

# **THE NONDUALITY PAGE**

**A Collection of Articles on Nonduality**

**by Swami Abhayananda**

**Published in the Public Domain 4-6-21**

**(last revised: 8-19-23)**

## **-Table of Contents-**

- 1. Nonduality**
- 2. Advaita: Experience or Understanding?**
- 3. Fundamentals of Existence**
- 4. Maya**
- 5. Nonduality In The Teachings of Jesus**
- 6. The Philosophy of Nondualism**

# 1. NONDUALITY

## by Swami Abhayananda

### Published in the Public Domain 3-12-18

### (last revised 8-19-23)

*Nonduality is generally associated with the Indian philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, but Nonduality is in fact the universal hallmark of the unitive mystical experience known to the mystical seers of every culture.*

#### **I. Introduction To Nonduality**

The Sanskrit word, *advaita*, is usually translated as "nonduality;" but it is more literally translatable as "not two." Advaita is the statement that in this entire universe there is but *one* thing, one Being, one living entity. Ordinarily, we imagine that there are *two* things: a universal Spirit *and* the world of material form. But Adaita Vedanta declares that there is only one thing: call it God, call It Brahman, call it Allah, call It the divine Self. The one Reality is in fact undivided. There are not two, but only One.

From the most ancient of days, men have divided reality into two realms: (1) the eternally transcendent God, and (2) His material Creation. We do not see the transcendent God, and yet we see His handiwork, the material Creation. And so, it is only natural that we think of God as being somewhere else, far above us, as a king is above his subjects. Since ancient times, when primitive men roamed the earth, God has been regarded as a transcendent overlord, separate from this world and its creatures, who dwells in some distant yet ever-present heavenly realm. But what marvelous news! When He finally lifts the veil and reveals Himself to man, God is seen to be all-pervasive! He is seen to be the very fabric of one's being, the sole Identity of everyone. It is this knowledge that illumined Jesus, prompting him to declare 'I and the Father are one!' This was not the result of Jesus' supposedly unique paternity, nor was it some wild fantasy by which Jesus was deluded; it was the realization of the hidden truth by which Jesus became enlightened!

To a devoted person who calls out lovingly to His God, it is not immediately apparent that he himself is a manifestation of God; but when God reveals Himself within, that person knows his own deathless Self, his own oneness with God, and knows that nothing else exists in this world but that One. God has spread Himself

out as this vast universe, and He is immediately present as our own inner Consciousness. God is the life that lives you; He flows through that life in every breath. He is the joy that thrills your soul, and He is the sweet awareness of being that fills you. Remember Him and praise Him in every thought and word and know every moment that He is manifest as you, that He is your own divine Self.

The mystical experience, in which the perceiving subject and the Divine object of perception are experienced as one, brings with it a unique perspective on the metaphysical foundation of existence, a perspective that is not afforded to those who have not *experienced* this divine revelation. That unique perspective is one of *direct* perception, unmitigated by the rational speculation of an individual's mind. The metaphysics revealed to the mystics in that direct perception is similarly described in nearly every case of genuine mystical experience. Invariably, the Divine Reality is described by the mystic as nondual; that is, the Divine Reality is seen to be one contiguous whole, without any divisions.

That Divine Reality is realized to be universal Consciousness, the invisible Spirit, or Mind, that contains and pervades everything everywhere. That Spirit, in Its "Creator" aspect, periodically produces an immense radiance, or Light, which rapidly transforms into 'material' wave-particles that become the elemental constituents of a substantial universe of stars, planets, and conscious, living beings, including ourselves. That spreading Light produces not only 'Matter', but produces, through its very expansion, those dimensions that we call 'time' and 'space.' The invisible Spirit thereby takes on the aspect of visible substance, becoming the limitless universe. And so, we see that the all-inclusive Reality that we call 'God' has two complementary aspects: It is *both* the all-pervading Consciousness, or Spirit, *and* It is the Creative Power by which the manifest Light-forms that constitute the universe are produced from Itself.

## II. Tale of The Two In One

The Divine Consciousness that we call "God" has always been. As an invisible Spirit, He is unborn and unending. But periodically, He manifests from Himself a universe of form in order to live multiple embodied lives within that multiformed universe. And, since He is the only Existence, if there is to be a universe of form, it must be produced *from* Himself. God periodically takes form by manifesting His own Energy in the form of a concentrated radiation of high-frequency light. By God's power, as that light spreads, it transforms into material wave-particles, which congregate into molecular forms that then become the many diverse structures that go to make up the physical universe. This majestic universe continues to exist for billions and billions of years, after which it returns to the Divine Light-Energy of the One from which it came. Then, in a time of His own

choosing, that Divine Being once again manifests His form-bearing Light as a multiform universe.<sup>1</sup>

But did you ever wonder how God, who is famous as the universal all-pervading Spirit, or Consciousness, also manages to create, or manifest, an immense universe of 'material' forms? It seems incongruous, doesn't it? He is Spirit, yet He produces, organizes, and reorganizes an incredible amount of Mass/Energy. These two qualitative definitions of Divinity seem to be distinctly contradictory to one another, presenting a perplexing conundrum that has baffled philosophers and theologians for many millennia. The solution to the conundrum that has surfaced in many different cultures throughout history is the recognition that God, though one, possesses two distinctly different aspects: He is the eternal Mind that serves as the absolute Ground of Consciousness in which all objects and beings are contained; *and* He is the Creative Power that produces an electromagnetic field of Energy that is capable of transforming itself into material wave-particles, which particles then aggregate into the elements and forces that go to make up the entire universe of objects and beings.

An eternal Being who possesses two separate and distinct aspects seems a bit fantastic, to be sure; but that is the conclusion reached by nearly everyone who has deeply pondered this question—including those, like myself, who have been graced with mystical vision. In that divine revelation, it is clearly revealed that the one Being constitutes both one's body and one's soul, both one's mind and one's 'physical' substance. There is seen to be only one existent, one contiguous reality identified as 'I', and yet It is both the conscious Spirit and the Energy that becomes Matter, i.e., both soul and body. To give human expression to this duality-in-unity for the purpose of rendering It comprehensible, these two—the invisible Spirit and the form-producing Energy—have been given many different names over the centuries, such as *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, *Brahman* and *Maya*, *Shiva* and *Shakti*, *Jahveh* and *Chokmah*, *Haqq* and *Khalq*, *Theos* and *Logos*, *Godhead* and *Creator*, and many other names.

Here, however, we will continue to call them "Spirit" and "Energy", noting that the Energy is born of the Spirit, belongs to the Spirit, and that, therefore, the Spirit and Its Energy were never divided, were never two, but are simply two complementary aspects of the one Divine Self we call God. It is also important to note that it is that One as Energy, who becomes our body, and it is that One as Spirit, who becomes our soul. It is clearly evident, therefore, that we are, from head to foot, inwardly and outwardly, nothing else but God; that, in accord with His omnipotent will, God is indeed living an embodied life within a multiformed universe *as us*. Isn't that awesome and marvelous!

**NOTE:**

1. That “concentrated radiation of Light” last occurred around fourteen billion years ago and is known today in retrospect as “The Great Radiance” or “The Big Bang”. That high-frequency electromagnetic energy that we call “Light,” which is convertible into matter in accord with Einstein’s formula:  $e=mc^2$ , thus became material wave-particles congregating as atoms and molecules, and thereby became the substance of this vast universe of forms.

**III. Oneness**

In ancient India, the one Divine Reality was called, in a Sanskrit phrase, *Chit-Shakti Vilas*, “the play of Consciousness-Energy.” This phrase, “*Chit-Shakti*,” is an interesting one, in that it stands for the one Reality, and yet it is made up of two words: *Chit* (“Consciousness”) and *Shakti* (“Energy.”) These are the two aspects of Reality with which we have become familiar as Spirit and Energy, Godhead and Creator, *Shiva* and *Shakti*, *Brahman* and *Maya*, *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, *Theos* and *Logos*, etc. *Chit*, or Consciousness, is in other contexts referred to as *Shiva*, the absolute and formless aspect, the transcendent Godhead; and *Shakti*, or Energy, is the creative aspect of that one Consciousness which manifests as the multi-formed universe. They are one, but they appear to be two. The two are but complementary aspects of the same one indivisible Truth.

These two complimentary aspects are frequently symbolized as Male and Female. He—i.e., the masculine aspect of God—is the world-transcending Absolute. He is the pure and stainless Consciousness, and He is also the source of the world-manifesting Creative Energy. He is the eternal One, beyond all dualities, and beyond all conception. He is known by those to whom He reveals Himself as the Unmanifest. But this stainless Consciousness possesses a Creative Power. And with that Power It periodically produces an Energy that manifests as a universe of time, space, and material forms. That Power of manifestation could be characterized as the Breath of God, which is periodically exhaled and then inhaled back again. Between the contraction and re-expansion of this universal manifestation, there is a period of stillness, in which God’s manifestory Power remains in a potential state within Himself. This manifestory Power, this Matter-producing faculty, is often regarded as the Female aspect of God. It is the creative movement that arises within the Absolute Mind, and it is also everything that this creative movement produces. Within this creative production, which we call the universe, these two aspects of God are given expression as creatures formed as male and female.

Though a universe of form is made manifest by this (Female) Power, He (the Source) never becomes anything other than the eternally pure Consciousness. Just

as the human consciousness (which is derived from the one pure Consciousness) remains unaffected by the millions of thoughts that pass across its face, or as the pure sky remains unaffected by the myriads of clouds that drift through it, that pure Consciousness produces a vast universe of Thought-forms, and yet remains in Himself unchanged, unmoved. Just as the human consciousness witnesses in full awareness the play of thoughts as they arise and disperse within it, so does He witness in full awareness the universal play in all its detailed convolutions. And as the human consciousness constitutes human thoughts, being the source and witness of those thoughts, so does He live in His creative exuberance of universal Thought-Energy. This exuberance is His own. It has no existence apart from Him; He is its Soul and substance. He is the all-pervading Eternal Consciousness (the "Father"), and He is the creative Power of manifestation (the "Mother"), just as we human "images" of God contain the same two aspects to our being. And so, the One Reality is both Male and Female, both God and Goddess, both *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, both *Chit* (or *Shiva*) and *Shakti*, both body and soul.

Jnaneshvar, the thirteenth century Indian sage, described these two as interdependent:

"The Shakti cannot live without her Lord, and without her, He (Shiva, the absolute Consciousness) cannot appear. Since He appears because of Her, and She exists because of her Lord, the two cannot be distinguished at all. Sugar and its sweetness cannot be told apart, nor camphor and its fragrance. If we have the flame, we have the fire as well; if we catch hold of Shakti, we have Shiva also.

"... Shiva and Shakti are the same, like air and its motion, or gold and its luster. Fragrance cannot be separated from the musk, nor heat from fire; neither can Shakti be separated from Shiva."<sup>1</sup>

The whole world of apparent phenomena is the manifestation of the Shakti (Energy) of Shiva (God, the Spirit). Shiva is our innermost consciousness, our very Self; and Shakti, therefore, is our own creative power, our power of will. Shakti, by its very existence, creates an apparent duality in That which is one. From this original duality comes the duality of seer and seen, or subject and object. It is because of this apparent duality, this imaginary division in the One, that the world-appearance continues to exist.

Nonetheless, the truth of the matter is that it is one Being, and one Being alone, who is playing all the roles; He is the Director, the stage Manager, the actors, and the scenery. He is the stage, and He is the audience of this play as well. He is in all cases the Subject and He is in all cases the Object. There is nothing outside of God. This is brought out in the story of the egoistic king who asked his Minister, "Who is greater, me or God?" And the wise Minister replied, "You are, O

King! For you can banish anyone from your kingdom, but God can never banish anyone from His kingdom.”

It is not possible to step outside of God’s kingdom. The only thing that really *is* is that one Being; He is both the unchanging Absolute, the Unity, and the Creator of the world-appearance as well. He is both Shiva and Shakti. For, as we’ve seen, you can’t have one without the other; they form an inseparable unit. And so, the question, “Who am I?” is readily answered: “I am the one Reality. I am *Chit-Shakti*, and all this is my play!” It is, of course, important to experience this truth; but it’s perhaps just as important to truly understand it and to make this knowledge a part of one’s being. This is not just philosophy or theorizing. It is very important to fully comprehend this; otherwise, who knows what you might imagine yourself to be? Perhaps you will regard yourself as only some weak and insignificant creature!

Because the final and ultimate Truth is unity, is oneness, all talk of duality is misleading. But, in our very good intentions of making the truth understandable to others, we like to describe the dual aspects of the One in order to explain the relationship between the Transcendent and the Immanent, the Absolute and the Relative, the Unity and the Diversity. And from there we go on to delineate all the limbs and subtle layers, and so forth; and before we know what has happened, we’re immersed once again in the swamp of multiplicity.

The initial conceptual division of the One into two (*Purusha-Prakrti, Brahman-Maya, Chit-Shakti*, etc.) is the intellectually tempting pathway leading into this swamp. And almost every mystical philosopher and metaphysician finds himself beguiled by the apparent usefulness of exploring this pathway. But, since the ultimate Truth is unity, and always unity, we are much better off adhering bulldoggedly to One and only One, without allowing for the slightest admission of duality or mention of even an *apparent* division in It. For this reason, the author of the Biblical book of Second Isaiah, as a counter to those who would dissect reality into good and evil, Jehovah and Satan, Light and Darkness, put these words in the mouth of God: “I am the one Lord; there is no other beside Me. I form the light and create the darkness; I make peace and create evil. I, the one Lord, do all these things.”

Let’s look for a moment, from the historical perspective, and see what happens when we begin dabbling with “two-ness.” In the *Yajurveda*, we find the statement, “The One becomes the many by Its own inherent power.” This seems innocent enough. Everyone can see that “Its own inherent power” is not an entity separate from the One; it is just an inherent quality. A little later, however, we find in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, “Brahman projects the universe through the power of His Maya. Then He becomes entangled in that universe of Maya. Know,

then, that the world is Maya, and that the great God is the Lord of Maya.”

Uh oh! Now, we have established a definite pair! Here, we have the Lord *and* His Maya. From the smallest seed, duality has sprung up as a full tree of contention. We have forgotten that “Maya” simply refers to His “inherent power” of manifestation, and we have begun to see “the Lord” and “His power” as two separate and distinct entities. Do you not see how craftily and insidiously this imaginary separation has taken place? Once you have a “Lord,” you have a “servant” as well.

By the time of the *Bhagavad Gita*, this dualism has taken a firm hold on the mind. We hear Krishna saying, in the 13th chapter, to Arjuna: “He sees truly who sees that all actions are performed by *Prakrti*, and that *Purusha* is actionless.” Now, this is a very useful concept for understanding that one’s eternal Self remains constant, inactive, and unchanged, even while one’s body and mind engages in actions; but a split is being established which will prove to be very difficult to patch up again.

Shankaracharya, the great Nondualist Indian philosopher and sage of the seventh or eighth century C.E., though quite aware of their underlying unity, describes the two divine aspects in such a way as to widen the division between them. He says:

“Maya... is the power of the Lord. It is she who brings forth this universe. She is neither real nor unreal, nor partaking of both characteristics; neither the same as the Lord, nor different, nor both; neither composed of parts nor an indivisible whole nor both. She is most wonderful and cannot be described in words.” 2

Now, let’s look at what’s happened so far: The Lord emanates the universe by His inherent Power. And suddenly, we are saying that He is real, but the universe and the Lord’s Power by which the universe exists are both unreal! Can we say that the Sun is real, but its rays are unreal? No; of course not. But let’s not be unfair to Shankaracharya; it should be perfectly clear that he was merely pointing out that the Godhead, the formless Absolute, is *eternally* real, while the manifestation known as “the universe” is only *temporarily* real. And, to this, we all agree. But can we say that the Lord’s inherent “Power of manifestation” is also only temporarily real? No. His Power, His *Shakti*, His *Maya*, though it may indeed become inactive and dormant, is co-eternal with Shiva; it is inherent. It is never something separate or independent of the Lord, any more than wetness can be thought of as separate or independent of water, or any more than the power to think can be thought of as independent of the mind. He, the Lord, and She, His Power, were never divided, were never two; and only confusion can result by allowing this mistaken impression to stand.

