

Continuation from Dec 2024 edition of AV Monthly Journal...

The 2024 Fall *Vedānta* retreats, guided by Swami Tattvavidananda Saraswatiji, began with a two-week course (<https://courses.avgbooks.org/product/aparokshanubhuti-audio/>) primarily on *Aparokṣānubhūti*, a *prakaraṇa grantha*. Following this course, there was a five-week (<https://courses.avgbooks.org/product/aitareya-upanishad-2/>) program covering the much-anticipated *Aitareya-Upaniṣad* with *Śāṅkara-bhāṣya*. The introduction to the retreat was described in earlier articles; this continuation focuses on the summary of selected highlights covering the *Aitareya-Upaniṣad* that spanned the last five weeks of the seven-week program.

Highlights

Śānti-Mantra

Om, the sacred sound and symbol of nature discovered by the *ṛṣis*, initiates the *Śānti-mantra* associated with *Aitareya-Upaniṣad*. The mind depends on speech while listening, and speech depends on the mind while speaking. Let there be resonance and integrity between what I say and think, and vice versa. *Nāma* and *Rūpa* cannot be separated. Let *vāk* and *manas* be mutually established in each other.

Īśvara is *Tejomaya*. *Īśvara* is composed of *tejas* or effulgence. The *Gāyatrī-mantra* likens the Sun's 'outside effulgence' to the real effulgence 'inside' the heart, revealing the world. *Īśvara* is addressed as effulgence, recognizing that physicality is only a symbol. *O Īśvara*, may you reveal the wisdom of effulgence in the heart. May speech and mind function to reveal that effulgence as *Veda*, representing wisdom. Here, learning is not about cognition in brain cells, like say, grammar, which is subject to accumulation and subsequent loss over time but learning to connect to the infinitude of truth in the heart.

With this learning of timeless truth, which is not subject to loss, may I abide in that wisdom day and night. May I never think, say, or act in *adharma* (*anṛtam*), and may I never say untruth (*asatyam*). This is based on *Sāyaṇācārya*'s commentary. In the *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad*, *ṛtam* is described by *Śrī Śāṅkara* as wisdom communicated by *śāstra*, while *satyam* is described as experiencing wisdom as truth. It is also possible to understand *ṛtam* as speaking the truth in the mind and *satyam* as the truth reflected in my speech. The prayer is truly about living a life of integrity where thoughts, speech, and actions are consistent.

May this effulgent *Īśvara* bless and protect me and the speaker so that this *śravaṇam* to learn the wisdom and secret of life is effective. The intent emphasizes studying together without superimposed roles of student and teacher during the *śravaṇam* period.

May there be peace at the *adhi-daiva* level without conflicts arising from the unknown, peace at the *adhi-bhūta* level with no conflicts among people around me, and peace at the *adhyātma* level from problems of body and mind.

The starting proclamation of this *Upaniṣad* “*ātmā vā idameka evāgra āsīt, nānyat kiñcana miṣat*” translates to “In the beginning, verily there was only the Self, nothing else whatsoever moved.” This profound statement emphasizes that before the universe appeared, only *Ātmā*, the Self, existed. It highlights the non-dual nature of reality, suggesting that the *Ātmā* is the fundamental essence in whose presence everything emanates. The entire universe and all beings are merely apparitional manifestations of this One, undivided Self, which is my very essence.

This understanding cannot be grasped by the mind engaged only in a life of *karma*, or *upāsanā* and stands in contrast to the *Pūrva-mīmāṃsakas* who believe the *Veda* is solely about *karma* and *upāsanā*. They cannot accept that the *Upaniṣad* departs from *karma* and *upāsanā* and requires non-accumulative understanding beyond brain knowledge.

This perspective is not just ancient; it persists today, promoting the belief that effort is essential for achieving lasting happiness. This mindset enslaves one to a life of constant struggling. Even *sannyāsīs* often aren't exempt from this cycle. Many religions and *Vedānta* teachers suggest that realization of timelessness as one's true nature can be achieved through time-bound actions. Consequently, studying *Vedānta* often becomes mastering vocabulary that only leads to conceptual ideas within the mind, itself a product of ignorance.

The mind is trapped by space, time, and causality, leading one to a life of becoming. The study of cosmology, with the creation of the universe from a singularity (Big Bang), continues to seek a unified theory guided by the cause-effect paradigm. Similarly, *Vedānta* includes *Upaniṣadic* models describing *Brahman* as the material and efficient cause of the universe. These models, though appealing to the mind, are preliminary and not meant to establish cause-effect as ultimate reality, since *Brahman* or *Ātmā* remains unattached to the unreal universe.

