

# SKM YOGA

Yoga Teacher Training Programme

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**YOGA PHILOSOPHY**

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**ADVAITA VEDANTA**

*A Comparative Study in Depth*

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For Yoga Teacher Training Students of SKM Yoga

Compiled by

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*Founder, SKM Yoga | Yoga Acharya | Vedanta Scholar*

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***Brahma satyam jagan mithya, jivo brahmaiva naparah***

— *Brahman alone is real; the world is appearance; the individual self is none other than Brahman*

— *Adi Shankaracharya*

*Dedicated to*

*the unbroken lineage of Vedantic teachers  
who carried the flame of Advaita across millennia —  
from the Upanishadic seers to Adi Shankaracharya,  
from Ramana Maharshi to Swami Vivekananda,  
and to every yoga student who dares to ask,  
"Who am I?" — and refuses to accept a shallow answer.*

— *Dr. Shivam Mishra*



# Foreword

## *A Message from the Founder*

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Dear Student of SKM Yoga,

Of all the philosophical traditions that have emerged from the fertile ground of Indian civilisation, none is more profound, more rigorous, or more directly relevant to the yoga teacher's life and work than Advaita Vedanta. The word 'Advaita' means 'non-dual' — the teaching that reality is not two, not divided, not fragmented into the apparent multiplicity of individual selves and separate objects that ordinary experience presents. There is, beneath all appearance, one unbroken, self-luminous awareness — Brahman — and you are that.

This is not a metaphor. It is not poetry. It is, according to the greatest minds the Indian philosophical tradition has produced — from the seers of the Upanishads to the towering genius of Adi Shankaracharya to the luminous simplicity of Ramana Maharshi — the most direct, most precise, and most radical description of the truth of your own nature that human language is capable of articulating.

And yet: most yoga teacher training programmes give Advaita Vedanta at most a few hours. A slide about the Mahavakyas. A brief mention of Maya. A cursory introduction to Shankaracharya. And then back to the asana curriculum. This book exists because I believe that is not enough — not for the yoga teacher who wants to teach from genuine depth, not for the student who is asking the real questions, and not for the tradition that has trusted us to carry its torch.

This text undertakes a systematic comparative study of the classical yoga philosophical tradition — primarily as codified by Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras, supported by the Bhagavad Gita and the principal Upanishads — alongside the Advaita Vedanta tradition in its full philosophical richness. These are not two separate traditions that happen to share some vocabulary. They are two branches of the same great tree of Indian philosophical inquiry, each illuminating the other in ways that studying either in isolation cannot reveal.

The yoga system of Patanjali begins from Samkhya's dualism: Purusha (pure consciousness) and Prakriti (primordial nature) are two distinct realities, and liberation consists in the discrimination between them. Advaita Vedanta, following Shankaracharya's radical reading of the Upanishads, dissolves this dualism entirely: Brahman alone is real; Purusha and Prakriti are both appearances within the one unlimited consciousness. These are not identical positions — they are in genuine philosophical tension. But they are in conversation with each other, and that conversation, followed to its depth, leads to the most fundamental questions of yoga philosophy: What is the self? What is liberation? How do consciousness and matter relate? And who is asking?

Read every chapter with patience. Let the ideas settle before evaluating them. Apply them to your practice. Bring them to your students when the time is right. And above all — ask the question that Advaita Vedanta has been asking for three thousand years, and that Patanjali's yoga has been practising an answer to: Who is aware right now? What is this awareness? Can it be found to have a boundary?

With reverence for the tradition and love for your journey,

**Dr. Shivam Mishra**

*Founder, SKM Yoga*



# Preface

## *Purpose, Scope and Structure of This Book*

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### **Scope and Purpose**

This book undertakes a complete comparative study of the classical yoga philosophical tradition — principally as systematised by Maharishi Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras (c. 400 CE), supported by the Bhagavad Gita and the principal Upanishads — alongside the Advaita Vedanta philosophical tradition as developed from the Upanishadic sources through the systematic genius of Adi Shankaracharya (788–820 CE) and subsequently elaborated by Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi, Sri Aurobindo, and the modern Advaita teachers.

The comparative method employed here is neither the perennialist approach that dissolves genuine differences into a falsely unified 'essence,' nor the sectarian approach that treats one school as simply superior to the other. It is the method of genuine philosophical dialogue: presenting each tradition on its own terms, identifying points of genuine convergence, honestly examining genuine philosophical tensions, and asking what the encounter between the two traditions illuminates that studying either in isolation cannot reveal.