It was with just such an objection to Shankara's descriptive language that, in the 9th and 10th centuries, the authors of the literature of Kashmir Shaivism began to rephrase and reformulate their own philosophy of Unity. As we shall see, however, there is really no satisfactory solution to the problem of expressing in language That which exceeds the capabilities of language. In every time, in every culture, the seers of the One have attempted to explain in a satisfactory way the fact that the universe is God, and yet is not God; that He is eternal, and yet lives in the temporal; that He is forever unchanging, and yet is manifest as the ever-changing universe.

Jnaneshvar, in the 13th century, likewise felt impelled to object to the language of Shankara, and to attempt to do away with such concepts as "Maya," and "superimposition." In his *Amritanubhav*, he says:

"When it is always only the one pure Consciousness seeing Itself, why postulate the necessity of a superimposition? ... By His very nature, He *is* whatever He sees. Whatever form appears, appears because of Him. There is nothing else here but the Self.

"... In the current of the river or the waves of the sea, there is nothing but water. Similarly, in the universe, nothing else exists besides the Self.

"... Therefore, whether He is the seer or the seen, it doesn't matter; there is only the Self vibrating everywhere." 3

Again, in his *Changadev Pasashti*, Jnaneshvar says: "Only Oneness is real. All else is a dream!" 4 And yet, we must ask the question, "What all else?" And the answer can only be, "the appearance of multiplicity!" And this, of course, is precisely what Shankara had said: "Only Brahman is real; the world (the appearance of multiplicity) is illusory." So, you see, it is not possible to solve this question of how to talk about the (apparent) duality in Unity. That is why, in India, there are so many authentic schools of mystical thought. There is the *Advaita*, or Nondualism of Shankara; there is the *Dvaita*, or Dualist, school of Madhva; there is the *Vishishtadvaita*, or Qualified Nondualism of Ramanuja. All speak the truth, and yet each sees the Truth a little bit differently. But that's okay. The built-in ambiguity of language demands alternate expressions. Still, the ultimate Truth, the final Reality, known by the seers, is One without a second. All duality is apparent only. This reality in which we live is simply the "Play of Consciousness and Energy" (*Chit-Shakti Vilas*), and these two are ultimately One.

So much for correct understanding! It is necessary to pass beyond understanding if we are to *experience* the joy of Unity, the bliss of God. This Bliss is not attained by engaging the mind in trying to comprehend the nature of God—though this has

its place, of course. The bliss of God is attained only through devotion. Devotion is love, and it leaves the intellect far behind; in fact, devotion is possible only through the abandonment of the pride of intellect. It is more akin to the longing of a child for its mother than to the ratiocination of the adult. Devotion begins with the awareness of one's utter dependency upon God for everything, and an open upturning of one's mind and inner gaze to the Source of all mind and all vision. We engage our minds so often in circuitous analysis and repetitious thought-patterns. Far better would it be if we could build into our minds the thought-pattern of calling on God for our succor and support. He is capable of filling the mind and body with ecstasy and light, and of setting our minds at peace in perfect understanding. All that is required is a pure and innocent heart, and a simple and steady regard to Him for all our satisfaction and reward.

As the mind becomes steady and one-pointed on God, all questions become answered automatically. A mind at peace is a mind illumined by Truth. Let there be an apparent duality between you and your Lord! But keep on trying to close the gap through love. Talk to Him. Pray to Him. Give all your life and love to Him. And the God within you will manifest the more as you become engrossed in Him. You become what you meditate on; so, meditate on God. Regard Him as the only Reality and become as a moth dancing about His flame. Yearn to be immersed in His perfect light, His perfect love, and He will draw you into Himself and make you know your eternal oneness with Him.

### Meditation

The Latin phrase, *E Pluribus Unum*, is the motto of our country. It means, "Of many, one." But it would be closer to the truth to say, "Of One, many." This simple formula explains everything we need to know about the Reality in which we live. For, just as the one white light is refracted to appear as the entire spectrum of colors in a rainbow, so does the one undivided Existence appear as a multitude of forms. Just as a sunflower blossom spreads out its many tender petals, so God spreads Himself out into this variously formed creation. Just as the ocean raises up from itself a tossing surface of countless waves, so the ocean of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss raises up from Itself countless individual forms of life from shore to shore.

In every single form the One alone exists; it is He alone who lives in every life. However wise, however foolish, however attractive, however repulsive—the tiger and the scorpion, the spider and the snake—all is His Life, playing in a million fantastic forms. And we, children of His mind, images projected from His light upon Himself, wander here and there upon His screen, playing out our roles, forgetful of the One in whose dance of Light we live. But when we turn within, behold! We discover as our very essence that One who lives as many, the heart and soul of all that lives, the blissful God whose life and breath we are.

**NOTES:**

1. *Jnaneshvar: The Life And Works of The Celebrated 13th Century Indian Mystic-Poet, Amritanubhav*: I:21-24, 41, 42; Swami Abhayananda, Olympia, Wash., Atma Books, 1989, p. 116.
2. Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*, III:7; Prabhavananda, & Isherwood, Vedanta Press, Hollywood, California, 1947, 1978, p. 49.
3. Jnaneshvar, *Amritanubhav*, 7:165, 233, 235, 237, 244; *Ibid.*, 1989, pp. 186, 193-195.
4. Jnaneshvar, *Changadev Pasashti*, 25; *Ibid.*, 1989, p. 240.

**IV. The Apparent Duality**

If we think carefully and accurately, we must eventually conclude that God constitutes everything that exists. That being understood, it must also be understood that He exists in two different modes or aspects: He is the ultimate Reality, the Divine Mind, the one conscious Spirit—formless, invisible, and eternal, who exists as the conscious Self within all of us; and He is *also* the Creator who periodically projects His own Light-Energy that becomes the material particles that form the substance of the phenomenal universe in which we live.

So, the nondual Reality produces within Itself an apparent duality: it is a duality between the one conscious Spirit and the world of Matter. This apparent duality of Spirit and Matter is reiterated in the perceived duality of body and soul constituting our being; but we must remember that both of these dualities are apparent only. God is both soul and body, both the invisible Spirit and the 'material' universe. He exists in two different modes; He has two different aspects: He is the eternal Spirit, the absolute Ground that constitutes our conscious Self; and He is *also* the Originator of the Light-Energy projected fourteen billion years ago that gives form and 'material' substance to our world. So, while these two modes or aspects exist separately and independently, they are *both* God, they are both eternal. The appearance of the material world with all its forms is indeed transient: it has a beginning and an end; but the Light-Energy of which it is constituted is nonetheless eternal. For, since the multi-formed appearance that is the material universe is eventually dissolved back into the pure Light of God of which it was made, that Light-Energy itself, by virtue of its divine nature, lives eternally in God.

I would like to propose a simple remedy to the confusion that often arises when discussing the nonduality that underlies the apparent duality: The one Spirit, the Divine Mind or Supreme Self, is to be regarded as "God I"; and the Light-Energy that constitutes the material world is to be regarded as "God II". I feel that, with

the implementation of this terminology, confusion will not arise, and it will become clear that there is only God I and God II, and that it is to be recognized hereafter that God, in His dual aspects, constitutes everything that exists.<sup>1</sup>

**NOTE:**

1. I can't help thinking that, had Descartes truly understood that Mind and Body are both constituted of God, he would have found the solution to his Cartesian duality in the realization that the nondual One, while appearing to us to be a duality, is, *in Himself*, a single unified and integrated reality. This fact is not known through reason but is realized and subjectively confirmed in the mystical vision, for, as a soul experiences itself as the all-inclusive Divinity, it knows no distinction between its form and its essence, its body and its mind; for, then, all is in fact experienced as the one indivisible Self.

## V. The I Between Us

When I first discovered that God was within me, and that everything in the world around me was also God, it still seemed to me that, between the God within and the God without, there existed an '*I*' that separated me out from that unified reality. I felt as though I was a pitcher of water in an ocean of water: there was water within and water without, but *I*, the pitcher, was there as a separate thing preventing my unitive awareness of God. And I prayed that God would take away this *I* that veiled His omnipresence and let me know oneness in Him.

And suddenly, I was graced by God with the revelation that even this body, and even this *I*, is God's own. It had been my owning of this *I* that prevented my realization that there is nothing anywhere but God. He creates the forms of this world, and He constitutes our awareness of this world. It is we who make the mistake of thinking that this body and this awareness of *I* belongs exclusively to ourselves, thus wrongly separating our perception of *I* from God.

This obscured perception is a blindness within us that tends us toward self-preference; we call it the *ego*, or 'I'. It is a blindness that is built-in to provide self-protection, self-preservation, and individual responsibility. But it also tends to blind us to the vision of God's all-encompassing presence, and it can only be healed with the help of God's grace. He reveals through divine vision that the One constitutes both *I* and God, both past and future, both life and death; and that all things move together of one accord, coordinated in God. It is this vision that rids us of the blindness under which we suffered for so long.

But beware! For this blindness—this *ego*—will continue to rise up in its attempt to corrupt your sight once again. At every corner, it awaits the opportunity to subtly

reassert itself and leave you once again in darkness and confusion. Your only weapons against this enemy are silence and humility, and a constant diligence to remember the One in whom you exist and by whom you are fashioned. Sing His name in your heart to remind you and rely on His help in your need. He will illumine your blindness, and restore you to sight, and eventually He will uplift you to wholeness in the sweetness of His eternal Light. There, no ego will threaten; there, you'll need not struggle to remember. His peace and yours will be the same, all duality put behind.

## VI. What Is The Ego?

The human ego is a very elusive entity. This is because it is an invisible constituent of your interior belief system. It is your firm confidence that you are an individual being, that you have an independent will, and that you are *the doer* of what is done in and through you. That is the ego (the I). It is what constitutes your individualized "soul," and prevents you from knowing your true Self, the one indivisible Spirit, or *Atman*. *Atman* is just another word for God, or *Brahman*, as He manifests in and as an individual person. The truth is that there is only God, or *Brahman*, everywhere. All souls are contained in God, and all that we souls experience is contained in Him.

The ego, therefore, is clearly an illusory identity. This illusory identity is established in us through the acquired belief that the experienced body/mind complex constitutes our individual identity and our sole being. Because the true source and foundation of our being, the indivisible Spirit, is invisible to us, we take the body/mind complex to be who we are. And we boast that "I (the false ego) am doing this," "I have done that," I can do whatever I choose." It is this very conceit, "I am the doer," that constitutes the ego. So long as that conceit exists in you, you are prevented from experiencing your true eternal Self.

Listen to what Sri Ramakrishna says about this:

"Under the spell of God's Maya, man forgets his true nature. He forgets that he is heir to the infinite glories of his Father. 1 Maya is nothing but the egotism of the embodied soul. This egotism has covered everything like a veil. All troubles come to an end when the ego dies. If, by the grace of God, a man but once realizes that he is not the doer, then he at once becomes a *jivanmukta* [a liberated being]. Though living in the body, he is liberated. He has nothing else to fear. 1

"'I' and 'mine'—that is ignorance. By discriminating, you will realize that what you call 'I' is really nothing but *Atman* [the Self]. Reason it out. Are you the body or the

flesh or something else? At the end, you will know that you are none of these. You are free from attributes. Then you will realize that you have never been the doer of any action, that you have been free from virtue and faults alike, that you are beyond righteousness and unrighteousness. 2

"You may try thousands of times, but nothing can be achieved without God's grace. One cannot see God without His grace. Is it an easy thing to receive the grace of God? One must altogether renounce egotism; one cannot see God as long as one feels 'I am the doer.' God doesn't easily appear in the heart of a man who feels himself to be his own master. But God can be seen the moment His grace descends. He is the Sun of Knowledge. One single ray of His has illumined the world with the light of knowledge. This is how we are able to see one another and acquire varied knowledge. One can see God only if He turns His light toward His own Face. 3

**NOTES:**

1 &2. Nikhilananda, Swami (trans.), *The Gospel Of Sri Ramakrishna*, N.Y., Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942; p. 328, p. 218, p. 181.

## VII. My Foundation

There is a universal 'I' at a deep subconscious level in this apparent 'me' that surfaces in its own time and is capable of producing creations that are beyond the power of this apparent 'me' to produce. That 'I' is divine and eternal, and It graces 'me' with Its presence in moments of its own choosing and has the ability to reveal a reality clearer and more true than this apparent 'me' can even imagine. It is this deeper and greater 'I' that is referred to by some as the inner soul or *atman*, the Divine, or the Christ within. That 'I' cannot be known unless He makes Himself known, but His influence may be recognized by His fruits.

Therefore, let it be known and understood by all who read the words I have posted here that whatever truth or clarity may be found herein is not of my own making, but is given by that divine Self as a favor to this suppliant soul for its eagerness to serve. No praise is due this eager soul, this apparent 'me', but all praise is due to that divine and eternal 'I' who has treated me so generously in allowing 'me' to be included among Its humble servants.

That one divine Self, eternal and undivided, does not truly consist of two beings: a servant and a Master, an 'I' and a 'Thou'; rather It is an indivisible Spirit—appearing as an individualized form in this manifest world as 'me', but operating *within* 'me'—as eternal Soul, a universal 'I'. At times I address that Spirit as "Thou", but He is my ground, my foundation, not separate, but

surrounding and encompassing 'me'. We are one, though, while the body persists, along with this *ego*, it seems that we are two.

### **VIII. Who Am I?**

Jesus famously said, "*Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me*" 1; and "*I and my Father are one.*" 2 He was answering the question of 'Who am I?' not only for himself, but for all of us. However, if I could put it more plainly, the simple truth is that there *is* no "me"; there's only God everywhere. The sense of a distinct being that is "me" is an illusion, made credible by long habitual belief. The consciousness that I regard as belonging to "me" is really His. The body that I regard as "my" body is really His; it is made entirely of His Light—even though that Light long ago transformed into 'material' wave-particles. Therefore, this body and all bodies are His. This mind and all minds are His. Where, then, is this "me" that takes credit for the thoughts and actions herein mysteriously produced? What I experience is really the mental and physical activity of God. Who, then, is this "I" that experiences? Remember that He alone is. Whether appearing as the subject or as the object, He alone is.3

### **NOTES:**

1. The Gospel of John, 14:11.
2. The Gospel of John, 10:30.
3. The sense of "I", or *ego*, which constitutes our individual soul, is a God-produced illusion that assures our individual culpability for our individual acts. The peculiar characteristics that make you who you are, and me who I am, are merely the distinctive modifications each of us makes to our individual minds over time in accord with our individual experiences. Those modifications become habitualized as karma and pass from one lifetime into another. It is only when we are made to know our absolute and eternal identity that we are able to free ourselves from the limiting bonds of karmic habit.

### **IX. Look Around You!**

Without any doubt, this world, this vast universe, is made *by* God, *of* God, and resides *in* God. For there is no other Reality but Him. God is the one all-inclusive Spirit, or Mind, in whom everything and everyone has its being. This truth has been clearly revealed through Grace to countless individual souls in an

enlightening inner vision. If there was something else—something other than Him, it is in that divine inner vision that we would learn of it. But it is there, in that divine revelation, that we learn that we are made of God-stuff, that there is nothing else! We learn that it is the One Great Mind who brings all to light, and that it is He in whom everything resides and of whom everything consists. There, by His Grace, we learn our oneness with Him. There, two-ness cannot even arise as an imagination. You will be happy to know that, by searching for Him within, you too can experience His Grace. You too can know Him as the one and only Reality and solve this great riddle of nonduality conclusively for yourself.

Look around you! Do you not see that every blade of grass is bursting with Consciousness? Do you not see that every chunk of gravel is alive with Consciousness? Do you not see how perfectly timed the planets move, how the Sun and moon tell the unveiling of the moments in your life? O what good fortune is this—to see with the eyes of the Divine, to bathe in the bliss of His living presence, to delight in the heavenly breezes wafting in the summer light! Look around you!