Upaniṣad s include *vedantic-upāsanā* sections that admit provisional duality, in order to prepare the mind for creative insights. Vision in a *vedantic-upāsanā* is not to establish the reality of that vision.

The *Sambandha-bhāṣya* by *Śrī Śaṅkara* introduces the *Upaniṣad* section through an imagined conversation between *Pūrvapakṣi* (here *Mīmāṃsakas* who are ritualists) and *Siddhānti*, who asserts the truth. These points are relevant even today, putting self-knowledge in the context of a life of action.

The *Aitareya-Upaniṣad* is positioned at the conclusion of the *karma* and *upāsanā* section titled *Bṛhatī-sahasra* and is followed by the *Samhitopaniṣad* section, which also deals with *upāsanā*. The preceding *upāsanā* sections direct one to contemplate *apara-brahman*, the universal *prāṇa* from which the universe appeared and into which it will resolve. Various *devatās* such as *Varuṇa* and *Agni* are considered limbs or *vibhūti* of this *apara-brahman*, understood as an effulgent power. Contemplation on this higher power, through various means of *upāsanā* on *devatās*, is mandated in these sections.

The *Pūrvapakṣi* asserts that the *Upaniṣad* section continues the mandates from the *uktavākya*, or *upāsanā*-prose, of prior sections. According to *Pūrvapakṣi*, the *upāsanā* section continues in the *Samhitopaniṣad*, making the *karmī* eligible for it. Therefore, *Pūrvapakṣi* argues that *karmī* is eligible for the *Upaniṣad* section also as it falls between these two sections. The *upasarṁhāra* or conclusions of these sections appear consistent across all three sections. These objections are fully refuted by *Siddhānta* which is illustrated in detailed discussions by students in a [play](#) based on the class noted in previously published sections of this article.

A *karmī*, with a sense of doership, tends to have the syndrome of 'me-and-mine', which is contrary to *mokṣa*, the state of being free from such a syndrome. Only a *sannyāsī* who has relinquished doership and enjoyership can be *akarmī* and eligible for the study of *Upaniṣad*.

Importance of *Sannyāsa* as a Lifestyle

In the *Sambandha-bhāṣya*, *Śrī Śaṅkara* emphasizes not only the correct understanding of what *sannyāsa* means but also advocates strongly a lifestyle conducive to this understanding. This contrasts with *Śrī Kṛṣṇa*'s teachings, that emphasizes correct understanding only and the traditional lifestyle part is not described as mandatory for *mokṣa*.

The ritualists believe that the *Veda* mandates a life of doership for all until death. The *Veda* originated from *jñānī*; therefore, it cannot issue a mandate to a *jñānī*. Besides, not all mandates of the *Veda* apply universally to everyone. *Śruti* never states that you are the *kartā*. The *Mīmāṃsā* asserts that, while there may be no mention of doer or *kartā*, it is determined by *ākṣepa*, which is *anyathā anupapatti (arthāpatti)*, otherwise untenable. If detailed rituals are described for a given goal, there must be a doer of such rituals, to whom the details are stated.

The response is as follows. My nature is determined by what I am, not what I do. I am timeless awareness, not a time-based doer. The various stipulations of debt for a human being, such as those to *ṛṣis* and *pitṛs*, raised as objections, are not the reason to be in a life of *karma* because these *Veda*-enjoined *karman*s mandated only for one who is eligible and married. This does not apply to a *jñānī*. The *Kauṣītaki-Upaniṣad*, quoted by *Śrī Śaṅkara*, asserts what is *yajña* for a *jñānī*. For example, a *jñānī* offers the organ of speech as an oblation to *Prāṇa*, which means becoming silent.

The highest possible results in *upasarṁhāra*—the conclusion reached in *Bṛhatī-sahasra*—is that time-limited *upāsanā* of *devatās* leads one to merge with that *devatā*. But all *devatās* are themselves subject to hunger and thirst, as evidenced by the *Upaniṣad* model. Hence, desirelessness and fearlessness are not realizable, since the *devatās* themselves are bound.

The *Upaniṣad* conveys that there is *prajñānam*—the knowingness which is "I"—that shines where there is no doing. This is the origin of the universe; hence, *prajñānam* is *Brahma*. This insight alone is the conclusion or *upasarṁhāra* of the *Upaniṣad*, in contrast

to the assertions of the *Pūrvapakṣi*.