For the yoga teacher training student, this study serves several practical purposes: it deepens the philosophical foundation from which you teach; it equips you to address the sophisticated questions that serious students bring to class; it illuminates the meaning of practices and teachings that otherwise remain technically correct but philosophically shallow; and it places your own practice within the broadest possible framework of the Indian philosophical tradition's engagement with the most fundamental questions of human existence.

### **How to Study This Book**

- Read each chapter at least twice — once for initial understanding, once for deeper reflection.
- Keep a dedicated philosophical journal. Write responses to the reflection questions from your own experience, not just from the text.

- Where possible, verify the philosophical claims through your own practice. The best test of Advaita Vedanta is not intellectual argument but the question 'Who am I?' brought into the depths of meditation.
- Study this text alongside the primary sources listed in Appendix C. The secondary literature, however good, is no substitute for the originals.
- Bring these teachings to your teaching, appropriately and gradually. Philosophy taught from lived experience is transformative. Philosophy recited from memory is merely impressive.

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**PART I**

# Foundations

*The Two Great Traditions and Their Philosophical Landscape*

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## CHAPTER 1

# The Two Great Traditions

*Origins, History, and Intellectual Context*

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***Ekam eva advitiam — Chandogya Upanishad 6.2.1***  
*— One only, without a second — the fundamental declaration of non-dualism*

## 1.1 A Common Root, Two Great Branches

The yoga philosophical tradition and Advaita Vedanta are not two separate systems that happen to share some Indian vocabulary. They are two branches of the same primordial philosophical tree — the tree of Vedic inquiry that has been growing for more than four thousand years. Both traditions draw their foundational inspiration from the Upanishads. Both are animated by the same ultimate question: what is the nature of consciousness, what is the true self, and how is the human being liberated from suffering? And yet they develop their answers along genuinely different lines — lines that sometimes converge, sometimes run in parallel, and occasionally diverge in philosophically significant ways.

Understanding how these two great traditions emerged from the same Vedic root, how they developed their characteristic philosophical frameworks, and where they stand in relation to each other — is the intellectual foundation upon which this entire comparative study rests. The yoga teacher who understands this history is not a better historian; they are a deeper teacher, because they understand what is at stake in every practice they guide, every philosophical question they address, and every student inquiry they receive.

## 1.2 The Vedic Root — The Common Source

Both the yoga tradition and Advaita Vedanta trace their authority to the Vedas — the ancient collection of sacred texts that represent the oldest layer of Indian philosophical and religious thought. The four Vedas — Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda — date in their oral transmission to approximately 1500 BCE, though scholars believe their origins may be

considerably older. The later portions of the Vedic corpus — the Aranyakas (forest texts) and above all the Upanishads — represent a decisive shift in the direction of Indian philosophical inquiry: from the external rituals of the earlier Vedic religion toward an intense, direct investigation of the inner nature of consciousness and reality.

The Upanishads (c. 800–200 BCE) are the philosophical culmination of the Vedic tradition — and the primary source-texts for both the yoga tradition and Advaita Vedanta. More than 200 Upanishads exist, though the principal texts — the Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Kena, Katha, Isha, Mundaka, Mandukya, and Prasna — are the ones most studied in the tradition. These texts are not systematic philosophical treatises in the manner of later Indian philosophy. They are collections of dialogues, narratives, meditations, and direct teachings transmitted from teacher to student in the forest setting of the ancient ashram — and their central, recurring theme is the identity of Atman (the individual self) with Brahman (the ultimate ground of reality).

### **The Upanishads**

*c. 800–200 BCE — Sruthi (Revealed Scripture)*

*The philosophical culmination of the Vedas. Their central insight — Tat tvam asi (That thou art) — is the foundation of both the yoga tradition and Advaita Vedanta. Every major Indian philosophical school is, in some sense, a commentary on the Upanishads.*

## **1.3 The Emergence of the Yoga Tradition**

### **Pre-Classical Yoga — The Upanishadic Foundation**

Yoga, in its broadest sense, predates any particular school or text. References to yogic practices — controlled breathing, withdrawal of the senses, meditative absorption — appear in the Rig Veda itself, and the Katha, Shvetashvatara, and Maitri Upanishads contain some of the earliest systematic descriptions of yoga practice as a spiritual path. The Bhagavad Gita (c. 200 BCE–200 CE), which forms part of the Mahabharata, represents the most complete pre-classical exposition of yoga — presenting it as a comprehensive path of karma (action), jnana (knowledge), and bhakti (devotion), each leading to the same ultimate goal of liberation.

