



**Vedanta:
Teachings from the
Upanishads on the
essential freedom of the
self**

Course topics:

Topic 1: Brahman or ultimate reality – its nature as truth, knowledge, and infinity

In the first topic, we will study the definition of the nature of ultimate reality or Brahman as the absolute truth, absolute knowledge, and infinity. This definition allows us to gain knowledge of Brahman by understanding what Brahman is not. This method of knowledge through negation is called neti neti – not this, not this.

Brahman is recognised only in manifestation through names, forms and functions

Topic 2: Knowledge of Brahman as one's own true Self is available in the heart

The Upanishad declares that Brahman is to be known in the space of the heart, or the cave of the mind.

In this teaching, we learn how Brahman or ultimate reality is recognized as the Self-illuminating the mind and manifesting as the I AM.

Topic 3: The state of liberation or knowledge of Brahman, Brahman as the source of all happiness

Finally, the knower of Brahman is liberated, which amounts to having all desires fulfilled simultaneously. Brahman being the absolute happiness or bliss and the source of all manifest happiness or pleasure is explained.

Topic 4: Brahman's desire to manifest creation

This teaching explains that creation manifests out of the will of the infinite consciousness, which is the intelligence bringing creation forth and controlling its evolution. The purpose of creation is for the jivas or souls to experience the fruits of their past actions.

The teaching on the entry of Brahman or consciousness into creation is explained.

Topic 5: The One becoming the many

Creation is the manifestation of all names and forms which have no independent reality from Brahman, just like the waves don't have an independent reality from the ocean.

Brahman is ever one without a second, but appears to be the diverse creation. How does the One reality appear to be many is explained.

Topic 6: He who is in man and He who is in the Sun, are one. He who knows this...attains this Atman...

The One Self who is the existence of the individual soul, known as I AM and experienced as bliss or happiness, is the same One who exists in the supreme Lord. This mahavakya or declaration of the oneness of the self with Brahman is explained. Also, what is the meaning of the attainment of the Atman or Self is explained.

Topic 1: Brahman or ultimate reality – its nature as truth, knowledge, and infinity

Leading a life of Karma Yoga - the foundation of knowledge

Living the life of Karma Yoga is emphasized as the preliminary to the attainment of Brahavidya or knowledge of the Self. It is a life of sacrifice or life of self control. Living a life of Devotion to God, life of dharma is relative surrender, managing one's desires and emotions based on the injunctions and prohibitions of right conduct (Sadachara). The happiest person is the successful person. The most successful, happy peaceful person is the one who mastered his own mind, one who has mastered desire. He is unafflicted by desire (Akamatah). Absolute Mastery is only by knowledge of the self or discrimination between the Self and the non- Self. The obstacle to living a life of Karma Yoga is lack of clarity about the goal of life being liberation, or Purushartha Nischaya. By living a clean, disciplined life for a long time one can attain purity of mind and be prepared for knowledge.

The essential nature of Brahman (swaroopa lakshanam)

Brahman is the Absolute-Existence which is of the Nature of Knowledge-Bliss. The world itself shines as Brahman when the veil of ignorance is torn down by the dawn of Knowledge of the Imperishable. See Brahman in your Guru, Brahman in the world, Brahman in Everything.

Satyam jnanam anantam brahma (Taittiriya upanishad)

This is swaroopa lakshanam of Brahman, the definition of the essential nature of Brahman. Brahman can be defined only through neti-neti - not this, not this. The method of negation.

Satyam - Real, existent, i.e. Brahman is distinguished from all changing forms which have no independent existence.

Every object, abiding in existence, is existent. Every existent object is satyam. The object is made up of name, form, existence (it is). By negating all names and forms, one remains with pure existence that underlies all names and forms, by which all names and forms exist, and that is satyam. Satyam is anatam Brahman - infinite reality.

Jnanam - knowledge, consciousness. Brahman is distinguished from the insentient - known.

The knower is knowledge, knowing is knowledge, known is knowledge. These are all pure knowledge, just like the illuminator light, light and reflected light from the known objects are just "pure light".

The knower is the same and independent from the known in wakefulness, in dream and in deep sleep. One says I dreamt, I slept. All three states are referred to the same knower.

In deep sleep one knows the absence of the subject - aham vritti or I-thought (ego). There is experience of non-duality. Therefore the knower referred to in all three states is the Self or pure knowledge. The knower is there in deep sleep, but without the knower qualification - ego, or knower relative to the known objects.

As the knower is independent, changeless reality it is existence or Satyam. Jnanam is Satyam.

The knower or consciousness is the existence permeating all names and forms.

Anantam - That existence, knowledge is unlimited by the limitations of names and forms which have no independent existence (mithya). It is all-pervasive. Brahman is distinguished from the limited, i.e., all names and forms.

Brahman is recognised only in manifestation through names, forms and functions

The presence of the Atman or Brahman is understood only through the operations, functions of the sense organs and the mind. Thinking, desiring, willing, knowing, determining, seeing, hearing, doing etc are all manifestations of Brahman through the manifesting power Maya.