Stars burn and the universe moves, yet there is no doer. If I perceive myself as a doer and remain in that illusion, the mind can never be quiet. There is the power of action (*kriyā-śakti*) and the power of intellection (*viññāna-śakti*) in all living beings; I am beyond the origin of both. I am the only reality; all else is a shadow, with the whole world and persona casting a shadow on the canvas of space-time. This understanding is not intellectual; otherwise, it is lost. I am what I am, with no need for further definition. "I am that I am" is the only truth that can never be negated. "I am that I am" refers to Yahweh in the Bible essentially meaning "I am who I am" and representing the self-existent nature of God.

Time defines a persona—a product of memory, which is itself in time as information stored from the past. I exist in timelessness and spacelessness; this understanding is not cerebral. The *Upaniṣad* should not be studied by the body/mind, which can only produce conceptual knowledge. Look closely; I am unattached (*asaṅgo'ham*). This is the *siddhānta*. A *jñānī* has nothing to do since he has no desires or fears.

The *Pūrvapakṣi* says desirelessness lacks purpose; And for a *jñānī*, there is no *prayojana* in *karma*, so why not do *karma* anyway he asks. *Siddhānti* responds that desire creates a world for its fulfillment. *Kriyā-abhāva* does not imply the absence of actions, only the absence of motivated actions due to desire (or fear). This is called *vyutthāna*. A *jñānī* has no motive or desire. *Vyutthāna* is his nature or *svarūpa*. The *Veda* cannot mandate *vyutthāna* since it is not *karma* but the natural *svarūpa* of a *jñānī*. *Vyutthāna* is not an action but an understanding. It signifies lack of attachment to anything specific, leading to unconditional love for all while working ceaselessly without selfish motives, allowing one to remain wherever they are.

Living in a family environment is not conducive to realizing *vyutthāna*. Hence, *Śrī Śaṅkara* says it is proper to wander away from the world of our conception to realize the nature of oneself. *Bhāṣya* highlights the *svarūpa* of *Ātmā* in a detailed manner. In that understanding, the universe is seen merely as linguistic and observational and not existential. All that is cognized is *mithyā* and arises due to *nāma-rūpa-vyākaraṇam* alone. Space-time is not in the *vastu* which alone is existential. Such creative insights are improbable when the lifestyle of *sannyāsa* is not followed.

The glory of *sannyāsa* is highlighted in the *bhāṣya* of this *Upaniṣad*. The Song of the *Sannyāsin* by Swami Vivekananda captures the spirit conveyed. This is a strong message for listeners aspiring to escape the bondage of *saṁsāra*.

Select Topics

In this summary, the intent is to provide select highlights that can give an idea of what is unique about these teachings, with the following background comments.

Brahman is considered both the material and efficient cause of the universe by all schools of thought, including teachers of *Advaita-Vedānta* and teachers of dualism. This means

that *Brahman* is the substance from which the universe is made (*upādāna-kāraṇam*) and the intelligence that orchestrates the creation (*nimitta-kāraṇam*). The statement underscores the non-dual nature of *Brahman*, indicating that there is no separation between the creator and the creation. However, **no** statements in the major *Upaniṣads* or Śrī Śaṅkara's *bhāṣya* explicitly assert that *Brahman* is a *nimitta-kāraṇa*, though it is considered implied in preliminary studies. *Nimitta-kāraṇa* is stressed mainly in dualist schools of thought wherein matter and mind are seen as separate realities.

This *Upaniṣad* starts by asserting that in the beginning, before the appearance of this universe, there was *Ātmā* alone. *Ātmā* is the essence of who I am here and now. It can be referred to as *Īśvara*, provided the word *Īśvara* does not automatically conjure up a vision of something remote from I, which is often the case due to social and religious conditioning of the mind. The assertion of the *Upaniṣad* is that I am the center of the cosmos. How to understand this assertion without bringing in a remote *Īśvara* for creation or bringing in an intelligent cause to satisfy the mind's urge to have a cause-effect paradigm? The universe is *tuccham* as asserted in *Daśaślokī* and in its lack of existence, it is no different from the serpent seen on a rope by mistake, which also lacks an intelligent cause. The universe is *mithyā* to the extent that it appears and disappears, but its nature of existence is that it is *tuccham*.

The teachings in the class clearly communicated the vision of the *Upaniṣad*, which can be validated by our own direct experience. For example, we create our own world every day and this world resolves in deep sleep. More importantly, the objective was not to unfold a concept of a vision but to communicate a vision of reality that can bring about a radical inner transformation in the listener. The teaching was supported by rich examples from life to 'see' the falsity of deluded thinking.