What distinguishes the Bhagavad Gita's yoga from the later systematic yoga of Patanjali is its direct Upanishadic grounding: the Gita's metaphysics are broadly Upanishadic, its teaching of the eternal, indestructible Atman (Bhagavad Gita 2.19–20) echoes the Katha Upanishad directly, and its goal — the recognition of the self's identity with the divine — is much closer to the Advaita position than to the strict Samkhya dualism that underlies Patanjali's system.

## Classical Yoga — Patanjali's Systematisation

Maharishi Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (c. 200 BCE–400 CE) represent the decisive systematisation of classical yoga philosophy. In 196 terse aphorisms, Patanjali creates a complete philosophical and practical system that addresses the nature of the mind, the structure of consciousness, the causes of suffering, the eight-limbed path to liberation, and the ultimate nature of the liberated state (Kaivalya). Patanjali's philosophy rests on the Samkhya cosmological framework — the dualism of Purusha (pure consciousness) and Prakriti (primordial nature) — which places classical yoga philosophy in a fundamentally different metaphysical position from Advaita Vedanta.

### Maharishi Patanjali

*c. 200 BCE–400 CE — Classical Yoga (Yoga Sutras)*

*Author of the Yoga Sutras — the foundational systematic text of classical yoga philosophy. His philosophical framework is grounded in Samkhya dualism: Purusha and Prakriti are two co-eternal, qualitatively distinct realities. Liberation is the discrimination (Viveka) of pure consciousness from all identification with matter.*

## 1.4 The Emergence of Advaita Vedanta

### The Upanishadic Foundation of Advaita

Advaita Vedanta did not begin with Shankaracharya, though it was Shankaracharya who gave it its definitive systematic formulation. The non-dual teaching of the Upanishads — that Atman is Brahman, that the individual self is identical with the ultimate ground of reality — is as old as the Upanishads themselves. The Chandogya Upanishad's Tat tvam asi (That thou art), the Brihadaranyaka's Aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman), the Mandukya's Ayam Atma Brahma (This self is Brahman), and the Aitareya's Prajnanam Brahma (Consciousness is Brahman) — these four Mahavakyas (great sayings) are the direct scriptural seeds from which the entire Advaita tradition grows.

Before Shankaracharya, Gaudapada (c. 700 CE) — Shankaracharya's paramaguru (the teacher's teacher) — wrote the Mandukya Karika, the first systematic exposition of Advaita Vedanta, with a particularly striking influence from Buddhist Madhyamaka philosophy. Gaudapada's concept of Ajatavada (the doctrine of non-origination — the radical teaching that nothing has ever actually been created, that the appearance of creation is itself the illusion of Maya) represents the most uncompromising formulation of non-dualism in Indian philosophy.

## **Adi Shankaracharya — The Architect of Advaita**

Adi Shankaracharya (788–820 CE) is, without question, the towering intellectual figure of Advaita Vedanta and one of the greatest philosophers in Indian history. In a life of only 32 years (according to tradition), Shankaracharya: wrote commentaries on the ten principal Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Brahma Sutras; composed original philosophical works including the Vivekachudamani, the Upadeshasahasri, and the Atma Bodha; established four monastic institutions (mathas) at the four corners of India to preserve and transmit the Advaita tradition; and engaged in philosophical debate (shastrartha) with the proponents of rival schools throughout India, consistently defending the non-dual position with extraordinary intellectual rigour.

### **Adi Shankaracharya**

788–820 CE — Advaita Vedanta (Brahma Sutra Bhashya, Upanishad commentaries, Vivekachudamani)

*Brahma satyam jagan mithya, jivo brahmaiva naparah — Brahman alone is real; the world is appearance; the individual self is none other than Brahman. This three-line teaching (Manishanapanchakam) encapsulates the entirety of his philosophical project.*

## **1.5 The Post-Classical Period**

After Shankaracharya, the Advaita tradition was carried and developed by a succession of brilliant philosophers and sages. Sureshvara and Padmapada (both direct disciples of Shankaracharya) developed the tradition in different directions. Later figures — Vacaspati Mishra, Prakashatman, Sarvajnatman, and Vidyaranya — further elaborated the systematic philosophy. In the modern period, Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) brought Advaita Vedanta to the world stage through his electrifying presentations at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1893 and his subsequent teaching tours. Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950) embodied the living reality of Advaita

recognition, teaching primarily through silence and the direct question 'Who am I?' Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) developed an Integral Advaita that, unlike Shankaracharya's traditional position, affirmed the reality and spiritual significance of the world process.