The functions are the lakshanas or indicators of Brahman, being manifestations of knowledge. In His presence alone, they exist and function. Iswara is manifest knowledge or the cosmic order, Dharma in everything.

In His presence the ego, intellect, emotions, memories, vasanas etc function.

He is the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech of the speech, the vital air of the vital air, the eye of the eye, the wise, freeing themselves from the identity with the sense organs (including mind) and renouncing the world, become immortal.

(Kena Upanishad 1.2)

**I bow to Sri Dakshinamurthi in the form of my Guru:
I bow to Him who, as a man, in deep and dreamless sleep,
Exists as Ultimate Truth Itself.**

**When outer awareness is obscured, like the sun and moon in Rahu's grasp (this refers to sun or moon eclipse) and the organs of sense are all withdrawn;
And who, on awakening, tells himself, "It was I who slept"
And sees again the objects he saw before.
(Sri Dakshinamurthi stotram - Adi Shankaracharya)**

Topic 2: Knowledge of Brahman as one's own true Self is available in the heart

**I bow to Sri Dakshinamurthi in the form of my guru:
I bow to Him who, in His loving kindness reveals to his worshippers,
The eternal Atman, which-through the changes of waking, dreaming and
dreamless sleep,
Through childhood, youth, maturity, and old age-persists as the inexhaustible
flow of consciousness.
Revealing Itself in the heart as the ever present sense of "I".**

Dakshinamurthi stotram (7) of Adi Shankaracharya

Brahman is available for recognition in the cave of the exalted, sacred space of the heart (intellect). Taittiriya Upanishad

Brahman is available for recognition in the cave of the mind as the essence, or content of the aham vritti or I -thought (ego), the knower qualification.

Brahman is pure knowledge, is the real knower of all the three states of the mind, i.e., wakefulness, dream and deep sleep. It knows the three states as the independent knower of the rising and falling known objects.

Kena Upanishad 2.4: Pratibodhitam viditam matam - Brahman is known in each and every cognition.

Brahman has to be recognized as the invariable Consciousness available in every variable cognition in the mind, That because of whose presence alone cognition, experience, knowledge are possible. It is the pure Consciousness present in all cognitions. It has to be recognized only in terms of its nature of pure consciousness, i.e. the essence of the knower.

Mandukya Upanishad commentary from 1.5:

He who is known by the names Vishva, Taijasa and Prajna is shown to be the one and the same enjoyer (Atman), in as much as the conception I am That is there as also the feature of being the same Perceiver in all the three states. He who knows both these, which as the object to be enjoyed, and to be the enjoyer, have become varied in many ways does not become affected even though enjoying (due to absence of doership and enjoyership), for everything that is enjoyable is to be enjoyed by the one and the same enjoyer. One does not undergo diminution or expansion on account of another which is its object of enjoyment.

Explanation: The one knower, the Atma, is the knower in all three states - waking, dream and deep sleep. The one who knows both the object enjoyed and the apparent subject (I - vritti, ego) also in an objective way, will have no doership-enjoyership and will not be thus affected by the object he experiences, by way of elation or depression etc.

Topic 3: The state of liberation or knowledge of Brahman, Brahman as the source of all happiness

The knower of Brahman fulfils all desires

He enjoys all the objects of Desire without exception, he has absolute satisfaction which is as good as having all pleasures enjoyed simultaneously. Does he enjoy the objects one after the other sequentially like an ignorant person does? Does he put effort and then gains that Pleasures Etc? No, it is simultaneously with Brahman. The sense of I is shifted from the Upadhis - body, mind ,with all the wrong notions about the self, into Brahman. There is no sense of doership and enjoyership. He enjoys all Bliss all at once. Enjoyment and pleasure take place only through the mind and the sense organs therefore only sequentially, not simultaneously. For the ignorant the mind and sense organs and the objects of pleasure are all different from himself. For the jnani all objects are in Brahman, in himself, including the mind and sense organs. Aham Idam Sarvam. There is no duality, no desire - desired relationship. The jnani has purnatvam - fullness, Ananda Swaroopam. Thus, as it were enjoying all the objects simultaneously. The jnani enjoys all objects simultaneously in the form of Brahman alone, i.e., becomes Brahmin. Pervading everything is enjoying everything.

The jnani fulfils all desires, enjoys all the pleasures simultaneously due to the depth of vairagya or dispassion. The jnani has atmananda due to jnanam, thus, he has absolute tranquility, absolute happiness.

To attain pleasure there are two means:

1 make the effort to attain the pleasure and have temporarily tranquility.

2 Vairagya - through dispassion to the impermanent enjoyments, by having the knowledge of the scriptures (discriminative understanding), having shama or tranquility.

The jnani has purna-vairagya or full dispassion, thus he is as good as being able to enjoy all pleasures, up to the highest worlds. He also has atmananda - the bliss of the Self.

Topic 4: Brahman's desire to manifest creation

Sah Kamayata - He (Brahman) desired

Bahusyam Prajayayeti - may I become many, may I give birth to many

There is no insentient desirer. Brahman being the desirer, not directly as a status, Brahman cannot be jadam achetana, inert. Brahman is of the nature of pure knowledge or consciousness.