The *tattva* or the absolute truth is presented in this *Upaniṣad* as a delightful story in a poetic fashion. The vision enunciated through the story is the main focus, for it has the transformative power. The story itself should not be analyzed for its superficial logic. In this summary, the focus here is to highlight a few aspects of the vision, and the reader is welcome to procure an audio or video recording to get the complete vision.

What is creation in this vision?

Upon waking up, like a gossamer spider, 'I am' projects the countless *nāma-rūpas* that constitute my world (for the world is nothing but my conception shaped by sensations in the sense organs). It is "my world" and not "the world", for no two worlds are alike. In the beginning, before the appearance of the world, I alone am there, for 'I am' is the essence of all the unmanifest. The *nāma-rūpa* shines in the underlying light of knowingness that arises from *Ātmā* shining in the mind. Hence, 'I am' is *Ātmā*, the essential truth by which *nāma-rūpas* appear to be spun out. This is indeed our everyday experience upon waking. As awareness absolute shines through the shutters of the mind, there is initially a sense of 'I am', which immediately appears as 'I am here and now', reflecting the space-time aspect of the mind in terms of here and now. The body appears aided by memory,

and there is instant identification. *Nāma-rūpa-vyākaraṇa* is in full force, and a world is spun out, shining in the waking consciousness. This is just like a world of movies created from a large number of still frames that are supported by the faculty of memory embedded in the film. The *samsāric* world which is our world experience is similarly created from moment to moment using the faculty of memory.

Bubbles, wavelets, breadth, variety, size—all these are words used to describe foam, which is nothing but water. It is entirely *nāma-rūpa-vyākaraṇam*. All appearances in the universe are known by a name referring to a form, and the name itself is produced by grammar. It is a verbal world, after all. A variety of names point to the same *vastu*—water in this example. This arises because *rūpa*, which is about shape in space for a period of finite time, arises from the mind, since space and time are mental categories.

The question then is, what is the *upādāna* or the material cause of this universe, which is nothing but *nāma-rūpa-vyākaraṇam* (the grammatical explosion of names and forms)? For something to be, it has to be cognized as known or unknown, which is possible only in an underlying light of knowingness, which is my essence—namely *Ātmā*. It is incorrect to think that the *upādāna* or material cause is one real thing and the universe is another and that there is a process by which the universe is created. Rather, the universe is but an appearance, much like a mistaken snake on a rope, in the background light of knowingness.

The story itself has a parallel to the daily experience of waking up and going to sleep. Upon waking, a *loka* or world appears. *Lokyate bhujyate iti lokaḥ*—it is not created and not existential but is instead only seen and experienced. Whatever appears must necessarily end, like the world disappears when we are in deep sleep. This makes the universe momentary in time, no different than the world of a movie in its own space-time or a dream world in its own space-time. All that is momentary is indeed transient, and transience is a pointer to its unreality.

Ātmā is *sarvajña*, all-knowing. I know as witnessing awareness, all that I know and all that I do not know. And I witness the knower, means of knowing and the known, all arising in the mind. In that sense, I am *sarvajña*. I wake up and decide to make a cup of coffee, for example, which is a *saṅkalpa*. Similarly, the story relates that *Ātmā* began with a *saṅkalpa* to create the universe.

An objection can be raised here, that since *Ātmā* has no body, how can it have *saṅkalpa*? *Ātmā* is the very knowingness and all-knowing. The assumption in the question is that to create anything a sense of ‘doership’ is needed which in turn needs a body. *Ātma* is the very knowingness, all-knowing and light of awareness which makes all appearance and disappearance possible. The universe is nothing but observational only, not existential. As an example, consider this. A movie projector can project unlimited movies, and the appearance of movie characters is due to light alone. All characters appearing on the movie screen is only light and yet light, that has ‘as though’ created characters in the movie screen has no doership.

In the story, *Ātmā* thought, "Let there be these *lokas* where living beings can enjoy the fruits of *karma*." This is no different than the loka we create every morning upon waking, and we experience pleasure and sorrow in the loka or world of our creation. There is a question as to what is the *upādāna* or material cause for this world that I create every morning, and the answer is that it is an unlimited collection of names and forms all arising from ignorance. To understand this, let us take an example: How is a husband created? Not by taking a man and making him a husband. He is not the material cause of a husband. Rather, the word husband with a given meaning is assigned to him, making him a husband, and that is the *upādāna* or material for making a husband.