## 1.6 Reflection Questions

- Why does it matter, for the yoga teacher, whether yoga philosophy is grounded in Samkhya dualism or Advaita non-dualism? What practical difference does the metaphysical framework make?
- Shankaracharya's commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita interpret Krishna's teaching through an Advaita lens that Patanjali's yoga philosophy would not straightforwardly support. What might this tell us about the relationship between the traditions?
- Ramana Maharshi's question 'Who am I?' and Patanjali's practice of Purusha discrimination are both methods of self-inquiry. Are they asking the same question? Do they arrive at the same answer?



## CHAPTER 2

# The Philosophical Architecture

## Core Frameworks Compared

### *Na tatra suryo bhati na candra tarakam — Kena Upanishad 2.5*

— There the sun does not shine, nor the moon, nor stars — the whole universe shines by the light of Brahman

## 2.1 Samkhya-Yoga Cosmology — The Architecture of Dualism

Classical yoga philosophy inherits its metaphysical framework from the Samkhya darshana — one of the six classical schools of Indian philosophy attributed to the legendary sage Kapila. Samkhya presents a complete cosmological system founded on a strict ontological dualism: reality consists of two fundamentally distinct, co-eternal, and qualitatively incommensurable principles — Purusha and Prakriti. Understanding this dualism is not merely an academic exercise for the yoga teacher; it is the philosophical foundation upon which Patanjali constructs his entire account of the mind, suffering, practice, and liberation.

Purusha (literally 'the one who dwells in the city,' i.e., the body) is pure consciousness — self-luminous, unchanging, without qualities, without action, without contact with anything external. It is the pure witness: the seer that is never itself seen as an object, the knower that is never itself known, the light by which all mental activity is illuminated without itself being illuminated by anything else. In Samkhya's philosophical framework, there are many individual Purushas — each a distinct, eternal centre of pure consciousness, corresponding to each individual being.

Prakriti (literally 'primary creation' or 'original nature') is the second eternal principle — the undifferentiated, dynamic matrix from which the entire manifest universe evolves. Unlike Purusha, Prakriti is not consciousness; it is matter-energy — though not 'matter' in the reductive physicalist sense. It is the primordial potential that contains, in seed form, the capacity for all physical, biological, and psychological manifestation. Its characteristic is activity, change, and process.

Category	Samkhya Term	Characteristics	Role in Liberation
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Pure Consciousness	Purusha	Eternal, unchanging, self-luminous, passive, the pure witness	The Purusha's liberation is the recognition of its own distinction from Prakriti
Primordial Nature	Prakriti	Dynamic, unconscious (in itself), the matrix of all manifestation, composed of the three gunas	The instrument of bondage (through false identification) and liberation (through practice)
Great Principle	Mahat / Buddhi	First evolution of Prakriti — cosmic intelligence; in individuals, the discriminative intellect	The faculty of discrimination (Viveka) by which liberation is achieved
Ego-Principle	Ahamkara	The I-maker — the principle of individuation that creates the sense of separate selfhood	The primary cause of misidentification of Purusha with Prakriti
Processing Mind	Manas	The sensory-integrating faculty — coordinates sense input and action	Purified by yoga practice; ultimately stilled in Samadhi
Five Subtle Elements	Tanmatras	Sound, touch, form, taste, smell in their subtle form	The basis of sensory experience
Five Gross Elements	Pancha Mahabhutas	Earth, water, fire, air, space	The material basis of the physical world

## 2.2 The Three Gunas — The Dynamic Constitution of Prakriti

The three gunas — Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas — are the three fundamental qualities or forces that constitute the entire fabric of Prakriti, from the most subtle to the most gross. They are not merely psychological categories (though they have immediate psychological application); they are the fundamental ontological constituents of everything that exists within the domain of Prakriti.