## X. Iraqi's Glimpses of Truth

In the search for the Divine, we all go through an initial process of reasoning. Once He reveals the truth, we become aware that all is God, and it becomes clear that there is no “me”. And we begin the process of clarifying our thinking about who we are. In the thirteenth century, there lived in Persia (modern day Iran) a man named Iraqi (1213-1289) who put his own thinking into verse in a poem called *Lama 'at* (“Glimpses”). Here are a few selected verses from that celebrated work. For more about Iraqi, see my *History of Mysticism*:

### Iraqi's Glimpses

Beloved, I sought You here and there,  
Asked for news of You from all I met.  
Then I saw You through myself,  
And found we were identical.  
Now I blush to think I ever searched  
For signs of You. 1

By day I praised You, but never knew it;  
By night I slept with You without realizing it,  
Fancying myself to be myself.  
But no, I was You and never knew it. 2

“O You who are so unbearably beautiful,  
 Whose beloved are You?” I asked.  
 “My own,” He replied,  
 “For I am one and one alone--  
 Love, lover, beloved, mirror, beauty, eye!” 3

I sought solitude with my loved one,  
 Yet find there is no one here but myself.  
 And if there were a “someone else,”  
 Then, truly, I should not have attained her. 4

When I clutched at His skirt,  
 I found His hand in my sleeve. 5

I am the one I love,  
 He whom I love is I.  
 Two, yet residing in a single body. 6

If I have become the Beloved,  
 Who is the lover?  
 Beloved, Love and lover—three in one,  
 There is no place for union here,  
 So, what is this talk of “separation?” 7

What He takes,  
 He takes with His own hand from Himself.  
 What He gives,  
 He gives from Himself to Himself. 8

Hunter, prey, bait, and trap;  
 Candle, candlestick, flame, and moth;  
 Beloved, lover, soul, and soul’s desire;  
 Inebriation, drinker, wine, and cup--  
 All is He! 9

Is it You or I—this reality in the eye?  
 Beware, beware of the word, “two.” 10

“I” and “You” have made of man a duality.  
 Without these words,  
 You are I and I am You. 11

He speaks.

He listens.

“You” and “I” are but a pretense. 12

When shall You and I divorce ourselves,  
So that “You” and “I” are gone,  
And only God remains? 13

If You are everything,  
Then, who are all these people?  
And if I am nothing,  
What’s all this noise about?  
You are the Totality.  
Everything is You. Agreed!  
Then, all that is “other-than-You”--  
What is it?  
Oh, indeed I know, nothing exists but You!  
But tell me, whence all this confusion? 14

He Himself speaks of Truth.  
He Himself listens.  
He Himself shows Himself.  
He Himself sees. 15

The world but seems to be,  
Yet it is only a blending of light and shade.  
Discern the meaning of this dream.  
Discriminate between time and Eternity.  
All is nothing, nothing.  
All is He. All is He. 16

Listen, riffraff: Do you want to be ALL?  
Then go, go and become nothing. 17

You are nothing when you wed the One.  
But, when you truly become nothing,  
You are everything. 18

Regard yourself as a cloud drifting before your Sun.  
Detach yourself from the senses,  
And behold your intimacy with the Sun. 19  
If you lose yourself on this path,  
Then you will know for sure:  
He is you, and you are He. 20

**NOTES:**

1. Chittock, W.C. & Wilson, Peter L. (trans.), *Fakhruddin Iraqi: Divine Flashes*, N.Y., Paulist Press, 1982; p. 120.
2. *Ibid.*; p. 124
3. *Ibid.*; p. 111
4. *Ibid.*; p. 95
5. *Ibid.*; p. 117
6. *Ibid.*; p. 125
7. *Ibid.*; p. 76
8. *Ibid.*; p. 96
9. *Ibid.*; p. 110
10. *Ibid.*; p. 77
11. *Ibid.*; p. 103
12. *Ibid.*; p. 80
13. *Ibid.*; p. 127
14. *Ibid.*; p. 99
15. *Ibid.*; p. 80
16. *Ibid.*; p. 119
17. *Ibid.*; p. 10
18. *Ibid.*; p. 112
19. *Ibid.*; p. 123
20. *Ibid.*; p. 120

**XI. The Question of Free Will**

As for the question of man's "free will" in a universe entirely determined by the will of God, the nineteenth century saint, Sri Ramakrishna, one of the greatest mystics and seers the world has ever known, had this to say:

"The Englishman [i.e., the Western materialist] talks about free will, but those who have realized God are aware that free-will is a mere appearance. In reality, man is the machine and God is the Operator. Man is the carriage and God its Driver." 1

For many, such a declaration implies a strict determinism, which they regard as unacceptable. The prospect of a universe of strict causality appears to them a dismal one, reducing the status of men to that of helpless cogs in a machine whose functioning had been preordained from the day of its creation. Yet most men of science find it necessary to acknowledge that if the universe *is* ruled by the principle of strict causality, then all men's acts, thoughts, desires are also governed by that principle. Max Planck, the founder of quantum mechanics, once said:

“The principle of causality must be held to extend even to the highest achievements of the human soul. We must admit that the mind of each one of our great geniuses —Aristotle, Kant, or Leonardo, Goethe or Beethoven, Dante or Shakespeare —even at the moment of its highest flights of thought or in the most profound inner workings of his soul was subject to the causal fiat and was an instrument in the hands of an almighty law, which governs the world.” 2

We all feel, however, that we have some freedom in our choices, that we are able to do whatever we want to do. Yet we must recognize that the “wants” which govern our “doing” are given factors, results of previous causal factors. The German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, noting this, remarked: “You can do whatever you want, but you cannot *want* whatever you want.” Many another scientist or philosopher has reflected on the possibility of “free will” in a deterministic universe. Baruch Spinoza, for example, declared:

“There is in the mind no absolute or free will, but the mind is determined in willing this or that by a cause, which is determined in its turn by another cause, and this by another, and so on to infinity. 3

“... Men think themselves free because they are conscious of their volitions and desires but are ignorant of the causes by which they are led to wish and desire.” 4

This may indeed appear a “dismal” view to some, but really it is not so dismal if seen in the proper perspective. In the context of the One, the unbroken Whole, men are not “cogs”, but instruments of Divine Will, and expressions of Divine Joy. If the universe is to be seen as a machine, it must be seen that it is a living one, and that the life of the parts is the life of the whole. It is the Creator Himself who is playing out the drama. Who, then, are the victims? And who is the tyrant whose will is being thrust upon us? *Us* is Him. And our willing is His willing. Our dreaming and discovering, our joys and despairs, and even our doubting, is His doing. There are not two.

The universe *is* determined; it is determined by the One who is manifesting as the universe. But though a man’s life is destined, still he is free. Man’s true and eternal freedom lies in his eternal Being; he may do only what lies in his destiny to do, but he is always free in his Being. He may be glorified or vilified; he may be crowned or nailed to a cross; but as the One, as the unchanging sky of pure Consciousness, he is ever free, untouched by the raging storm of the world. Still, you may object to what is seen as a world of strict determination, and ask, “If every event in our lives is determined by God, where then is our freedom of choice? Where is the possibility for virtue, for choosing the path of righteousness over the path of evil? And how is it even possible to progress spiritually by one’s

own efforts if all is in God's hands? How can we be held responsible for our acts if every sentiment, emotion, thought, or act is determined by God?"

These are questions, which must occur to anyone who thinks deeply about such matters. But these questions are framed on a presumption of duality where none in fact exists. For *we* and *God* are ultimately not two. And it is only a linguistic quandary that we fall into when we regard ourselves and God as separate entities and consider one to be determining the other. There is only One in this universe; it is *He* who, *as us*, is freely making all the choices.

Each individual being (soul) chooses according to his or her evolutionary development, but it is He alone who is manifesting as each individual at every step on the evolutionary scale. Therefore, we must admit that everything is determined by God's Will. And ... we must also see that, since we are Him, we are free to choose. When these two, man and God, are recognized to be one, this question of whether we are free or determined in our willing is easily resolved: Determinism and free-will are *both* true; they are "complementary" truths, each representing one aspect of a dual-sided reality. As the one eternal Consciousness, beyond time, we are forever free; as individualized souls, in time, we are determined by the law of causality, and are therefore under the decree of fate.

Thus, the question, "Are we responsible for our acts?" must be answered, "No," from the standpoint of our individualized souls; and "Yes," from the standpoint of the Self. For, as the one Consciousness, we are the witness of all the thoughts and impulses of our nature and are free to grant or withhold consent to her promptings. Therefore, ultimately, we *are* responsible for our acts. It is on the basis of our Divinity that all civil and criminal law intuitively recognizes the culpability of the individual. For, if we were not the eternal Self in essence, if we were not absolutely free from causal necessity, but merely unwitting, mechanical pawns, we could not be held responsible for what we do. But our Self *is* God, the universal Spirit. We *are* free; and therefore, we *are* responsible.

The question of "free will" is one which has fascinated the minds of men since first man looked to the heavens and deduced a Creator. And, though the answer to the problem is very simple, it is difficult for most minds to assimilate, which have not gotten into the habit of allowing for two answers to be true which contradict each other. Such an attitude is required of physicists for whom light, and energy itself, must be seen as both a particle (quanta) and a wave, whose respective qualities are mutually exclusive. What is required is the ability to freely shift one's viewpoint from one frame of reference to another.

The answer to the question, "Do I have free will?" is determined by who *I* is; in other words, to which "I" you are referring. If you are identifying with the

individual body, mind and soul, the answer is, “No, you do not have free will.” Nothing happens in this drama that was not in the original script. Omar Khayyam has rightly said: ‘The first morning of creation wrote what the last dawn of reckoning shall read’. The Will that flung forth the universe is its only Cause, and all that follows is effect. All effects are implied and contained in their cause, as the tree is contained in its seed. Even your apparent choosing is *His* choosing; even the choosing is Him. In short, there is no escaping Him, for “He is even that which thinks of escape.”

On the other hand, if by *I* you refer to the one and only true Self, the one universal Consciousness; if by *I* you mean the eternal Lord and Witness of all this drama, then you already know the answer: “Yes, you have free will. Your will is the only will; You are Freedom itself!

#### NOTES:

1. Nikhilanda, Swami, 1942; pp. 379-380
2. Max Planck, *Where Is Science Going?*
3. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, II.48.
4. *Ibid.*, I. Appendix

(The above was excerpted from my book, *The Supreme Self*, pp. 139-144)

## XII. Some Final Notes On Free Will

To all appearances, the responsibility for the acts of each individual accrue to that individual soul and those acts constitute that individual’s accumulated karma. But the soul (jiva) has a limited existence. When an individual soul is graced with the realization that Brahman is its true identity, the apparent duality of “I” and “Thou” is resolved in that one conscious awareness, and this one divine Reality is realized to be one’s eternal identity. With the knowledge of the absolute unity of oneself and God, the false identification of oneself as an individualized soul wanes and eventually comes to an end. When an individual, knows himself to have always been Brahman, the karma he had previously accumulated no longer has a binding effect on him. He realizes that, as Shankaracharya has famously said:

*brahma satyam  
jagan mithya  
jivo brahmaiva napara*

(“Brahman is the reality;  
The world is illusory.  
The soul is, indeed, nothing else but Brahman.”)

While it may appear that the soul is willing freely and independently, it must be acknowledged that the soul is indeed nothing else but Brahman, and that, therefore, it is in fact Brahman who is willing and acting in the world. For example, if a king stands on a corner disguised as a beggar, and money is given to the beggar, it is really the king who is receiving the money. Likewise, the apparent acts of an enlightened soul are in fact the acts of Brahman.

The answer to the question of whether you have free will is “Yes, indeed, you do have free will.” But it must be understood that “you” are in fact Brahman. From the Nondualist view of the enlightened, whether you are aware of it or not, the individual soul you identify with has never existed as a permanent reality but is simply a transient manifestation of Brahman—as a wave is but a transient manifestation of the ocean. Therefore, we must acknowledge that it is always and only God (Brahman) who, on every level, is doing everything. We may see an illustration of this phenomenon in the life of Jesus, as he declared to everyone, “It is the Father who dwells in me doing His own work.” We mustn’t marvel therefore that this same understanding is evidenced by other enlightened mystics.

### **XIII. Resolving The Issue of Free Will**

The following material is by Timothy Conway, who hosts his own website entitled “Enlightened Spirituality” ([www.enlightened-spirituality.org](http://www.enlightened-spirituality.org)). I have known Timothy for many years and had long ago read his article “The Three Levels of Nondual Reality,” but it was only recently, upon re-reading it, that it dawned on me that the scheme outlined in this article constituted a perfect explanation and reconciliation of the question of whether or not we humans are in possession of a free and independent will. Though his article does not directly address the issue of free will, it establishes the foundation for its resolution. Here it is, by Timothy’s kind permission, for your consideration:

## **The Three Simultaneously True Levels of Nondual Reality**

**(one Absolutely True, the other two “relatively true”)**

- 3 - Conventional level
- 2 - Psychic-Soul level
- 1 - ONLY GOD

© Copyright 2008 by Timothy Conway

~~~~~

**[UPDATE, Feb. 6, 2012: See bottom of page for a newly uploaded CHART of this three-fold model.]**

**[UPDATE: Dec. 14, 2017: After the interview excerpt, I added some extra commentary about pain/suffering and the three truth levels or aspects.]**

~~~~~

Most humans view their situation in a conventional, non-mystical way, treating whatever happens as concretely real, and to be judged as "good" and "bad," etc. By contrast, a growing number of spiritual teachers and disciples in the New Thought and Neo-Advaita (nonduality) movements of our era have become boxed into a viewpoint which constrains them to see whatever happens **only** as "the perfect manifestation of Divine Will," or else as "nothing really happening." Such persons *abandon all capacity for evaluating phenomena in any constructive or meaningful way.*

Yet our situation is *not* so one-dimensional as these positions would hold, and an expansive, truly liberated way of talking about Reality will involve more dimensions. A **three-fold model of nondual Reality** I've suggested has been found by many people to be quite helpful in accounting for **all levels of our experience.**

This three-fold model is an elaboration of the old **two-fold** distinction between the "**Absolute-truth**" level (*paramarthika-satya*) and the mundane "**conventional-truth**" level (*samvriti-satya* or *vyavaharika-satya*) articulated by India's most illustrious ancient sages— the Buddha, Nagarjuna, Sankara, et al. **In the model I suggest, based on additional revelations from the Great Traditions of India and mystical traditions of the West, another level is inserted between the "conventional" mundane level and the "Absolute-Truth" level.**

Thus, we can identify the "Three Levels of Nondual Reality" as:

**Level 3: the pragmatic level of mundane reality and conventional experience**, involving the "appropriate and inappropriate," "helpful and harmful," "skillful and unskillful," "right and wrong," "justice and injustice," "pleasant and painful" and so forth;

**Level 2: the psychic or "heavenly soul" level of Reality**, which yields the realization or epiphany that whatever happens is ultimately "perfect," because whatever occurs is the "exquisite manifestation of Divine Will" for the sake of ALL souls eventually coming Home to God-realization. And, further, here it is realized that all souls have essentially always been immortal, innocent, free and radiant with

Divine bliss-love (prior to and beyond their karmic entanglements on earth and in any lower subtle realms); and

**Level 1: the Absolute "level" of Reality**, wherein it is realized that whatever happens in the play of manifestation is a *dream*, so *nothing* is really happening, there is *no fundamental multiplicity*, only the nondual singularity of GOD or Pure Infinite Awareness is truly HERE. This Divine Self is absolutely Real as the sole Identity (prior to or beyond all worlds, souls, events, experiences).

**These "truth-levels" are all simultaneously true.** Level 1 ("only God, only the One Reality") is **ABSOLUTELY TRUE**, whereas Level 2 and Level 3, both pertaining to the realms of multiplicity, are "**relatively true.**" (Level 3 pertains to the situation for sentient beings here on earth and lower subtle realms, whereas level 2 pertains to the "highest heaven realms.")

