

Advaita Vedanta- Philosophy of Oneness or Monism for Spiritual Awakening

Advaita Vedanta is the philosophy of Monism, or Oneness. In this philosophy, the only reality in the world is said to be Brahman, the 'Oneness'. All the world that we see around us is said to have relative reality only, and it is Brahman alone at the base of the world which has absolute reality. Even our own individual consciousness is only a relative reality, and it is Brahman which lies at the root of our consciousness which is our true identity. This means that we are, right at this moment, Brahman itself, and we can rejoice in the supreme bliss of being Brahman if we can break out of our individual identity. This is to be done through Yoga. We can then achieve Spiritual Awakening and realize the Truth of our existence.

'Advaita' means 'non-dual', that there is only one. Dvaita means two, and hence Advaita means not-two.

Advaita philosophy is based on the Upanishads or 'Vedantas', which are a part of the Vedas, the main religious scriptures of Hinduism.

Vedanta philosophy or Upanishadic philosophy has three main schools, Dvaita, Vishista-dvaita and A-dvaita.

All these three schools are based on the same scriptures, the Upanishads, and derive their difference because they interpret the *sutras* of the Upanishads differently. The Upanishadic sutras are short, terse passages, and lend themselves to different interpretations, and hence we have these three schools of Vedanta philosophy, all of which claim that their philosophy is the true philosophy of the Upanishads and the others are misinterpretations.

Dvaita means dualism. Here there are two separate existences, God and the world. God has created the world, and the two are completely separate existences, with God being the higher perfect existence and the material world, including all humans, being a lower existence. There is thus no commonality between us and God.

Vishista-dvaita is the path of qualified monism. Here also God has created the world but he has created it out of his own substance. Hence the world, including us, are not an entirely separate substance from God, we also have the Divine within us. But we are imperfect parts of the divine and it is only God who is wholly perfect, and we have but a 'spark' of this divinity within us.

The third school of Vedanta philosophy is the school of Advaita Vedanta. In this, the only reality that exists is Brahman. This does not mean that the world does not exist, but that it has a lower level of reality. In Advaita Vedanta philosophy, the world exists, but it exists with only ambiguous reality, and it exists with Brahman at its root. Hence the true reality of

the world is Brahman and the reality that we see around us is a false reality, an ambiguous reality. So the world is really Brahman, that which is not Brahman has only relative reality and is to be disregarded.

To understand this, we can take the example of a burning candle as it changes to smoke, ash and giving off energy in the form of light and heat. We can see that as the candle burns, it changes in form so that it exists as candle in the beginning, as wax, energy and smoke in the middle and as ash and dissipated smoke and energy at the end. Since the candle changes form in this way, there must be something which is common to all the three forms, something which can exist as the candle alone or as ash, smoke and energy also. We know from science that that which is common to all these forms is the matter–energy combination.

Matter in the form of molecules and atoms of wax combined with energy and existed as the candle in the beginning, and in the other forms like ashes, smoke and heat and light at the end. So for this change, it is matter – energy which formed the absolute reality and the candle, etc. were just forms of this. Again, we know from $E=MC^2$ that matter and energy are also part of a spectrum and matter can be expressed as energy and vice versa. So there must be something which is common to both, something which can exist either in the form of matter or in the form of energy. So, debating in this way, we can see that all that exists in this world are but forms and have only relative reality and there must be something which is Absolute beyond all this. This Absolute beyond the world is declared to be Brahman in Advaita Vedanta.

Similarly, for our consciousness also, when we examine our individual consciousness, our thoughts, ego and sensations, etc. we find that we cannot ascribe an absolute reality to any of them. They all have a fleeting reality only and none can be said to have a unique identity. Yet there can be no doubt that 'I' exist, that this I, my individuality, exists. This existence cannot rest on any individual thoughts or sensations, since they are all temporary. There must be something which has absolute reality, something which is unchanging and which is the root of our awareness. This unchanging root of our consciousness is declared to be Brahman by Advaita Vedanta.

When we ask the question, 'who am I', we would be prone to identify with our individual consciousness, our ego in this world. But Advaita Vedanta philosophy says that this individual consciousness is not our true reality, since it has only a relative reality, and our true identity is that which is the root of our consciousness, the Brahman.

So when we ask the question, 'who am I', the answer according to Advaita Vedanta philosophy would be, 'I am Brahman', "Aham Brahmasvi".

This really is the main importance of Advaita Vedanta Philosophy, that it says that we ourselves are Brahman.

Brahman is the root of both the world and our consciousness, the objective and the subjective. That Brahman is the root of the objective world has its importance in understanding the true reality of the world. It also has its importance in physical sciences.

But it is Brahman as the root of our individual consciousness which is the main teaching of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy. It is this teaching that is the fount of the spirituality of Advaita Vedanta.

In our everyday life, we identify ourselves with our individual consciousness. The rush of thoughts and sensations which fill our minds seem to be all that constitute our identity. We rush along heedless with this flow. But if we examine this flow of thoughts and sensations, we will find that they are very transient and if we consider this to be our identity, our identity too would be flimsy. Advaita Vedanta teaches us that our true identity is not this stream but the Absolute Brahman which lies at its base and illuminates it. Once we stop this flow, our identification with our individual consciousness will also cease and we will exist as the Absolute Brahman, which was always our true Self.

This is the spiritual goal of Advaita Vedanta. The path to stopping this flow of thoughts and sensations is Yoga. There are four main types of Yoga: Raja, Karma, Bhakti and Gyan. Through Yoga, our rush of thoughts and sensations will become stilled and we will become one with Brahman. Then all our doubts and fears will be dispelled and we will attain Spiritual Enlightenment. Once we know ourselves as Brahman, we will no more identify ourselves as our puny ego and see ourselves as who we really are, the Absolute, Unchangeable root of the Universe itself.

There are four main 'Mahavakyas' or 'great axioms' of Advaita Vedanta philosophy. They are (1) Prajnanam Brahma – Consciousness is Brahman; (2) Aham Brahmasmi – I am Brahman; (3) Tat Tvam Asi – That Thou Art; (4) Ayam Atma Brahma – This Self is Brahman. These are the central tenets of this philosophy.

The essence of all these four sayings are the same: that it I myself who am Brahman. Brahman or Oneness is not something to be looked for outside. It is within me, or rather it is me myself. That part of me which is not Brahman, my individual ego, my thoughts and sensations, etc. have only an ambiguous, half formed reality. It rests on my true identity, which is the root, and that is Brahman. I need only to realize this and I will know the Truth of this universe.

Thus the path of Advaita Vedanta philosophy is to search for this root of oneself, this true self of oneself, which is Brahman. This is all that ever was, it is only because of a lack of true appreciation that we think of ourselves as other than Brahman. It is this Brahman that we need to realize, and this is done through Yoga. This is the great truth shown by Advaita Vedanta philosophy.