In the beginning, the *nāma-rūpas* were in unmanifest form, just like our unique world is in unmanifest form when we are in deep sleep. Upon waking, the names and forms manifest, and become the *upādāna* for the universe. *Ātmā* (I am) can be said to be the substratum of unmanifest names and forms or *avyākṛta nāma-rūpa*. *Nāma-rūpa* does not create duality, for it is only observational and unreal.

Another way to state this is to say that, as in a rope magic trick, the magician or *māyāvi* creates the illusion; jagat can be taken as an illusion. It is there so long as I take it as real. When I want to see the truth, it dissolves and is not there. For one invested in cryptocurrencies, bitcoins are very real. For one who is desireless and has no interest in the glitter of the world, a world of cryptocurrency is unreal. Something transient, due to addiction to *nāma-rūpa*, can appear real. The world appears real because of my belief and false ideas. The suffering that follows as a result is entirely optional, for seeing the false as false is all that is needed. The focus is on seeing the false, not knowing the false by the mind.

Every aspect of the story in this *Upaniṣad* has tremendous significance. As an example, it is said that *Ātmā* first created an expanding egg—*Brahmāṇḍa*. In fact, modern cosmology is in alignment with this vision, for the universe is ever-expanding and its shape is an ellipsoid, which resembles an egg. *Ātmā*, which can be taken as *Īśvara* in this understanding, is said to create a cosmic person from the waters. A person here at any level should be considered as one with structure due to negative entropy and able to sustain an orderly form over time. Evolutionary biology is consistent with the vision that primordial single-cellular life forms appeared in water, and hence scientists who search for extra-terrestrial life in the cosmos first look for evidence of water on exoplanets.

Ātmā, that is *Īśvara*, is considered omnipotent and all-powerful. If we look at the life that we have created upon waking, we realize we have the power to identify with sorrow or pleasure or be out of this dream altogether. In that sense, we are 'all-powerful'. So, every facet of the story not only has significance in many dimensions, such as consistency with science, but is also directly relevant to this life and points to how to wake up from this dream we call life.

Ātmā is said to have created not only this world, the atmospheric world, and the celestial world, but also protectors and various devatās or demi-gods. All these seeming creations

are affected by hunger and thirst, signifying every life-form, be it exalted or otherwise. These exalted demigods mentioned in the story can be seen as facets of this life here and now in terms of the power of sense organs, the power of organs of actions and speech, and the power of intellection and emotion.

The story continues that these demigods demanded life forms to be created for their expression in various organs, and until a human endowed with wisdom was created, they were not satisfied. In a human being, the sense organs and mind are most refined and powerful. Life forms then needed food that can help sustain an orderly form by throwing negative entropy on themselves as food. These were then provided. As an aside, the original cooks are the plants that take the negative entropy from the sunlight and convert carbon dioxide and water to form glucose, a marvel of quantum computing at room temperature, to produce food consumed by some living organism to form a sustainable food body to be consumed by other living beings endowed with food bodies.

Food-bodies consuming food-bodies arising in nature can be understood from the second law of thermodynamics and the law of entropy described in the previous parts of this article, published earlier. An important corollary that follows is the understanding that food comes to any life form including humans. not because of a body-mind identified persona working hard to get food, but because of law of entropy that operates regardless of our imagination. Body and mind take care of each other, and 'I am' the uninvolved witnessing awareness.

Praveśa-śruti

"Praveśa-śruti" refers to passages in the *Upaniṣads* that describes how *Ātmā* (the Self) enters into the created world of names and forms. This kind of description is found in many *Upaniṣads* to reinforce the understanding that anything which is cognized and referred to with a name and form is unreal and is not what it appears to be. Instead, the only reality that makes the names and forms shine is *Ātmā* alone. One way to understand this is with a metaphor. If one were to conceive of a fancy gold ornament to be worn on the head, the first step would be to create drawings using computer programs and then refer to it with a name. A mold is then made to create the ornament envisaged in the mind. Until molten gold is poured into the mold there can be no ornament. The pouring of the gold to make an ornament which is otherwise just a name and form is akin to *Ātmā* in the story entering the creation of the cosmic person thereby becoming a *jīva* experiencing 'as though' limitation. *Jīva* is not soul but is rather the power by which the five sense organs, five organs of action and mind are held together in the body. This upholds the expression of life force and is therefore described as 'jīva prāṇadhārane'. This entry of *Ātmā* into the cosmic person by *vyākaraṇam* means that *Ātmā* is reflected in all life forms. *Ātmā* functions as a *jīva* in these life forms while its *swarupa* is the apparitional cause of all, namely *Brahman*.

- Report by Sri. T.K. Srinivas, USA

To be continued...