When we don't honor together all three of these "levels" or "aspects" or "dimensions" of Reality as being simultaneously true, we tend to get caught in **a constricted viewpoint**. So, for instance, if we ignore the conventional level (level 3 in this model), preferring to ONLY see that "everything is perfect" (level 2) or that "nothing is really happening, only God is Real" (level 1), we can easily fail in morality, compassion and empathy, falling into an **insensitive apathy**, ignoring the rampant forms of injustice that inflict pain on sentient beings. Furthermore, denying level 3 may lead us to mistakenly believe that being discerning or critical—i.e., critiquing any form of thinking or behavior in the field of politics, spirituality, etc.—is "being negative" or "deluded" or "coming from the head, not the heart." (Actually, a true sage utilizes both head and heart in the context of Awareness.) Yet this is, itself, a negative judgment or a critique. It is a **limited position** that violates true freedom by constraining us to *always only* view whatever happens as "perfect" and beyond reproach, or as "nothing really happening." Again, to hold onto such a position is to constrain ourselves to a uni-level or one-dimensional and limited view of the Totality of Reality.

Likewise, if we ONLY focus on level 3 and, for instance, the countless injustices and forms of cruelty to living beings, we can become angry political fanatics, vindictive zealots always finding evil-doers somewhere and throwing them out of our heart with the constricted mind of scornful anger and venomous disgust over what "those evil persons" are doing. This can be healed by allowing level 2 and level 1 perspectives to be realized along with a level 3 sensibility.

