and *Isvara* is comprehended, or in other words, until the truth of non-duality is clear. Understanding what the self is, why you are the self, and why the individual, creator, and creation are you—but you are free of them—is freedom. But how can this be done? The concluding argument is now given.

HOW CAN THERE BE NON-DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE JIVA AND ISVARA?

The great statement “You are that” reveals the identity between the *jiva* and *Isvara*. This identity is not obvious because the *jiva* has limited knowledge and power and is possessed of an ego, while *Isvara* has all knowledge and power and is devoid of ego. So how can there be non-difference between the two when they have different qualities?

This is how the statement “You are that” is to be understood: The literal meaning of the word “you” is the *jiva*, who owing to ignorance is identified with the gross and subtle bodies. The implied meaning of the word “you” is the self, the one who is free from the limiting adjunct of ignorance. Similarly, the literal meaning of the word “that” is *Isvara*, the one who is endowed with all knowledge and power. The implied meaning of the word “that” is the self that is free from the limiting adjunct of *maya*.

Thus, the *jiva* and *Isvara* are non-different as the self.

The conclusion is simple: both the *jiva* and *Isvara*—or ignorance and *maya*—are *mithya*, which isn’t real. And there can’t be a real difference between two unreal objects. Another way to look at it is this: If both *jiva* and *Isvara* are *mithya*, and *mithya* depends on the self to apparently exist, *mithya* can only be *satya*, the self, similar to the way a clay pot can only be clay. As a single clay pot and the totality of all clay pots are completely non-different as clay, *jiva* and *Isvara* are completely non-different as the self.

Since you are the self, the *jiva* and *Isvara* are you. But just as clay is always unaffected by and free from the clay pots it appears to be, you are always unaffected by and free from the *jiva* and *Isvara* that you appear to be. They are *mithya* and can only ever be you, but you can never be them because you are *satya*: non-dual, independently existent, unchanging, eternal, limitless consciousness. When this knowledge is clear and doubt-free, it is *moksha*.

LIBERATED WHILE LIVING

Those who, through the teachings of Vedanta and the instruction of the teacher, understand that they are the self are set free, here and now, from the cycle of *samsara*.

Before self-knowledge there is the firm conclusion that, “I am merely the body and mind. I am inadequate, limited, subject to suffering and death.” But after self-knowledge the one who is liberated while living has the firm, abiding, immediate understanding (not dependent on sensory perception) that, “I am not the body and mind. Rather, my nature is existence, consciousness and limitlessness. I am eternal, unchanging, whole and complete. I am non-dual, so while there appears to be a world, in reality there is only me.”

Self-knowledge is a permanent solution, available in this very life, to the problem of suffering. By showing you that you are free of the body, mind and all of its experiences, you are freed from all of the problems of the body and mind, such as change, suffering and death.

By saying that self-knowledge is immediate, the text is pointing out that it doesn't depend on perception or thought. In other words, you don't have to see, taste, touch, smell, hear or think about the self to know that it exists and that you are it. The nature of the self is consciousness and consciousness is self-evident, not requiring any external media to be known. If self-knowledge did depend on perception, thought or even the maintenance of a particular action, it would be temporary, and thus not freedom.

THREE TYPES OF KARMA

By the immediate understanding, “I am the self,” one is totally freed from the three types of karma: *agami*, *sanchita* and *prarabdha*. Thus, the one with self-knowledge crosses the ocean of *samsara* and appreciates the limitlessness of their own nature in this very life.

Karma is any action, mental or physical, as well as the results of those actions. It can be positive or negative. Karma performed with the mistaken notion, “I am the doer” is called *agami* and it contributes to *sancita karma*, your total karmic account. *Sancita karma* remains unmanifest until the appropriate time comes for it to fructify. The karma which has been withdrawn from this account in order to create your current body, circumstances and life, is called *prarabdha karma*.

The firm understanding, “I am the self” negates the false notion that you are the doer of karma or the one who reaps its results. With no notion of doership to claim the performance of karma and no notion of enjoyership to receive the results, your *sancita* and *agami karma* is destroyed. Because when there is no longer an owner of the karmic account—meaning you no longer identify with it—there is no way to make deposits (*agami*) or receive

withdrawals (*prarabdha*).