As Brahman is the material cause of creation, it may be misinterpreted that like clay in relation to pot, it is insentient. Thus it is shown that it is the intelligent cause as well and pure consciousness.

Brahman is vivarta (changeless) material cause. All causes within Prakriti or creation are Parinmai (changeful) material causes. The material cause transforms into the effect, just like clay and pot, milk and yogurt, seed and tree etc.

There is a doubt: since Brahman is a desirer (so teaches the Shruti) like us, it has unfulfilled desires due to inadequacy, originating in avidya or ignorance. This understanding will render moksha or liberation purposeless, for liberation is Brahavidya, knowledge of Brahman.

Reply: There are two types of desires, binding and not binding. Binding desires multiply, forcing one to act and generate karma, for which one needs to come back or be reborn. They can become very compelling, addictive habits, vasanas, ashuddha kamah - impure desires. Non-binding desires, upon fulfilling, one is not elated, if not fulfilled, one is not dejected. Shuddha kamah, pure desires. One is not dependent on the desires' fulfillment for happiness and security.

Jnani's desires are non-binding, for he has purnata, vision of fullness. If there are desires at all they are for the welfare of all and non-binding. In the Brahman there are desires which are manifestations of Brahman. There is no second. Brahman is secondless (advitiam). Brahman doesn't have desires. Brahman does not lose itself when it is the desire it is not impelled by the pressure of desire. Desire is the vibhuti or glory of Brahman. Brahman is what wvatantriya or totally free, free also to desire.

Brahman, pure knowledge, is the support for all manifest knowledge and unmanifest ignorance, is distinct and totally independent, free of all forms of manifestations that have their existence in Brahman only. Thus Brahman is absolute freedom. Desires are possible only in self ignorance, identifying with the limitations of the upadhis. Desires are natural to one's being like the hair on the head and are triggered by external situations one has no choice about that but one needs to manage the desires by living a life of Karma Yoga, acting in line with dharma, being committed to following dharma.

There is nothing separate from Brahman, nothing is there to be achieved by Brahman. Brahman has no mind. Brahman's desire is to create the world so that all the jivas, the souls, can work out and exhaust their karmas, their need to fulfill their desires. For this sake Brahman desires the world out, of compassion for the jivas.

Brahman visualizes the sanchita karmas of all jivas. This is desiring or knowing (omniscience). In keeping with the karmas (causal level), Brahman creates the subtle and gross bodies for the jivas.

Brahman's desires are non separate from Brahman's nature - satyam jnanam anantam. Brahman's fulfilment of desires does not depend on any means, as mind, sense organs, body, punyam (merit). Brahman's desires are Brahman itself.

Without losing its own nature, without changing, through its own power of knowledge, Maya Shakti, Brahman manifests the names, forms and functions of the world, as the rope manifests the snake.

Topic 5: The One becoming the many

**I bow to Sri Dakshinamurthi in the form of my Guru:
I bow to Him who, by the sheer power of His will,
Projects outside, like a magician or a mighty yogi, this infinite universe,
Which, in the beginning rests without name or form, like the sprout in a seed,
And after creation, by the power of time and space imagined through maya,
Appears to be many, possessed of manifold shapes and hues.**

Sri Dakshinamurthi stotram (2) of Adi Shankaracharya

May I become many - this means may I, the substance, existence, reality, satyam enter, pervade the effect of names and forms, mithya. Brahman is indivisible, changeless, all-pervasive, partless whole. The names and forms become manifest through Maya Shakti, become differentiated, while Brahman is their changeless cause. This is Brahman becoming many.

Brahman is presented as the material cause of creation due to all the objects, all names and forms being non-different from Brahman, as Brahman is satyam, their very existence. The universe of names and forms is mithya, or an appearance, an illusion, as it does not have an independent reality.

The rope is the cause of the snake, only from the standpoint of the snake actually existing.

The ignorance of the true nature of the rope, due to dim light, is the support for the rope to become the material cause for the snake-appearance. Meaning, one cannot speak about “the cause of the snake” outside of the ignorance, for there is no snake at all. The very question, what is the cause of the snake can rise only under the spell of ignorance. So is with the question what is the cause of the universe? Due to ignorance of Brahman, Brahman is seen as the world. From that standpoint of ignorance, where the universe is seen to exist, one refers to Brahman as the material cause of the universe. Truly Brahman alone exists.

In reality there is no creation. The world itself is an appearance of Brahman. The world is superimposed upon Brahman through Adhyaropa. Through Apavada-Yukti (see below) the superimposition is sublated or negated and everything is realised to be the Absolute Brahman.

Ashyarooopa (superimposition):

1. Superimposing, assigning the effect status to the pot. Through the effect, one recognises the cause - clay.
2. Superimposing the causal status on the clay. Then, upon analyzing the pot, one realises it is only clay, and then:

Apavada (negation of superimposition):

1. Negation of the effect status of the pot, recognizing it as non-different from the clay.
2. Negation of the causal status of the clay, as without the effect status, the causal status cannot be.

The final conclusion is that there is neither effect nor cause, there is only clay.

All beings exist in me, but I do not dwell in them (Bhagavad Gita ch. 9, v.4).