A more in-depth presentation of this "Three Levels of Nondual Reality" occurred in an interview several years ago in the *Sun* magazine, a national journal of politics, spirituality, psychology, poetry, etc. The relevant excerpt is reproduced immediately below....

~~~~~

**Excerpt from April 2003 *Sun* magazine cover-story interview with Timothy Conway, Ph.D.**

© Copyright 2003 by Timothy Conway

(The full text of this interview can be downloaded at [this link](#) and at the "Engaged Spirituality" section of this website.)

-----

**Arnie Cooper:** Many people feel a tension between the more contemplative life on the one hand, and the more engaged activist life on the other.

**Timothy Conway:** To heal this conflict, I think it helps to **see our situation on three levels—all equally true and valid.**

I'll start with the most familiar level, **level three, the conventional level of our ordinary experience in the world.** This is a realm of *opposites*, of pleasure and pain. In mystical spiritual literature, you hear a lot about going beyond the opposites, beyond all duality, but let's stop at this level three and acknowledge the loss and gain, the beauty and ugliness. This is the level of right and wrong and good and evil, skillful and unskillful. It's humans doing despicable things to each other and to our ecosystems. It's also all the good and beauty and joy in the world.

Look at 9/11 and the horrific damage the terrorists caused: not just the nearly three thousand dead, but also those who were scarred for life, the economic dislocation, the massive layoffs and monetary losses. But there was also the great heroism shown by the firefighters and police officers and rescue workers and all those who donated their blood and time and energy. The events of September 11 showed both the best and worst of humanity.

This is level three: the amazing play of what is traditionally called good and evil. At this level, one must look evil in the face and see it for what it is. And one must be willing to step up with an engaged spirituality and do what needs to be done for the public good. I do not mean mere charity, but getting involved in *enacting justice*. There's a big difference between *charity* and *justice*. Bill Moyers said, "Faith-based charity provides crumbs from the table; faith-based justice offers a place at the table." He wrote that in the preface to a book by another hero of mine, Jim Wallis, a progressive evangelical Christian, editor of the spiritual-political journal *Sojourners* and cofounder of the Sojourners community of those who live and work in solidarity with the poor. In his book, Wallis says, "We need to do more than pull people out of the river before they drown; someone needs to go upstream to see who or what is throwing them in." For example, government policies that punish poor and middle-class Americans, or corrupt foreign-aid practices that destroy habitat and displace thousands or millions of people from their ancestral lands. So level three, the realm of good and evil, is where engaged spirituality shines.

Cooper: What about **level two?**

Conway: On this level, we realize that, *whatever happens, it's all perfect*. The great fourteenth-century Christian saint Juliana of Norwich was immensely troubled by the misery around her, the sinfulness of people, and the traditional idea that sinners would go to eternal hell. Then she experienced a dazzling revelation: Jesus appeared to her and, among many other lovely utterances, said to her, "All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." And *this beautiful secret from God was revealed to Juliana—that all beings would somehow be brought Home*. No one would have to

permanently suffer in hell, for God is our deepest truth, our real condition of eternal love and bliss.

This goes back to the old, widespread but largely forgotten Christian idea of **apokatastasis**, or universal salvation taught by Origen and Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and earlier suggested by Paul of Tarsus: God's love is so powerful that no creature can exile itself from this Love forever. It may take eons, but at some point God will redeem all souls. Even Satan will be reconciled in God's love. The beauty of universal redemption is that, no matter what's happening on level three—the oppression, exploitation, and terrorism—it's all perfect, for this Divine Comedy has a *happy ending*. Moments, or periods, or even eons of suffering are ultimately "outshined" by reconciliation in God. This idea is not found just in Christianity. It is also known to mystical Sufis and Hasidic Jews, and it is openly acknowledged in the Eastern traditions. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna promises universal salvation for all beings. So, too, does the Buddha, when he says that all beings will come to nirvana, that none of the conditioned states are permanent. India's ancient *Brahma Sutras* say, "All beings will eventually become Brahman," or Divine Reality, "because there is only Brahman."

So, with this blissful outcome for all, there's a sense that it's all perfect—truly, an amazing Divine Comedy. Yes, there are times of terrible tragedy and tribulation, but ultimately everything turns out well. All souls—really God in disguise—use their suffering as grist for the mill to produce sublime awakening to Spirit.

Sri Ramakrishna, the great Bengali master of the nineteenth century, when asked why we suffer, poignantly replied: "To add zest to the [Divine] play." In classic works of comedy, from Shakespeare to the Marx Brothers, things get darkest before the dawn. And when that dawn comes, when the comedic climax happens, all those on stage awaken to an overwhelming sense of joy and happiness. In the highest form of comedy, even the villains are converted.

So here at level two, the deep, mystical part of us realizes that all is well in a superb Divine play of manifestation. Unlike our vulnerable human aspect, which fears things are going down the drain, this deep Self knows that, in the exquisite script authored by Divine Intelligence, it's all perfect and everything happens for a reason. You can take this on faith, but mystics know it in the core of their being as the truth of every situation.

Cooper: Many people have trouble even taking it on faith. They want proof.

Conway: Well, in a way, modern physics supports this aspect of the mystical view. The basic parameters to get a physical cosmos had to be absolutely, utterly perfect—otherwise this nearly 14 billion-year-old universe just wouldn't have happened. So many astounding fine-tunings underlie this world that it's obvious to many scientists that divine intelligence and wisdom are active in the process.

What holds the cosmos together is a great mystery. Respected Princeton mathematician and physicist Elliott Lieb has worked for thirty years on the "foundational problem"—the question of why matter is stable. Why doesn't the atom just implode and then explode? Another glaring anomaly is that, at the origin of the material universe, there happened to be a tiny bit more matter than antimatter. If there had been equal amounts, which is what one would expect, then everything

would have just canceled out. But there just so happened to be a few more quarks than anti-quarks (by the ridiculously tiniest hairbreadth of a hairbreadth of a difference), in just the right proportion.

And let's ponder that initial inflationary period of the physical universe: the infinitesimal Planck moment, the tiniest moment in physics,  $10^{-43}$  second—a ten-millionth of a trillionth of a trillionth of a trillionth of a second! In this original moment in time, a “speck of nothing,” a quantum bubble of space-time, inflated out of the “vacuum” to the size of a soccer ball. Then the inflation somehow stopped and the Big Bang process took over to slowly unfold our universe through an energy radiation phase to the birth of matter, and then evolving galaxies, stars, and planets to their present proportions. Now, why did that original inflationary cosmic bubble expand to a certain point and then stop? If it hadn't gone far enough or had gone too far, in that initial Planck moment, we wouldn't have a universe today. And, in a fascinating development over the last two decades, superstring or M theory, accepted by over 90 percent of theoretical physicists, holds that our familiar, four dimensional space-time cosmos must be embedded within an eleven-dimensional hyperspace, a much subtler realm ultimately rooted in the immaterial.

In the realm of chemistry and biology, one great anomaly is water. A century ago, Lawrence Henderson of Harvard explained that water is, in many ways, a miracle substance. It has some highly unusual properties compared to other molecular compounds. And without water, you wouldn't have any complex forms of life. The famous astronomer Fred Hoyle, after being an atheist for most of his life, found remarkable and inexplicable anomalies in the chemistry of stars that caused him to declare that “a super intellect has monkeyed with [the basic laws of] physics as well as chemistry and biology.”

A survey done by the journal *Nature* revealed that 49 percent of scientists believe in a personal God. That number surely would have jumped to 70 or 80 percent had the question allowed for belief in a transpersonal God, such as the one that Einstein held dear.

*The point is this:* Atheistic materialists who claim the universe is just an accident have to appeal to the almighty “laws of physics” to account for how the cosmos got to be so stable and so conducive for the emergence of complex forms of life. But when we see how many absolute miracles of fine tuning were necessary for a universe and sentient beings to manifest, it becomes a semantic quibble whether you invoke “the laws of physics” or “God,” because they share the same divine powers of manifestation. Of course, the mystics would say that God actually has powers beyond the physical cosmos.

Cooper: We still haven't gotten to level one.

Conway: Well, after level two—the realization that everything is the perfect design of Intelligent Spirit—you might ask, “What could level one possibly be?”

**Level one** is the deepest mystical truth, namely: *Nothing is happening*. The world is a dream. There's only God here. It's always only been God, changeless and full. A hymn repeatedly found in the ancient Upanishads declares, “Praise to the great Divine Fullness (*Purnam*),” which remains perfect and changeless despite all that is happening at levels two and three. Because at level one, nothing is happening. What

appears to be happening at the other levels is a dream of Consciousness. Sufi saint Hakim Sana`i declared: "You think you are something, but that something is nothing." *La ilaha illah Llah.* There is nothing but God.

Here again modern physics helps out, revealing that atoms are 99.9999999999% empty space. Shimmering fields of energy underlie the appearance of matter. And, as Richard Feynman and other leading physicists have declared, energy is a complete mystery. Thus, an increasing number of physicists are considering that consciousness may be the basic reality and source of all.

The finest nondual advaita scriptures of India use humor to explain this. *Yoga Vasishtha*, for example, playfully states, "The cosmos is like two sons born to a barren woman who did not really exist, and one day they went out and got on their horses that had never been born and traveled along a nonexistent path to an uncreated land to a town that existed only in the imagination." These advaita scriptures all affirm that the world is a dream-play of the Supreme Consciousness. Yes, a world-appearance is happening that has a relative reality to it, rich with phenomenal experiences—colors, sounds, textures, tastes, smells, bodily pains and pleasures, emotional ups and downs. Yet it's all a dream. And if you bring attentive awareness to it, and a strong urge to awaken, the dream's apparent solidity is dissolved. And that's true for the ego as well, the sense of me, my mind-body.

*So, here's the paradox:* in Spirit—wide open, vast, spacious, infinite Being-Awareness—the No-thing manifests as "something," a world of phenomenal entities and processes. But, as the Mahayana and Zen Buddhist masters say, it's all *sunyata*, empty-open fullness. It's manifesting as Arnie, as Timothy, as the plants, the walls and all these beings within these walls and beyond, from the microscopic bacteria to fungi, to animals, to life on other planets. The entire play of all these souls is the One sitting where it always sits, spaceless, timeless, conjuring up a dream of multiplicity. Within the heart-mind of God appears this Cosmos-dream, manifesting on subtle levels of refined light, from the heavens all the way down to the denser, gross levels of the physical plane. Wondrous and poignant adventures are happening. God plays all the parts.

Cooper: But if, on level one, none of this is really happening, then why are we talking?

Conway: Why not? It's part of the divine play at levels two and three. You see, ***all these levels are simultaneously true. Nothing is happening, and everything is happening.*** "Wisdom says I am nothing; love says I am everything" was how one of my mentors, Nisargadatta Maharaj, put it to those of us who sat with him. The completion of the journey Home is realizing one's identity as both formlessness and form, nothing and everything, nobody and everybody. And that's where engaged spirituality spontaneously manifests. When you know that there's only God here, you're motivated to do whatever it takes—peacefully protesting, serving, educating, praying—to alleviate suffering and remedy injustice.

Cooper: But what about the realization that it's all perfect? Why do anything at all?

Conway: Ram Dass related a wonderful story about this. Coming from a good, progressive Jewish family, he was much interested in tzedek, or justice. One day he was kvetching to his guru, Neem Karoli Baba, about the suffering in God's creation,

and his guru finally cut him short, saying: "Look, Ram Dass, suffering is perfect." And Ram Dass, shocked by this apparently callous statement, began to marshal his intellectual resources to argue with his guru. But Neem Karoli stopped him again and said: "And, Ram Dass, your attempt to end suffering is also perfect."

There's no airtight case for why we should pursue social or environmental justice, given the fact that everything's perfect. But, *paradoxically, God prefers good over evil, even though God is also playing the villains on the world stage*, from Nero to Hitler to Stalin to former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who said in 1996, regarding the 500,000 innocent children dead in Iraq because of U.S. sanctions, "We think the price is worth it." Yet God is also the human-rights activists attempting to educate folks like Albright, and God manifests as all progressives rising up to protest and heal injustice.

[...]

[One can] speak critically of these asura or "demonic" characters [the disguises of the one God-Self who appear to be the perpetrators of evil], but they need our compassion. Though they appear immersed in very ungodly behavior, these folks are essentially God in disguise and will eventually, by Divine Grace, all come Home to God-Realization. Speaking from the radical context of the one Spirit, **I am these people. There is only one Self here.** May they and all beings be healed and liberated into full realization of this one Self, this pure, clear Absolute Awareness.

---

Timothy Conway has added some new Commentary to this article, and you may access that Commentary at his website: [www.enlightened-spirituality.org/3levelsofnondualreality](http://www.enlightened-spirituality.org/3levelsofnondualreality).

**Though the issue of free will is not addressed directly in the above article, we can easily recognize that we have free will (or what appears to us to be free will) only within Level Three of the Nondual Reality. In Level One, we don't even exist; in Level Two, one Will alone prevails. 'All things move together of one accord; assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain.' This three-level model of Timothy Conway's is in fact a golden key to the resolution of a slew of metaphysical questions and provides us with a clear perspective that applies to both the divine and the mundane levels of Reality.**

## 2. *ADVAITA: EXPERIENCE OR UNDERSTANDING?*

**Published in the Public Domain 3-12-18**  
**(last revised: 8-10-23)**

In the 20th century, there were a few enlightened men, such as Sri Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta Maharaj, both of whom had received a mind-transcending experience of the nondual Reality in their youth, but whose later teachings seemed to some to imply that the nondual (*advaita*) Reality could be known through deliberate intellectual enquiry. This controversy may be easily resolved if we examine how the word *advaita*, is commonly used. It is a Sanskrit word, which, literally, means “not two”, but it is generally used to stand for both “nonduality” and “nondualism.” To illustrate this, let us look at several official definitions of the word: The first definition, from the Britannica Concise Encyclopedia: “Advaita (Sanskrit: Nondualism), the most influential school of Vedanta... etc.” Second definition, from the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy: “Advaita (Sanskrit, nonduality) The doctrine of the Vedantic school associated with Shankara, that asserts the identity of Brahman and Atman... etc.” And the third definition, from the Oxford Dictionary of Asian Mythology: “Literally, ‘nondual’, *advaita* is the Hindu term for the state of nondifferentiation that is *Brahman* or the absolute reality.”

When “Advaita” precedes “Vedanta,” it refers to “the philosophy of Nondual Vedanta”, or simply “Nondualism.” But *advaita* can also mean “Nonduality”, a synonym for the absolute reality, or *Brahman*. So, we have two meanings for the same word: it is both *nonduality* and *nondualism*. However, the first is the nature of reality, which can be directly experienced in the mystical vision; the second is a philosophical position. Admittedly, *Advaita* (Nondualism), as a philosophical term, may indeed be intellectually understood; but *Advaita*, when we mean by it: “nonduality”—the nondual reality, the thing in itself—cannot be understood. It must be experienced to be known. That undifferentiated state where there is neither ‘I’ nor ‘Thou’ may be experienced in transcendent vision, but it cannot be understood, cannot be comprehended, by the mind. The mind, along with the language by which the mind thinks, is grounded in duality; duality is its mechanism, its being. With what instrument, then, would one *understand* nonduality? It cannot be grasped and understood by the mind.

However, Nonduality has been *experienced* by many throughout history—including myself. Nonduality, therefore, is, by definition, a transcendent *experience*, a divine revelation, which occurs beyond the temporal mind. *Advaita* (Nondualism) is a conceptual understanding; *advaita* (Nonduality) is definitely not a matter of understanding; it is a matter of revelation. Ideas may be understood. Concepts may be understood. We can understand the idea, the concept, of nondualism, but we cannot *understand* nonduality.

‘Understanding’ is a subjective process of the mind. Those who have obtained an intellectual understanding that the universe is an undivided unity, that there are not two things (I and Thou, Spirit and Matter), but only one, have attained a wonderful understanding, to be sure; but it cannot hold a candle to the *experience* of seeing that nondual Reality through the eyes of eternity—even if in time our memory of the details of that vision may fade. Philosophers have attempted through the ages to ‘understand’ the nondual Reality, and in the end have had to surrender and take their place among the many vanquished souls who, attempting to know God through their reason, have come to the dead-end of that road, and never reached their goal. For satisfaction does not lie down that road. The intellect turns out to be an inappropriate instrument in the hunt for the knowledge of Reality, in the quest for the divine Self. Inevitably, we must come to the realization that the intellect is impotent to discover God (the nondual Reality), or to comprehend His/Its ways. And with that realization comes also the sweet acceptance of the truth that only He can reveal His immediate and all-embracing presence, and show to the inner eye, beyond all thought or conceptualization, the inconceivable clarity of the undivided oneness of all being. The intellect must be put aside, and we must look childlike into the emptiness within, and listen for the voiceless Voice to speak. Only then may true understanding arise, just as the Sun effortlessly arises at dawn.

\* \* \*

**3. FUNDAMENTALS OF EXISTENCE**  
**A Compilation of Articles from**  
**The Mystic's Vision by Swami Abhayananda**  
**Published in the Public Domain 3-12-18**  
**(Last revised: 6-7-2023)**

**The Fundamental Reality**

**(June 6, 2023)**

What I'm going to say here will seem to many to be obvious, but to others my remarks may seem to run counter to their long-held beliefs. We all recognize, of course, that there are numerous 'religions,' each of which holds its own unique tenets to be sacrosanct. I would like to suggest, however, that these various 'religions,' with their separate histories and heroes, are mostly irrelevant to the overall knowledge of the reality in which we live. It is clear that, if it is the Fundamental Reality that we wish to know, we must rise far above the stories of regional histories and deified individuals that make up each of our several individual religious traditions.

The fundamental Reality is frequently referred to as 'God.' Those who have been privileged to know God say that He/It is a single eternal conscious Spirit or Mind, and that He/It is the Fundamental Reality of whom and in whom we all exist. That single Spirit or Mind is all-pervasive, and though It is insubstantial, It is manifest as (i.e., appears as) 'material' in the form of every speck of substance in this universe, living or non-living. We and all this apparent universe are contained within this Fundamental Reality; we are made of It and are synonymous with It, just as a wave on the ocean is made of and is synonymous with the ocean. Each of us, manifestations of the one Spirit, follows that destiny designed for us by the one conscious Spirit, so that, while Intertwined in a vast cosmos of innumerable destinies, each of us appears to operate as a fully independent individual entity, though we are in fact elements of a synchronous and integral spiritual network, which is the one Fundamental Reality.

Though each individual (which we designate as a soul) *appears* to act and choose independently, the truth is that there is but one Fundamental Reality, who, constituting these individual souls, is the one ultimate Cause, who is making all the choices and performing all the acts. This indivisible Causality underlying the lives and activities of the multiple individuals is similar to the indivisible Causality of the ocean underlying the apparent independence of

each of the separate waves on the ocean. Each of the waves appears to be acting independently, and yet each of the waves is simply one aspect of the complex network of the ocean.

Here is a light-hearted parable illustrating this apparent independence:

### Willie, The Wave

Willie, the wave, ran into Wanda, another wave,  
 And he was asked by Wanda, "What's it all about, Willie?  
 Is there some meaning to all this commotion?  
 I've heard that it's all run by the Ocean,  
 But I'm not sure I believe in the Ocean.  
 What do you think, Willie?" But Willie didn't know either.  
 He wasn't sure whether all this commotion was  
 Simply random or whether it was governed by  
 A grand ruler called 'the Ocean.'

And so, off Willy went, in search of knowledge of the Ocean.  
 And, as he searched, he thought to himself,  
 "I'm an independent wave, with purposes of my own,  
 And not simply a servant of the Ocean.  
 And if there is such a thing as 'the Ocean,'  
 Where is he? And why can't I see him?"  
 And just then, a sea anemone floated by, who said:  