However, the *prarabdha karma*, which has already been set in motion, still has to play out until the body dies. But this isn't a problem for those with self-knowledge because they understand that they are the ever-free, unaffected self, not the body and mind. Therefore, the details of the life of the body and mind and the circumstances of its death no longer have any particular significance. In this way, those with self-knowledge cross the ocean of *samsara*.

Thus ends *Tattvabodha*, the knowledge of truth.

OM TAT SAT

ENGLISH TO SANSKRIT GLOSSARY

Ability to focus on a given topic – *samadhana*

All-consuming desire for freedom (*moksha*) – *mumukshutwa*

Assimilation of the teachings of Vedanta - *nididhyasana*

Bliss – *ananda*

Beginningless self-ignorance – *avidya*

Bliss sheath – *anandamaya kosha*

Capacity to endure difficult situations – *titiksha*

Causal body – *karana sharira*

Composure of mind – *shama*

Consciousness – *chit*

Contemplation on the teachings of Vedanta – *manana*

Control of the senses – *dama*

Deep sleep state – *sushupti avastha*

Dependently existent; neither truly existent nor non-existent – *mithya*

Discrimination – *viveka*

Dispassion – *vairagya; viraga*

Dream state – *swapna avastha*

Dreamer; Dream state entity – *tajjasa*

Ego – *ahamkara*

Eternal – *nitya*

Evolution of the elements from their subtle to gross forms – *panchikarana*

Existence–Consciousness–Bliss (the nature of the self) – *sat-chit-ananda*

Five elements – *pancha mahabhutas*

Five sheaths – *pancha kosha*

Food sheath – *annamaya kosha*

Four-Fold qualifications – *sadhana chatustayam*

Freedom/Liberation – *moksha*

Gross body – *sthula sharira*

Gross elements - *mahabhutas*

Identity of *jiva* and *Isvara* – *isvara-jiva-aikyam*

Independently existent in the past, present and future – *sat; satya*

Inner instrument – *antahkarana*

Intellect – *buddhi*

Intellect sheath – *vijnanamaya kosha*

Individual; embodied being – *jiva*

Karma – action and its results

Karma (done in this life) – *agami karma*

Karma (that fructifies to create current birth) – *prarabdha karma*

Karma (total account) – *sanchita karma*

Knowledge – *jnanam; vidya; bodha*

Knowledge; skill – *sattva*, one of the three *gunas*

Knowledge not from people – *aparaushayjnanam*

Liberated while living – *jivanmukti*

Limitlessness – *Ananta*

Listening to the teachings of Vedanta – *shravana*

Material; substance; veiling power – *tamās*, one of the three *gunas*

Memory – *chitta*

Mind – *manas*

Mind sheath – *manomaya kosha*

Not-self – *anatma*

Observance of one's own duty – *uparama*

Open minded trust in the teacher and teaching – *shraddha*

Organs of action – *karma indriyas*

Organs of knowledge – *jñāna indriyas*

Pleasure – *kāma*

Power; energy; power of projection – *rajas*, one of the three *gunas*

Power that makes the non-dual self appear as a duality – *māya*

Quality; rope - *guṇa*

Self – *ātma*; *ātman*; *brahman*

Self in association with *māya* ; the creator- *Īśvara*

Self-inquiry – *ātma vichara*

Self-knowledge – *ātma bodha*; *ātma jñānam*; *ātma vidya*; *tattva bodha*; *tattva jñānam*

Six-fold accomplishments – *śamadi-shatka-sampatīh*

Sleeper; Sleep state entity – *prajña*

Subtle body – *sūkshma sharira*

Subtle elements - *tanmatras*

Three bodies – *sharira traya*

Three states – *avastha traya*

Vital air; breath; physiological function – *prana*

Vital air sheath – *pranamaya kosha*

Virtue; moral conduct – *dharma*

Waker; Waking state entity – *vishwa*

Waking state – *jagrat avastha*

Wealth; security – *artha*

Witness (referring to the self as the witness of objects) – *sakshin*