 "In him we live and move and have our being.  
 Therefore, look within; for the Ocean lives within you."

And Willy became mesmerized by the thought  
 That the sea anemone had placed in his mind,  
 And right then and there,  
 Willy determined to either know the Ocean  
 Or dash himself on the sandy shore.  
 And in that very moment, Willy became enlightened,  
 And he realized that he was in the Ocean  
 And the Ocean was in him;  
 That, in fact, he and the Ocean were one.

"All this is my own self!" Willy exclaimed.  
 "It is the Ocean that lives as me and as all that is.  
 He is the source and governor of all these waves.  
 He is our form and our substance as well.  
 In truth, it is only the Ocean who exists,  
 And who manifests as all this commotion!"

And from that moment forward,  
 Willie, the wave, saw only the Ocean  
 Wherever he looked, and he knew himself  
 No longer as a wave, but as a manifestation  
 Of the infinite and many-formed Ocean  
 Who constituted his every molecule,  
 His movement, his joy, and his very being.

### On Free Will—A Dialogue

The question of whether or not we possess a free and independent will is a question that has been argued and discussed for thousands of years. Clearly, it is not a subject that is easily dispensed with. And that is primarily because we are all at different levels of evolutionary development and understanding. Here is my attempt to clarify what I believe to be truth of the matter in the form of a dialogue between a Dualist and a Nondualist:

*The Dualist:* There are two things: God and His Creation. Put into personal terms, the two existents are God and the individualized soul. And while God is the Creator of this world, He has given each individual soul the ability to will freely and independently.

*The Nondualist:* Yes, that is the way everyone tends to view things prior to becoming enlightened. But the duality that you speak of is apparent only. It is the product of God's Creative Power, or *Maya*. The reality is that, since all of Creation is contained in God, God is all there is. I do not deny that there is such a thing as free will. But we disagree about *who* possesses it. You seem to be saying that the soul (*jiva*) has free will; and I maintain that it is God (*Brahman*) alone who exists in the form of the soul, and therefore it is God who has free will and who is choosing and enacting everything through the various souls.

*The Dualist:* But you yourself have said that all religions agree that individual souls are responsible for their actions based on the fact that they have free will.

*The Nondualist:* Yes, in *Maya*'s apparent world, the world of duality, that is the universal conventional understanding: The responsibility for the acts of each individual soul accrue to that individual soul and constitutes that individual's accumulated karma. But remember, the soul (*jiva*) is an illusion produced by God and has a limited existence. When an individual soul is graced with the realization that *Brahman* (God) is its true identity, the apparent duality of I and Thou is resolved in the conscious awareness that one's true identity is One: the

divine Reality. With the knowledge of absolute Unity, the false identification as an individualized soul wanes and eventually comes to an end. The individual, knowing himself as Brahman (God), and having always been Brahman, the karma he had accumulated is seen to be illusory and no longer has a binding effect on him. He realizes that, as Shankaracharya has famously said:

*brahma satyam  
jagan mithya  
jivo brahmaiva napara*

(Brahman is the reality;  
The world is illusory.  
The soul is, indeed, nothing else but Brahman.)

Now, though it may appear that the individual soul is willing freely, it must be understood and acknowledged that the soul is actually Brahman (God), and that, therefore, it is in fact Brahman who is willing and acting in the world. If a king stands on a corner disguised as a beggar, and money is given to the beggar, it is really the king who is receiving the money. Likewise, the apparent acts of an individual soul are in fact the acts of Brahman.

Since Brahman (God) is the *only* existent anywhere, Brahman is therefore the only possible source and agent of free will. And so, the answer to the question of whether you have free will is “Yes, indeed, you do have free will.” But it must be understood that “you” are in fact Brahman. Whether you are aware of it or not, the individual soul you identify with has never existed as a permanent reality but is simply Brahman’s manifestation within the phenomenal world of *Maya*—as a wave is but a phenomenal manifestation on the ocean. *Maya* is unreal, impermanent. Brahman is the eternal Reality and is beyond this illusory world of *Maya*. Therefore, we must acknowledge that it is always and only God (Brahman) who, on every level, is doing everything.

Some have endeavored to persuade me that every divine soul is given the freedom to will as it chooses without dependence upon a greater divine Will in which it is embedded. I am aware that there have been some credible mystics, such as Paramahansa Yogananda, who have declared that we do indeed have a free and independent will, and their declarations are relied upon by their followers as unquestionable. But I am an investigator of Truth, and I am unwilling to accept the authority of even the holiest friend of God as viable evidence without the accompaniment of some rational concept of how their conclusion was arrived at.

Although I would very much like to find a logical means whereby each individual soul is able to choose freely and independently, thus negating the necessity of the deterministic Will of a single divine overlord, I have been unable to, despite my best efforts. And so, I'm asking my readers If anyone can provide the reasoning that would allow for the free independent will of each individual soul—a will that does not originate with and is independent of the divine Source of all souls. If you can, please pass that reasoning on to me.

## Fundamentals of Existence

In India's most ancient scripture, the *Vedas*, one of the words for God, the Divine Consciousness, was *Purusha*, a masculine noun, meaning "the Person," or "the universal Self". That Divine Consciousness (*Purusha*) was said to have produced the universe of time and space through the power of Its Creative Energy, or *Prakrti*, a feminine noun. Later, in the 8th or 9th century B.C.E., a sage named Kapila adopted this terminology exclusively, and his theology of *Purusha* and *Prakrti* became known as *Samkhya*, which, like *Veda*, simply means "knowledge." Then, sometime around the fifth century B.C.E., another sage, by the name of Vyasa, wrote an epic story called the *Mahabharata*, within which was embedded a dialogue between the Avatar, Krishna, and his charioteer, Arjuna, that took place on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. That dialogue is famously known as the *Bhagavad Gita*, or "the Song of God." In this spiritual parable, Vyasa, adopting Kapila's by now well-known Samkhya terminology, explains, through Krishna, that *Purusha* is the Divine Lord, and *Prakrti* is His Creative Energy.

*Prakrti* is sometimes defined as "Nature" or "Matter", but *Prakrti* is more precisely God's Creative Energy, from which, at the beginning of a universal cycle, the material universe, or nature, originates and evolves, and to which, at the end of each universal cycle, the universe returns. *Prakrti*, therefore, is essentially the totality of the Divine Light that constitutes 'the Great Radiance' of which and by which the universe is formed, and into which it is once again subsumed. So, according to the *Bhagavad Gita*, these two, *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, the Divine Consciousness and Its Creative Energy, are the fundamentals of the reality in which we live. Initially, and ultimately as well, there is only *Purusha*; there is only God, since *Prakrti* is produced by, exists in, and belongs to *Purusha*. It is *His* Creative Energy! *Prakrti* is never really distinct from *Purusha*; it only appears to be—as it provides the apparent distinction between Matter (*Prakrti*) and Spirit (*Purusha*), constituting respectively one's body and soul, each of which possesses a distinct destiny—one briefly in time, the other in eternity.

*Prakrti* is eternally within *Purusha* and is thereby suffused with the Divine Consciousness of *Purusha*. *Prakrti* is enveloped in and pervaded by the Divine Consciousness, and is never distinct from or isolated from *Purusha*, but is always contained within It. So, while the material universe, produced by and consisting of *Prakrti*, is a transient phenomenon, of merely temporary duration, *Prakrti*, the Creative Energy of *Purusha*, is itself eternal.

These two fundamentals, the Divine Consciousness and Its Creative Energy, appear in other cultures as well, such as the Chinese Taoist culture, where the Divine Consciousness and Its Creative Energy, known in India as *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, are referred to as *Tao* and *Teh* by the great originator of the Taoist tradition, Lao Tze, who lived in the 6th century B.C.E.:

"Before heaven and earth existed, there was something unformed, silent, alone, unchanging, constant and eternal; It could be called 'the Source of the Universe.' I do not know Its name and simply call It "Tao." ... That Nameless (*Tao*) is the Father of heaven and earth; that which is named (*Teh*) is the Mother of all things."<sup>1</sup>

Lao's compatriot and fellow Taoist, Chuang Tze, who lived in the 3rd century B.C.E., elaborated on Lao Tze's words: "In the beginning, even nothing did not exist. There was only the *Tao*. Then something unnamed which did not yet have form came into existence from the *Tao*. This is *Teh* (the Creative Energy), from which all the world came into being. ... It is in this way that *Teh* created all forms. <sup>2</sup>

"The *Tao* is the source of the activity of universal manifestation, but It is not this activity. It is the Author of causes and effects, but It is not the causes and effects. It is the Author of universal manifestation and dissolution, but It is not the manifestation or dissolution. Everything proceeds from It and is governed by It; It is in all things, but is not identical with things, for It is neither divided nor limited. <sup>3</sup>

"*Tao* is invisible, hard to hold, and difficult to describe. However, I will outline It for you: The visible world is born of the Invisible; the world of forms is born of the Formless. The creative Energy (*Teh*) is born from *Tao*, and all life forms are born of this creative Energy; thus, all creation evolves into various forms.

"...Life springs into existence without a visible source and [at the end of a cycle] is reabsorbed into that Infinite. The world exists in and on the infinite Void; how it comes into being, is sustained and once again is dissolved, cannot be seen. It is fathomless, like the Sea. Wondrously, the cycle of world-manifestation begins again after every completion. The *Tao* sustains all creation, but It is never exhausted. ..." <sup>4</sup>

So, as we can see, the great mystics of previous centuries have described the fundamentals of existence in ways very similar to our current view. This is because, throughout the centuries, the (mystical) experience wherein these fundamentals of reality are revealed in interior vision is consistently the same for all who experience it.

What the author of the *Bhagavad Gita* saw, the Buddha and Jesus saw, and I also have seen. What Lao Tze and Chuang Tze saw, Heraclitus, Ibn Arabi, and Meister Eckhart also saw, and I have also seen. In fact, the knowledge of the fundamentals of existence remains the same for all who have experienced this revealed vision. There is one Divine Consciousness who, through Its Creative Power, manifests this universe with an emanation of divine Energy produced from Itself. This magnificent world of ours, including our own conscious selves, is made of that one Divine Consciousness and Its Divine Energy; and each of us, by searching within ourselves, is capable of knowing that Divine Source who constitutes our fundamental reality, and is truly our own eternally blissful and undying Self.

*Purusha* and *Prakrti* were not the only names given to the two aspects of the Divine in the land of India; there were other ancient names such as *Brahman* and *Maya*, *Shiva* and *Shakti*, *Vishnu* and *Lakshmi*. Different names arose in other lands. For the ancient Jews, the sovereign Spirit and His Creative Power were called *Jahveh* and *Chokmah*. And in the early years of the growth of Christianity, Christian theologians labelled these two divine counterparts as *Theos* and *Logos*. Today, in the secular Western countries, where the ancient theologies are forgotten by the citizenry, these two divine aspects are referred to simply as "The Father," and "Mother Nature." But these two complementary aspects of Divinity—an eternal Mind and Its Creative Power—are not recognized by the scientific community. However, the world of science *does* recognize the existence of an Energy that manifested as "the Big Bang" some fourteen billion years ago, and which constitutes our current physical universe, but that Energy is not referred to as *Prakrti*, nor is it seen as having its source in the Divine Mind, or *Purusha*. The Fundamentals of Existence, as experienced in the mystical vision of a few individuals scattered throughout time, carries little weight in the science-oriented world of today.

Today, science holds the floor, and contemporary scientific thought does not allow for the existence of an eternal (ever-existent) Consciousness that precedes, emanates, and pervades the natural (phenomenal) universe. Such a scenario is precluded by the very nature of "science," which, by definition, is confined solely to empirically demonstrable evidence. An eternal supernatural Mind that breathes forth the mass/energy that constitutes the natural universe

clearly has no place in such an empirical discipline. In their earnest desire to know with certainty, scientists have seen fit to outlaw empirically undemonstrable truth, even though that truth has been experienced in mystical vision for thousands of years. It appears that, instead of being led by the vision of our seers, today we are led by the vision of our technicians. Is it any wonder that our civilization seems to be descending into the darkness of ignorance?

But hold the phone! The great majority of the people of our civilization care little for the speculations of science; they have learned over time that the fashions of science are constantly changing. Even today, the majority of the people continue to rely strongly upon the teachings of their spiritual seers and hold intuitively to confidence in the truth that this world in which we live is created and permeated by God. The strength that each person draws upon in life is invariably the strength of his or her inner Spirit; the strength of our divine souls, which are identical with God. And though, in our darkest hours, the world seems just as terrible as it is painted by its most cynical detractors, we discover again and again that the divine Lord who placed us here in this verdant garden lives always in our hearts and reveals His great goodness and compassion in those very moments that He seems most absent. Without fail, He rises from our own hearts to save the day, to right the wrong, to prove the truth of His undying presence. So, never fear. All is well. His mercy still rules. His majesty still reigns. His love still shines within our hearts and throughout the land. And, as always, the lowering darkness will be averted; the Sun will shine again. Praise God.

#### NOTES:

1. Lao Tze, *Tao Teh Ching*, 25.
2. Chuang Tze, Ch. 12
3. Chuang Tze, Ch. 8
4. Chuang Tze, 22
- 5.

\* \* \*

## 4. MAYA

### A Compilation of Articles from

### The Mystic's Vision by Swami Abhayananda

### Dedicated to the Public Domain 2-25-2020

#### **I. Maya: The Power of God**

(Excerpted from *The Wisdom of Vedanta*, 1991.

**last revised: 5-25-21)**

In the final chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna says to Arjuna: “O Arjuna, the Lord dwells in the heart of all beings, while revolving them all on the wheel (of transmigration) by His mysterious power of *Maya*.<sup>1</sup> This word, “*Maya*,” is one which we hear quite often in discussions of Vedanta, and, because it is a word that is so often misinterpreted, I’d like to see if I can clear up any misunderstanding about it.

We may well understand that ‘*Brahman*’ is a name for the Godhead, the absolute Consciousness, the eternal Mind, which mystics throughout history have experienced as the transcendent Source of all creation. It is said by those who have known It to be pure Consciousness, Bliss, unmoving, unchanging, unqualified, beyond all form and beyond all activity. How then, the rational intellect questions, can such a quiescent Emptiness create a universe of myriad forms? The difficulty of explaining this satisfactorily is readily acknowledged even by those who have experienced It directly. The truth of the one Reality is “seen” clearly in the mystical “vision,” and yet to describe It is nearly impossible, because Its mode of existence is unique, and without parallel in the phenomenal world, and for that reason, there is nothing else with which It may be truly compared.

Those seers who do speak of It say that the one Reality has two distinct aspects: It is the absolutely pure Consciousness, which remains as the eternal Ground, the immoveable Witness; and yet, at the same time, It possesses the power of projecting a manifold universe upon Its own Self. Frequently, the analogy is made of the human mind and its power of projecting thoughts or images upon itself. These two aspects of our own immediate experience help us to grasp a little of what these two cosmic principles: *Brahman* and *Maya*, are like.

“Maya” is just another name for God’s power of manifestation, His power of form-projection. However, the word, “Maya,” is also used to signify the form-projection itself. It is God’s Power of manifestation, which remains eternally with Him, whether there is a manifestation or not; and it is also the actual world of forms which results from that power. Maya, in other words, is both the cause and the effect, both the Creator (or Creatrix) and the creation.

This word, “Maya,” is synonymous with all the other words used to represent the manifestory Power of God, such as “*Shakti*,” “*Prakrti*,” “*Logos*,” etc. So many different words exist because every seer of every time and place has found it necessary to give a name to the Creative Power of God in order to distinguish the temporal from the eternal, the phenomenal appearance from the constant and unchanging Ground. “Maya,” like so many of the other names for this “Power,” is a noun of the feminine gender. Just as the absolute Godhead is referred to as the figurative “Father,” His Power of manifestation is commonly referred to as “Mother,” as in “Mother Nature.” Maya is the Creatrix, the divine Womb from which everything is born, sometimes called the Will, or the effulgent Glory, of God.

Understand that God’s Power is not something *other* than God—just as our own power of thought-production is not distinct from our minds to which that power belongs. However, we must bear in mind also that, just as the thoughts and images which are produced in our minds are mere ephemera which come and go, and once gone, have no claim to existence, so, likewise, the various forms in the universe, however alluring and seductive, or however frightening and dreadful, are mere ephemera which come and go, and are, by that standard, illusory, or unreal. The Power, Maya, exists eternally, being inherent in God; but the world-illusion, Maya, is transient, having a beginning and an end.

Those who have experienced God, through contemplation, have “seen” the creation of the world-illusion, its flourishing, and its dissolution, in a recurrent cycle. It is somewhat like the recurrent cycle of breath, which we, as creatures, experience. In something similar to an exhalation, the Lord manifests and plays out the drama of the universe; and, in something similar to an inhalation, He draws it all back into Himself once again. In just one breath, the whole universe is created, evolves, and is ultimately withdrawn again into its Source. From the perspective of God, it is but a fleeting breath; from our temporal perspective, it is an unimaginable immensity of time. Perhaps our own breath, which seems to us a momentary thing, is an eternity to certain sub-atomic particles, whose life

span is measured in millionths of a second. See how relative our concept of time and space is!

While Maya is the breath of God by which the universe of time and space is created, from our own temporal perspective, that breath manifests as ‘the Great Radiance’ or ‘Big Bang’ from which and by which all else is produced. That ‘Great Radiance’, last occurring fourteen billion years ago, is an immense burst of high frequency electromagnetic radiation that rapidly transforms into quantum wave/particles which, combining with other such wave/particles, produce the appearance of the various forms of matter which constitute this vast universe. The production of this ‘illusory’ universe of discreet material forms within an infinitely extended space also creates the illusion of time. Our experience of the passage of time, as Albert Einstein showed us, is relative to our positional perspective, so that years may seem to pass which, from another perspective, are but passing moments—just as in a dream. Let me tell you a story from the Vedantic tradition, which illustrates this phenomenon:

Once, the legendary sage, Narada, was out walking with Krishna, who is, of course, representative, in literature, of God. In the course of their conversation, Narada asked God to explain to him the mystery of His Maya. And the Lord said, “Alright—but before I do, since my throat is a little dry, please fetch me a drink of water.” So, Narada ran off to find some water for the Lord. In the course of his search, he came to a pleasant little hut, where he stopped to get directions to the nearest water, but when the door to the hut was opened, there stood a most beautiful young maiden with whom Narada was immediately smitten. As she invited him inside, Narada forgot all about his mission to fetch some water for his Lord; and, as the days passed very pleasantly, Narada fell more and more in love with his beautiful hostess, and soon they were wed.

Before long, the blissful couple had children, and Narada toiled in the field to grow food for his growing family. He was extremely happy with his new family and thought himself to be surely the most fortunate of men to have such a beautiful wife and such fine children. But, one day, a great monsoon rain fell; and for many days thereafter the rain continued. The riverbanks overflowed, and the little hut was filled with water. Narada climbed, with his family, to the top of the hut, clinging with one hand to the roof, and with the other to his wife and children. But the rains continued, and the hut began to collapse from the flooding waters. First one child, then another, was swept away in the raging torrent; and finally, Narada felt his darling wife slip away from his grasp as well. Then, he too was swept away in the flood, crying out in the darkness for his wife and children.

At last, nearly unconscious, and completely exhausted, Narada found himself washed up on a wreckage-strewn shore. And, as he lay there desperately lamenting the loss of his family, he suddenly looked up to see the feet of Krishna at his head. Quickly, he struggled to his feet, and Krishna, with an ironic smile, asked, “Where have you been, Narada? I sent you for water nearly ten minutes ago!” It was in this way that the Lord showed to Narada His power of Maya. Indeed, this life is much like a dream, in which we become entirely involved and embroiled, forgetful of our real purpose, only to wake to find that the people, things, and events we thought real were, in fact unreal—a mere play of thought.<sup>2</sup>

“All this [world],” said the insightful sage, Shankaracharya, “from the intellect to the gross physical body, is the effect of Maya. Understand that all these and Maya itself are not the absolute Self, and are therefore unreal, like a mirage in the desert.”<sup>3</sup> “Real,” for Shankaracharya, meant “eternal,” That which always was and always will be. This phenomenal universe obviously does not fit this definition of “real,” and is therefore “unreal”—like a mirage. It is only God’s imagination—similar in some ways to a dream. Do you remember the following song?

Row, row, row your boat,  
Gently down the stream.  
Merrily, merrily, merrily,  
Life is but a dream.

That song conveys the idea of Maya. And this is a great understanding to have of the world. But, of much more significance is the understanding that the Dreamer of the dream, the divine Consciousness, is ultimately the only Reality, and is therefore, without doubt, our own ultimate Identity. And so, whatever apparently desirable conditions we become attracted to, and whatever nightmarish conditions manifest before us, if we are able to remain conscious of that eternal Identity, we will always remain fearless and unmoved, confident that we are above and beyond whatever conditions that may confront us in this dream-like world. The realization of God, the realization of our eternal Self, is an experience very similar to awaking from a dream in the sense that one who has awakened to the eternal Self is then able to re-experience the dream from a new perspective and enjoy the play fearlessly and with great enjoyment.

When I was a child, I remember I would sometimes have disturbing dreams in which some creature of my imagination would chase me and would be just at the point of gobbling me up, when I would pinch myself in the

dream, and wake myself, thus escaping the beast by withdrawing suddenly from the dream to my warm and safe bed. Once I discovered this handy trick, I would taunt the villains in my dreams, secure in the knowledge that, just at the critical moment, when they had me cornered with no apparent exit, I could pinch myself, and disappear from their clutches just like that.

The same kind of confidence belongs to the one who has realized the Self, through contemplation. Just as, when a dream-character awakes, he realizes he is, in fact, the dreamer, likewise, when we, who experience ourselves as manifestations of God's imagination, awake from this dream of a world, we realize that, in fact, we are the Imaginator, the pure Consciousness from whom all this imagined universe sprang. We realize that we are, and have always been, the one eternal Self of all; that we have always been safe and secure as the all-inclusive One.

Once we have awakened to the Self, then, when we find ourselves back in the dream, we can share our knowledge with everyone else in the dream. This is what the mystic does; he returns to the dream, the world, and tells everyone, "Hey! This is just a dream. Each of us is really that one Dreamer; He is the Self of all of us. And, if you really want to enjoy the dream in the best possible way, and at the same time know that you're free from the dream, then wake up and realize who you really are!"

This brings to my mind the parable told by Socrates, called "The Analogy of The Cave." <sup>4</sup> Socrates, who was an enlightened man, attempted to illustrate his own state by asking his listeners to imagine a world in which there were some people chained in a cave far underground, with their backs to a fire before which some other people were parading back and forth. The people chained are facing toward a cave-wall on which the images of the people parading in front of the fire are cast as shadows. The images on the wall are all that they can see, and so they take that to be the reality. Then, one day, one man escapes from his chains. He discovers the fire and the figures marching in front of it and realizes how mistaken he had been in regarding only the shadows as the reality. Then, he discovers a way out of the cave, and he climbs up, out of the cave, into the sunlight, and discovers the real source of light in the world. He is overjoyed, and elated, and he returns to the cave, telling everyone, "Look, this is only shadows, illusions! Break your bonds; come up out of the cave and see the reality!" The problem, of course, is that no one believes him. They think him mad; they curse him and stone him and ostracize him from their company while remaining ensnared in their false shadow world.

That was the analogical story Socrates told as a way of explaining the idea

of Maya. But, just as the unchained man in his story was brutally treated by his brothers when he attempted to lead them to freedom, so was Socrates brutally treated in his own life. When he tried to explain the Truth that he had seen to the people of Athens, they scorned him and condemned him to death, and eventually murdered him. Many years later, Jesus of Nazareth also experienced his eternal identity through God's grace, and, like Socrates, was persecuted and murdered for attempting to show people the way out of the cave, out of Maya's snare of illusion, so that they too could know the Truth and be free.

Just as the people living in the underground cave in Socrates' story were unaware that they were even bound by Maya, we also live in Maya's world of duality without even being aware of our ensnarement. In fact, it is only when God's grace reveals our true nature that the duality in which we had previously been living also becomes revealed. In the 7th chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna says, "The whole world is under the delusion of my Maya; for this Maya of mine is very difficult to penetrate. Only those who take refuge in Me go beyond it."<sup>5</sup> In other words, it is only by intense devotion and the grace of God that we are released from the delusive power of Maya. If we think of this release as the awakening from a dream, we can easily understand that it is not just the person within the dream who must awake, but the Dreamer must also deliberately reveal Himself. There must be a complicity, or grace, extending from the Dreamer to the dreamed. It's not as though one can awake from the cosmic dream simply by pinching oneself. But, through a strong desire for liberation, with a focused mind intent on God, with an all-consuming will and devotion, it is possible to draw that complicity, that grace, and bring about an "awakening." Then you will be free—even though you still live within Maya's cosmic dream.

Though everything in the world will remain the same after such an awakening, for you, all will be quite different; for your vision of the world will be very different. The clear, perfect nondual awareness shines without blemish, illuminating the mind with its light. But it is not permanent; one does not remain in that nondual state continually thereafter. Still, it is an experience that cannot be forgotten, and the radiant memory of its revelation permeates one's consciousness ever after. That divine awareness remains as the underlying content of one's mind, an ever-present certainty upon which one constantly dwells. From that moment on, you will carry with you the awareness of your eternal Self, and you will view all this dream-like world as your own glorious play. Maya will no longer bind you in any way, for you'll know that you are, in truth, the Lord of Maya. As the great Shankaracharya said, "Maya is destroyed by the realization of the One

without a second.” The revelation of your true nature destroys all previous limited notions of your identity, just as awaking from a dream destroys the illusory reality of the dream.

Swami Vidyaranya, another of the great Vedantic sages, wrote, “Maya is called ‘the wish-fulfilling cow.’ It yields milk in the form of duality. Drink as much of it as you like; but the Truth is non-duality.”<sup>6</sup> Final release from all duality—including life and death—is obtained only through the knowledge of the Self. One does not come to the end of dreaming until one awakes to that Self.

All the Self-realized sages agree: the knowledge of the Self is the only means to transcend the ignorance in which we are enmeshed due to the veiling power of Maya. Once a person has awakened from the dream-world of Maya, he may enter back into the dream, with the awareness of his eternal Identity, and he is never troubled by the occurrences within the dream-world again. He is aware that he *is* everything that appears before him, that everything that happens is a mere imagination, and that he can never be threatened or destroyed. All is himself; and, at the same time, he is quite free and safe, beyond the effects of all this temporal phantasmagoria of things and events. He knows within himself: “I am the Absolute; I am completely independent, ever-pure, eternal and free. I pervade everything; I am everlasting, undefiled, pure Existence, beyond Maya, without cause or limitation. I alone am. I am the one eternal Consciousness.”<sup>7</sup>

#### NOTES:

1. *Bhagavad Gita*, 18:61.
2. Who has not fallen at least once into the snare of Maya, just as Narada did? No one, I’d wager. Not even the greatest saint has managed to entirely escape Maya’s seductive spell of illusion.
3. Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*, III:7; Prabhavananda & Isherwood, *Shankara’s Crest-Jewel Of Discrimination*, Hollywood, Vedanta Press, 1978, pp. 51-52.
4. Plato, *Republic*, Book VII
5. *Bhagavad Gita*, 7:14
6. Vidyaranya, *Panchadashi*, 6:236; H.P. Shastri (trans.), *Panchadashi by Vidyaranya*; London, Shanti Sadan, 1965, p. 161.
7. It is because of Maya that the One appears to be two. The one eternal *I*, when seen through the dualistic perspective of Maya, becomes divided into an ‘I’ and a ‘Thou’ to whom it relates. Only when, by God’s grace, Maya is transcended, are we able to become aware of ourselves as the one eternal *I*. Without that grace, we remain confined to the perspective

of Maya, dividing ourselves into an ‘I’ and a ‘Thou’. From that dualistic perspective, ‘Thou’ art the transcendent Lord, and ‘I’ am Thy servant, an individual soul among other souls. Most of our time on earth, therefore, is experienced from the perspective of Maya. The undivided Self is always the ultimate Reality, but only rarely are we granted the nondual vision of that one true Self.

### I. The Appearance of Duality

It is well known that the Self of man and the ultimate transcendent Reality known as God are not two. This is the perennially acceptable view of “Nonduality”. But it must also be acknowledged that there is an *apparent* duality which has a certain phenomenal reality to it as well. For, during the “mystical experience” one experiences a noumenal and eternal ‘I’ who manifests this universe in which lives a phenomenal and temporal ‘I’. The ‘I’ is the same, yet different. The difference between the two ‘I’s is that the real ‘I,’ the eternal one, projected Himself as the temporal one into this world of time and space; the temporal one did not project himself into eternity.

So, God, by His very *projection* of this temporal universe, establishes an *apparent* duality for those living within this projection. This is not difficult to understand: If there is a dreamer and his dream, there *appears* to be two. But are there really two? The truth is that there is still only one; the other is only an imagination, and though the consciousness in the dream seems to be an ‘other,’ it is in fact the consciousness of the dreamer. But some would argue that “The other still *exists* as a phenomenon, and therefore constitutes a second. It is a question of perspective, is it not? At least we may be certain that, once the dreamer awakes and the dream is no more, then only one remains. The Nondualist would no doubt remark that there was *always* only one.

We dream-images enclosed within this illusory universe of time and space, are similarly “phenomena”, and therefore *appear* to exist. And so, as *images* of God (who is our *true* Self), we regard God as separate, ‘other’. For, while *we* are enclosed within the world of time and space which is His projection made of His Consciousness, *He* is the One in whom we and all else is contained. He is the eternal Mind that projects this space/time continuum, this form-filled world, as a construct of thought. He is indeed the Consciousness which animates us, and which lends us consciousness. He is our very Self; He is the one and *only* Reality. But it is not wrong to acknowledge the *apparent* duality which He brings to pass

in the act of projecting this world of beings within Himself.

Ultimately, when we pass from space-time to the unlimited Reality, we shall recognize the eternally inseparable oneness of God and our Self; nonetheless, while living as separate beings within this worldly illusion, it is quite understandable if we call out to Him as though He were separate, or ‘other,’ just as dream figures might call out within themselves in an effort to contact the dreamer, who is indeed their own essence, a one who becomes an *apparent* two.

Some hold exclusively to the eternal truth of unity, declaring their single and only identity to be ‘the One’; these are the *jnanis* (or “knowers”). Others, acknowledging the *apparent* duality between themselves and God, worship the One as other than themselves, as the Exemplar of which they are mere images. These are the *bhaktas* (or “lovers”). And both are perfectly correct and valid pathways to the realization of God, the knowledge of the eternal Self. The *jnani* says, “I am That”; the *bhakta* says, “O Lord, Thou alone art!”. And within themselves both arrive at the selfsame realization of the Real.

‘And what of the apparent duality of body and spirit?’ we may wonder. We all know what Descartes thought about it. But I would ask, ‘Have you ever seen ice cubes floating in water? Are they two things or one?’ There seems to be two different substances, since each is clearly separate from the other; but no, it is one substance in two different states. When I was immersed in the unitive vision, I wondered “Where is the temple (of the body)? Which the imperishable, which the abode?” For there was to be seen no separate body-temple with an imperishable soul within! There was no division to be found at all. All is Consciousness-Energy in this dream-universe! And all of it is imperishable. It is only the various shapes that are so changeable, so very perishable; but the Essence is one.

Think of your own dream-creations! Is your dream-character divided into a consciousness and a body-form? No. It is one thing: the form and its limited self-consciousness are one projected creative mind-stuff. Likewise, for us here on earth. We live and move and have our being within the Mind-stuff of God. It is His drama, and He is the Self-consciousness of each of us. When we ultimately awake, we shall know the Source of all selves, the Source of all forms; we shall know that we were, are, and ever shall be, the One who lives in eternal bliss.

But what of the separation between the ‘soul’ and the body at death? It seems quite certain that consciousness withdraws from the body when the

heart stops beating, that consciousness and the solidified energy that is our body then go their separate ways. And that seems to imply a real, absolute, duality. But it is just the magic of the One. Think of what happens when you wake from a dream: Your own consciousness of Self remains even when the dream vanishes. Who you thought you were in the dream is seen to have been an illusory identity; but the real *You* remains. The dream scenery is vanished too. Where did it go? It never really was. It too was only your own consciousness, *appearing* as form. Likewise, in this universe, matter is consciousness appearing as energy, appearing as form.

The universe itself is occurring *as a whole* within the one Consciousness. It is an integral dream-like phenomenon. He is always One, even while projecting the universal dream with His Consciousness-Energy. When each of the dream-like images awakes, they awake to the One. Then, at the end of the universal ‘dream’, all forms revert to Energy, which ceases its transformations and becomes merely the potential Energy (Creative Power) of the one Consciousness. Consciousness ceases its play, resolving quietly into Itself. They were never two; they are merely twin aspects of His projective Power. The Supreme Consciousness will rest now, prior to projecting once again an apparent universe of conscious forms, another seeming duality upon His oneness.

Keeping in mind this unity-in-duality, or duality-in-unity, please reconsider the remarkable text from the Gnostic seer, Simon Magus (*fl. ca. 40 C.E.*), entitled *The Great Exposition*, which so ably explains the apparent duality within the Nondual reality:

### The Great Exposition by Simon Magus

There are *two* aspects of the One: The first of these is the Higher, the Divine Mind of the universe, which governs all things, and is masculine. The other is the lower, the Thought (*epinoia*) which produces all things, and is feminine. As a pair united, they comprise all that exists.

The Divine Mind is the Father who sustains all things and nourishes all that begins and ends. He is the One who eternally stands, without beginning or end. He exists entirely alone; for, while the Thought arising from Unity, and coming forth from the Divine Mind, creates [the appearance of] duality, the Father remains a Unity. The Thought is in Himself, and so He is alone. Made manifest to Himself from Himself, He appears to be two. He

becomes “Father” by virtue of being called so by His own Thought.

Since He, Himself, brought forward Himself, by means of Himself, manifesting to Himself His own Thought, it is not correct to attribute creation to the Thought alone. For She (the Thought) conceals the Father within Herself; the Divine Mind and the Thought are intertwined. Thus, though [they appear] to be a pair, one opposite the other, the Divine Mind is in no way different from the Thought, inasmuch as they are one.

Though there appears to be a Higher—the Mind, and a lower—the Thought, truly, It is a Unity, just as what is manifested from these two [i.e., the universe] is a unity, while appearing to be a duality. The Divine Mind and the Thought are discernible, one from the other, but they are one, though they appear to be two.

[Thus,] ... there is one Divine Reality, [apparently] divided as Higher and lower; generating Itself, nourishing Itself, seeking Itself, finding Itself, being mother of Itself, father of Itself, sister of Itself, spouse of Itself, daughter of Itself, son of Itself. It is both Mother and Father, a Unity, being the Root of the entire circle of existence. 1

#### NOTES:

1. Simon Magus, *Apophysis Megale* (“The Great Exposition”), quoted by Hippolytus of Rome, in *Refutatio Omnitum Heresium* (“The Refutation of All Heresies”), VI. 8; adapted from Roberts, Rev. A. & Donaldson, J. (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Vol. VI; Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1892; pp. 208-210. This text was previously cited in Abhayananda, Swami, *History of Mysticism*, Olympia, Wash., Atma Books, 1987, 2000; p. 132.

\* \* \*

## 5. NONDUALITY IN THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS by Swami Abhayananda

**Published in the Public Domain: 3-12-18**

*This is excerpted from my book, The Wisdom of Vedanta, 1991, and was also included in the Article, “Enlightened Christianity,” both of which are available for downloading at my website: [www.themysticsvision.com](http://www.themysticsvision.com).*

### **I. Nonduality In The Teachings of Jesus**

It is important to stress the fact that no one religion holds deed to the Truth over and above the devotees of other lands and other religious traditions. Every religious tradition worth its salt recognizes the same eternal Truth; and all great religious teachers have taught according to their own intimate experience of God, their “mystical vision”—whether it is called “*samadhi*,” “*nirvana*,” “*fana*,” or “union with God.” Since there is but one ultimate Reality, which all share, each one who has experienced the Truth has experienced that same ultimate Reality. Naturally, therefore, their teachings about it, and about how one can experience It for oneself, are bound to be identical.

However, the languages and cultures of the various teachers who have lived throughout history are, no doubt, different from one another. Their personalities and lifestyles are different; but their vision is one. In the mystical experience, which transcends all religious traditions and cultures and languages, the Christian, the Jew, the Muslim, the Buddhist and the Vedantist, all come to the same realization: Each realizes the oneness of their own soul and God, the Soul of the universe. It is this very experience, which prompted Jesus, the originator of Christianity, to explain at various times to his disciples that he had known the great Unity in which he and the Father of the universe were one:

“If you knew who I am,” he said, you would also know the Father. Knowing me, you know Him; seeing me, you see Him. Do you not understand that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? It is the Father who dwells in me doing His own work. Understand me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. 1

This is the truth that the Indian philosophy of Vedanta speaks of as “Nondualism.” The term, “Unity,” is, of course, the same in meaning; but it seems that the declaration, “not-two” is more powerfully emphatic than a mere assertion of oneness. Indeed, the word, “Unity” is often used by religionists who apply it to God, but who have not even considered the thought that they themselves are logically included in an *absolute* Unity. Nondualism, the philosophy of absolute Unity, is the central teaching, not only of Vedanta, but of all genuine seers of the Truth. This understanding is embodied in the Vedantic assertion, *tat twam asi*, “That thou art.” Jesus expressed the same truth when he said, “I and the father are one.” That saying contains the whole teaching of Jesus, and it is the most perfect expression of Nondualism ever uttered.

Once we begin to look at the teachings of Jesus in the light of his “mystical” experience of Unity, we begin to have a much clearer perspective on all the aspects of the life and teaching of the man. His teachings, like those of the various Vedantic sages who’ve taught throughout the ages, is that the soul of man (the *Atman*) is none other than the one Divinity, none other than God; and that this Divine Identity can be experienced and known through the revelation that occurs inwardly, by the grace of God, to those who prepare and purify their minds and hearts to receive it. The words of Jesus are so well known to us from our childhood that, perhaps, they have lost their meaning through our over-familiarity with them. He attempted to explain to us, with the words, “I and the Father are one,” that the “I,” our own inner awareness of self, is none other than the one divine Self, the one all-pervasive Awareness, the Lord and Father of us all.

Why, then, are we so unable to see it? Why should it be so hard for us to attain to that purity of heart, which Jesus declared so essential to Its vision? Probably because we have not really tried—not the way Jesus did, going off into the wilderness, putting aside everything else in his life for this one aim, focusing completely and entirely on attaining the vision of God. Not the way the Buddha did. Not the way all those who have experienced in themselves the one all-pervasive Spirit have done. Perhaps we’re not ready for such a concentrated effort just yet. Perhaps we have other desires yet to dispense with before we will be free enough to seek so high a goal. For us, perhaps, there is yet much to be done to soften the heart, so that we are pure enough to hear the call of Divine Grace. It is to such as us, for whom much yet needs to be accomplished toward the attainment of a “pure heart,” that Jesus spoke.

All of what Jesus taught to his disciples was by way of explaining to them

that his real nature, and that of all men, is Divine; and that the reality of this could be realized directly. Furthermore, he taught them the path, or method, to follow in order to attain this direct realization. Let us look to his own words to corroborate this: In the Gospel book of John, he laments to God, “O righteous Father, the world has not known Thee. But I have known Thee.”<sup>2</sup> And, as he sat among the orthodox religionists in the Jewish temple, he said to them, “You say that He is your God, yet you have not known Him. But I have known Him.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus had “known” God within himself. Whether this ‘mystical’ experience of revelation occurred at the moment of his initiation by John the Baptist, or later, during his time in the wilderness, we cannot know for certain. However, it is certain that that experience had separated him and effectively isolated him from his brothers, because he alone among his contemporaries seemed to possess this rare knowledge of the truth of all existence.

This is the difficult plight of all those who have been graced with “the vision of God.” It is the greatest of gifts, it is the greatest of all possible visions; and yet, because the knowledge so received is completely contrary to what all men believe regarding God and the soul, it is a terribly alienating knowledge, which brings upon its possessor the scorn and derision of all mankind. History is replete with examples of others who, having attained this saving knowledge, found the world unwilling to accept it, and ready to defend its ignorance aggressively. This circumstance is little changed today.

Because the “vision” of God was so difficult to convey to those who had not experienced it, Jesus spoke often by way of analogy or metaphor in order to make his meaning clear. He spoke of the experience of “seeing” God as like the entrance into a realm beyond this world, a realm where only God exists. In his own Aramaic language, he called this realm *malkutha*. In the Greek translation, it is *basileia*. In English, it is usually rendered as “the kingdom of God.”

His disciples asked him, “When will the kingdom come?” Jesus said, “It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying ‘Here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ Rather, the kingdom of the Father is [already] spread out upon the earth, and [yet] men do not see it.”<sup>4</sup>

... Indeed, what you look forward to has already come, but you do not recognize it.”<sup>5</sup>

The Pharisees asked him, “When will the kingdom of God come?” He said, “You cannot tell by signs [i.e., by observations] when the kingdom of God

will come. There will be no saying, “Look, here it is!” or “There it is!” For, in fact, the kingdom of God is [experienced] within you.” 6

Jesus said, “If those who lead you say to you, “See, the kingdom is in the sky,” then the birds of the sky will have preceded you. If they say to you, “It is in the sea,” then the fish will precede you. Rather the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you [as well]. When you come to know your Self, then you [i.e., your true nature] will be known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living Father. But if you will not know your Self, you live in poverty [i.e., you live in the illusion that you are a pitiful creature far from God].” 7

Another of Jesus’ metaphors utilized the terms, “Light” and “darkness” to represent the Divinity and the inherent delusion of man, respectively:

Jesus said, “The world’s images are manifest to man, but the Light in them remains concealed; within the image is the Light of the Father. He becomes manifest as the images, but, as the Light, He is concealed.” 8

He said to them, “There is a Light within a man of Light, and It lights up the whole world. If it does not shine, he is in darkness.” 9

These are terms which have been used since time immemorial to represent the Divine Consciousness in man and the hazy ignorance brought about by the material Creation which obscures It. In the very first paragraph of the Gospel of John, we find an excellent explanation of these two principles, and their Greek synonyms, *Theos* and *Logos*.

In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God. He [or It] was with God in the beginning. All things were made by Him; without Him nothing was made. Within Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of man. And the Light shone in the darkness, but the darkness comprehended It not. 10

A word of explanation is necessary: These two terms, “Light and “darkness,” are also indicative of the cosmic aspects of Reality; in other words, they are not only the Divine Consciousness in man and the darkness of unknowing, but they are, at a higher level, the very Godhead (*Theos*) and Its Power of manifestation (*Logos*). They are those same two principles we have so often run into in other mystical texts, whether called *Brahman* and *Maya*, *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, *Shiva* and *Shakti*, or *Jahveh* and *Chokmah*. It is the Godhead in us, which provides the Light

of Consciousness in us; it is His Creative Power, His manifesting principle, which, in the process of creating an individual soul-mind-body, provides us with all the obscuration necessary to keep us in the dark as to our infinite and eternal Identity.

Jesus said, “If they ask you, ‘Where did you come from?’ say to them, ‘We came from the Light, the place where the Light came into being of Its own accord and established Itself and became manifest through our image.’

“If they ask you, ‘Are you It?’ say, ‘We are Its children, and we are the elect of the living Father.’ If they ask you, ‘What is the sign of your Father in you?’ say to them, ‘It is movement and repose.’”<sup>11</sup>

Jesus said, “I am the Light; I am above all that is manifest. Everything came forth from me, and everything returns to me. Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift a stone, and you will find me there.”<sup>12</sup>

Here, Jesus identifies with the Eternal Light; but it is clear that he never intended to imply that he was uniquely and exclusively identical with It; it should be clear that his intention was always to convey the truth that all men are, in essence, the transcendent Consciousness, manifest in form:

Ye *are* the Light of the world. Let your Light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.  
<sup>13</sup>

Frequently Jesus declared to his followers that they too would come to the same realization that he had experienced:

“I tell you this,” he said to them; “there are some of those standing here who will not taste death before they have seen the kingdom of God already come in full power.”<sup>14</sup>

“The heavens and the earth will be rolled up in your presence. And the one who lives from the living ONE will not see death. Have I not said: ‘whoever finds his Self is superior to the world?’”<sup>15</sup>

“Take heed of the living ONE while you are alive, lest you die and seek to see Him and be unable to do so.”<sup>16</sup>

“That which you have will save you if you bring It forth from yourselves. That which you do not have within you will destroy you.”<sup>17</sup>

“That which you have” is, of course, the Truth, the Light, the Divinity who

manifests as you. “That which you do not have” refers to the false identity of a separate and independent individuality, which is simply a lie. It is the wrong understanding of who you are that limits you, and which prevents you from experiencing the Eternal.

The teaching, common to all true “mystics” who have realized the Highest, is ‘You *are* the Light of the world! You *are* That! Identify with the Light, the eternal Truth, for That is who you really are!’ And yet Jesus did not wish that this should remain a mere matter of faith with his disciples; he wished them to experience it, to *realize* this truth for themselves. And he taught them the method by which he had come to know God. Like all great seers, he knew both the means and the end, he knew both the One and the many. Thus, we hear in the message of Jesus an apparent ambiguity, which is necessitated by the paradoxical nature of the Reality.

In the One, the two—soul and God—play their love-game of devotion. At one moment, the soul speaks of God, its “Father”; at another moment, it is identified with God, and speaks of “I.” Likewise, in the words of Jesus to his disciples, we see this same complementarity: At one moment, he speaks of dualistic devotion in the form of prayer (“Our Father, who art in heaven”); and at another moment he asserts his oneness, his identity, with God (“Lift the stone and I am there ...”). But he cautioned his disciples against offending others with this attitude (“If they ask you, ‘Are you It?’ say, ‘We are Its children ...’”).

At times, identifying with the One, he asserts that he has the power to grant the experience of Unity (“I shall give you what no eye has seen and what no ear has heard and what no hand has touched and what has never occurred to the human mind”).<sup>18</sup> And at other times, identifying with the human soul, he gives all credit to God, the Father (“Why do you call me good? There is no one good but the ONE, that is God.”). <sup>19</sup>

There is an interesting story that appears in both Matthew and Luke which illustrates the knowledge, from the standpoint of the individual soul, that the realization of God comes, not by any deed of one’s own, but solely by the grace of God: Jesus had just commented upon how difficult it would be for a young man, otherwise spiritually inclined, who was attached to his worldly wealth and occupations, to realize God; and his disciples, who were gathered around, were somewhat disturbed by this, and asked, “Then, who *can* attain salvation?” And Jesus answered, “For man it is impossible; but for God it is possible.”

And Peter, understanding that Jesus is denying that any man, by his own

efforts, can bring about that experience, but only God, by His grace, gives this enlightenment, objected: “But we here have left our belongings to become your followers!” And Jesus, wishing to assure them that any effort toward God-realization will bear its fruits in this life and in lives to come, said to them: “I tell you this; there is no one who has given up home, or wife, brothers, parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not be repaid many times over in this time, and in the time to come [will] know eternal Life.”<sup>20</sup> He could guarantee to no one the divinely-revealed knowledge of God; that was in the hands of God. But Jesus knew that whatever efforts one makes toward God must bear their fruits in this life, and in the lives to come.

And so, throughout the teachings of Jesus, one finds these two, apparently contradictory, attitudes intermingled: the attitude of the *jnani* (“I am the Light; I am above all that is manifest”); and the attitude of the *bhakta* (“Father, father, why hast Thou forsaken me?”). They are the two voices of the illumined man, for he is both, the transcendent Unity and the imaged soul; for he has “seen” this unity in the unitive mystical vision.

Jesus had experienced the ultimate Truth; he had clearly seen and known It beyond any doubt; and he knew that the consciousness that lived as him was the one Consciousness of all. He knew that he was, in fact, the living Awareness from which this entire universe is born. This was the certain, indubitable, truth; and yet Jesus found but few who could even comprehend it. For the most part, those to whom he spoke were well-meaning religionists who were dedicated to the exercises and rituals of their religion but were incapable of accepting the profound meaning of his words. The religious orthodoxy of his time, like all such orthodoxies, fostered a self-serving lip-service to spiritual ideals, and observed all sorts of symbolic rituals, but was entirely ignorant of the fact that the ultimate reality could be directly known by a pure and devout soul, and that this was the real purpose of all religious practice.

Jesus realized that despite the overwhelming influence of the orthodox religionists, still, in his own Judaic tradition, there had been other enlightened seers of God, who had known and taught this truth. “I come,” said Jesus, “not to destroy the law [of the Prophets], but to fulfill it.”<sup>21</sup> He knew also that any person who announced the fact that they had seen and known God would be persecuted and belittled and regarded as an infidel and a liar. In the *Gospel of Thomas*, Jesus is reported to have said, “He who knows the Father (the transcendent Absolute) and the Mother (the Creative Principle) will be called a son-of-a-bitch!”<sup>22</sup> It seems he was making a pun on the fact that one who does *not* know his father and mother

is usually referred to in this fashion; but, in his case, he had known the Father of the universe, and knew the Power (of Mother Nature) behind the entire creation, and still he was called this derisive name.

Such is the common experience of all the great seers, from Lao Tze to Socrates and Heraclitus, from Plotinus and al-Hallaj to Meister Eckhart and St. John of the Cross. All were cruelly tortured and persecuted for their goodness and wisdom. Jesus too found the world of men wanting in understanding; he said:

I took my place in the midst of the world, and I went among the people. I found all of them intoxicated [with pride and ignorance]; I found none of them thirsty [for Truth]. And my soul became sorrowful for the sons of men, because they are blind in their hearts and do not have vision. Empty they came into the world, and empty they wish to leave the world. But, for the moment, they are intoxicated; when they shake off their wine, then they will repent. 23

#### NOTES:

1. *John, Gospel Of*, 13:40.
2. *Ibid.*, 17:25.
3. *Ibid.*, 8:54.
4. *Thomas, Gospel Of*, 114; (trans. by Thomas O. Lambdin), Robinson, James M. (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*; San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1977, p. 138.
5. *Ibid.*, 51, p. 132.
6. *Luke, Gospel Of*, 17:20.
7. *Thomas, Gospel Of*, 3; Robinson, James M. (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*; San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1977, p. 126.
8. *Ibid.*, 83, p. 135.
9. *Ibid.*, 24, p. 129.
10. *John, Gospel Of*, 1:1.
11. *Thomas, Gospel Of*, 50, Robinson, James M. (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*; San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1977, p. 132.
12. *Ibid.*, 77, p. 135.
13. *Matthew, Gospel Of*, 5:14-16.
14. *Mark, Gospel Of*, 9:1.
15. *Thomas Gospel Of*, 111; Robinson, 1977, p.138.
16. *Ibid.*, 59, p. 132.
17. *Ibid.*, 70, p. 134.
18. *Ibid.*, 17, p. 128.
19. *Luke, Gospel Of*, 18:18.
20. *Ibid.*, 18:18-30; *Matthew, Gospel Of*, 19:16.

21. *Matthew, Gospel Of*, 5:17.
22. *Thomas, Gospel Of*, 105, Robinson, 1977, p. 137.
23. *Ibid.*, 28, p. 130.

\* \* \*

## 6. THE PHILOSOPHY OF NONDUALISM

(excerpted from *The Divine Universe*)

Spiritual Nondualism 1 is the philosophy substantiated by the vision of all the mystics who ever lived, which holds that the soul or self of man is identical with the transcendent Spirit that is God. *Spirit* is a word which is not very much in favor these days, as it has been sorely mis-used in the past; but it is a necessary word, as there is a need for a non-sectarian verbal symbol to represent the essence of our reality as experienced by the visionaries of the subtle. *Spirit* represents the Divine in both Its transcendent and Its immanent aspects. As the transcendent Godhead, *Spirit* is incognizable and inconceivable by the mind of man. It is neither mind nor matter, but a subtler reality that is eternal, omniscient, and omnipresent; and which experiences Itself as pure consciousness and bliss. The transcendent Godhead manifests Itself as the *Spirit immanent* in man and the universe, appearing as the consciousness of self in man, as well as the Divine Energy that goes to make up all the ‘material’ forms of this universe. There is but one Being, one *Spirit*, who constitutes both the Eternal and the temporal reality. Just as the Sun’s rays are identical with the Sun, all that emanates from the *Spirit* is identical with the *Spirit*. In other words, our true identity is *Spirit*, and nothing other than *Spirit*. This identity may be known directly, by the grace of God, when the soul is drawn to that unitive interior vision.

*Nondualism* means that there is no difference between the source and the manifestation, no difference between the essence of one thing and another, no difference between you and God. No difference. The Sanskrit word used by the Upanishadic sages to designate this philosophy is *advaita*, which is made up of *a*, not, and *dvaita*, two, meaning literally, “not two.” *Spiritual Nondualism* is the philosophy that you are essentially identical with the one *Spirit*—that One who has been called *Brahman*, *Shiva*, *Allah*, *Yahveh*, *Hari*, *Adonai*, *Karim*, *God*, and innumerable other names throughout history. The Upanishadic seers, recognizing this identity in their visions, have called that one *Spirit* the *atman*; the Self, as it is realized to be the one Self of all. Now, this vision belongs to no one religion. Though the philosophy of Nondualism was originally elucidated in the Upanishads, today, it is universally recognized by the mystics (the seers) of every religious tradition as the *Perennial Philosophy*, because it arises again and again throughout history as the one recurring view of mystical philosophers and seers from widely divergent cultures and traditions. It has been and continues to be repeatedly verified through direct experience by all those who have made the ascent in consciousness to

the supreme Self.

Here are a few snippets of quotations from some well-known seers representing that perennial philosophy:

*He who is beyond all predicates appears as the relative universe; He appears as all sentient and insentient beings.*

—Rig Veda —

*Even by the mind this truth is to be learned: there are not many, but only One.*

— Katha Upanishad

*It is not what is thought that we should wish to know; we should know the thinker. “He is my Self!” This one should know. “He is my Self!” This one should know.*

— Kaushitaki Upanishad

*The pure man sees the One as one and the many as one. So long as he sees the Unity, he is God; when he sees the distinctions, he is man.*

—Chuang Tze

*He who knows that he is, himself, the Lord of all, and is ever the same in all, immortal though experiencing the field of mortality, he knows the truth of existence.*

—

Bhagavad Gita

*The best of men choose to know the One above all else; it is the famous “Eternal” within mortal man.*

— Heraclitus

*What, then, is the heart of the highest truth, the core of knowledge, the wisdom supreme? It is “I am the Self, the formless One; by my very nature, I am pervading all. That one God who shines within everything, who is formless like the cloudless sky, is the pure, stainless Self of all. Without any doubt, that is who I am.”*

— Dattatreya

*God is high above place and time... He is contained by nothing but transcends all. But though transcending what He has made, nonetheless, He fills the universe with Himself.*

— Philo Judaeus

*There is one Divine Reality, divided as higher and lower, generating Itself, nourishing Itself, seeking Itself, finding Itself. ...It is both Mother and Father, a Unity, being the Root of the entire circle of existence.*

– Simon Magus

*I and the Father are one.*

– Jesus

*The one Divine Mind, in Its mentation, thinks Itself; the object of Its thought is nothing external; Thinker and thought are one, unchangeably the same.*

– Plotinus

*All that is He contains within Himself like thoughts: the world, Himself, the All. In the All there is nothing which is not God. Adore this teaching, my child, and hold it sacred.*

– Hermes Trismegistus

*The Reality is One; though, owing to illusions It appears to be multiple names and forms, attributes and changes, It always remains unchanged. [It is] like gold, which while remaining one, is formed into various ornaments. You are that One, that Brahman. Meditate on that in your mind.*

– Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*

*Just as the light of the Sun and the Sun are not absolutely different, ... so also the soul and the supreme Self are not different.*

– Shankara, *Vedanta Sutras*

*The entire universe is truly the Self. There exists nothing at all other than the Self. The enlightened person sees everything in the world as his own Self, just as one views earthenware jars and pots as nothing but clay.*

– Shankara, *Atma Bodha*

*When the mystery of the oneness of the soul and the Divine is revealed to you, you will understand that you are not other than God. ...For when you know yourself, your sense of a limited identity vanishes, and you know that you and God are one and the same.*

– Ibn Arabi

*My Me is God, nor do I recognize any other Me except my God Himself.*

– Catherine of Genoa

*As the soul becomes more pure and bare and poor, and possesses less of created things, and is emptied of all things that are not God, it receives God more purely, and is more completely in Him; and it truly becomes one with God, and it looks into God and God into it, face to face as it were; two images transformed into one. ...Some simple people think that they will see God as if He were standing there and they here. It is not so. God and I, we are one. ...By the living God, it is true that there is no distinction!*

– Meister Eckhart

*When I clutched at His skirt, I found His hand in my sleeve. ...I am the one I love; He whom I love is I.*

– Iraqi

*He to whom all things are One, and who draws all things into One, and sets all things in One, and desires but One, may soon be stable in heart and be fully pacified in God.*

– Thomas á Kempis

*The world in which we live is a play of Chiti Shakti, the self-luminous universal Consciousness. For a man who sees this, the world is nothing but a play of God's energy. ...Chiti plays in the external world and yet stays ever the same. ...In Her unity, She is supreme Shiva, supreme Consciousness, absolutely alone. In this mode, She is called the transcendent supreme Shiva, the "formless, attributeless Absolute" of the Vedantins. She has two aspects: the supremely pure transcendent aspect, which is above the world, and the immanent aspect, in which, by Her own desire, She becomes the universe within Her own being.*

– Swami Muktananda

All of the above statements were written by mystics who had directly experienced the oneness of which they spoke. Nondualism is above all a philosophy based on direct experience; without that direct vision, the philosophy itself is of little value. That direct experience confers on its recipient the blissful knowledge of the Divine Self in its fullness. It is referred to as "Self-realization," "God-realization," "yoga," or simply "enlightenment." It occurs only rarely, by the grace of the Spirit, and usually in association with a regimen of introspective meditation or contemplation. And, because that direct experience is limited to a select few, the philosophy of Nondualism has never been accepted as a major cultural worldview by the greater populace but continues to live on perennially as the spiritual philosophy of an elite spiritual intelligentsia. The main opposition to its broader acceptance comes from the blind exponents of materialism and the unilluminated partisans of various

sectarian religious faiths.

## NOTES:

1. There is also another kind of Nondualism: *Material Nondualism*. The philosophy of *Material Nondualism* is one with which all of us are familiar, since we are bombarded with its tenets every time we pick up a book on contemporary “Science”. Material Nondualists believe that there is but one existent that makes up the source and substance of this universe and all that exists within it: and that one thing is *matter*. How it is possible to hold such a view is completely beyond me. However, there are some who do manage to hold this view by ignoring the question of what produced the singularity from which they claim all matter was born, and by ignoring the absence of an adequate answer to the question of how consciousness arose from matter. But no matter! We are here focusing on another kind of Nondualism: *Spiritual Nondualism* or *Idealistic Nondualism*. Spiritual Nondualism is the conviction that the soul or self and God are not essentially different. It is a philosophy of the Nondualism of the *Spirit*.

\* \* \*