Sattva is the quality of clarity, luminosity, intelligence, and peace. In its psychological expression, Sattva manifests as clarity of mind, receptivity to truth, compassion, and the capacity for meditative depth. In its material expression, it manifests as the light quality of phenomena — the lightness of fresh air, clear water, clean space.

Rajas is the quality of activity, passion, stimulation, and restlessness. In its psychological expression, Rajas manifests as ambition, desire, anger, competitiveness, and the restless search for new experience. In its material expression, it manifests in motion, fire, and the dynamic processes of change.

Tamas is the quality of inertia, heaviness, dullness, and obstruction. In its psychological expression, Tamas manifests as laziness, confusion, depression, and the tendency to remain in familiar patterns regardless of their value. In its material expression, it manifests in solidity, density, and resistance.

The relevance of the gunas to the comparative study of yoga philosophy and Advaita Vedanta is direct and important: in the Samkhya-Yoga framework, the gunas are ontologically real features of Prakriti — not appearances, not illusions, but genuine constituents of nature. In Advaita Vedanta, while the gunas are acknowledged as describing the nature of the apparent world, that apparent world is itself understood as Maya — the cosmic power of appearance through which the one Brahman appears as a universe of multiple, distinct phenomena. The gunas are real at the level of Vyavaharika (conventional reality) but ultimately unreal at the level of Paramarthika (ultimate reality).

## 2.3 Advaita Vedanta's Ontological Framework — The Non-Dual Vision

Where the Samkhya-Yoga tradition builds its architecture on the foundation of two co-eternal principles, Advaita Vedanta makes the most philosophically radical move available in Indian thought: it denies that there are two principles. Brahman alone is real. Everything else — including the apparent dualism of Purusha and Prakriti, the apparent multiplicity of individual selves, the apparent solidity of the material world — is Maya: the cosmic power of appearance that makes the one unlimited Brahman appear as a world of many limited beings and objects.

Advaita Vedanta's ontology is structured around three levels of reality (Satta Traividhya) — a framework that is essential for understanding the tradition's position on the apparent reality of the world:

Level	Sanskrit	Description	Example
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Absolute Reality	Paramarthika Satta	The one, unlimited, unchanging Brahman — pure consciousness, pure being, pure bliss. This alone is ultimately real.	The ocean in its totality — the single underlying reality
Conventional Reality	Vyavaharika Satta	The world of ordinary experience — coherent, consistent, practically real, governed by the laws of cause and effect. This is real from within the perspective of ordinary consciousness, but not ultimately real.	The waves — real as waves, but their substance is only the ocean
Apparent Reality	Pratibhasika Satta	The reality of perceptual errors — the snake mistaken for a rope, the silver seen in nacre. These are 'real' only in the moment of the misperception and are immediately cancelled when correct knowledge arises.	A mirage — appears real but has no substance even at the conventional level

This three-level ontology is crucial for understanding Advaita Vedanta's relationship to the world, to practice, and to ethics. Advaita does not say the world is unreal in the sense of the Pratibhasika — it is not saying the world is as unreal as a mirage or a dream. The world is Vyavaharika — conventionally real, practically significant, and to be engaged with intelligently. But it is not Paramarthika — it is not the ultimate reality. And the source of human suffering (Duhkha) is precisely the confusion of these levels — treating the Vyavaharika as if it were Paramarthika: treating the conventional self as the ultimate self, the conventional world as the ultimate world.

### **Gaudapada**

*c. 700 CE — Mandukya Karika*

*The doctrine of Ajatavada (non-origination): nothing has ever been created; there is no birth, no death, no bondage, no liberation — only the one Brahman, appearing to be many through the power of Maya. The most uncompromising formulation of Advaita in Indian philosophy.*

## **2.4 Side-by-Side Comparison — Core Frameworks**

### Samkhya-Yoga Philosophy

- Reality is fundamentally dual: Purusha (consciousness) and Prakriti (matter) are co-eternal and distinct
- Many individual Purushas — each person is a distinct consciousness
- Mind (chitta) is part of Prakriti, not consciousness
- Liberation = Kaivalya: Purusha isolated from all Prakriti identification
- The world of Prakriti is genuinely real, not an appearance
- Practice works because mind is real and can be genuinely transformed
- Liberation requires active discrimination (Viveka Khyati)

### Advaita Vedanta

- Reality is non-dual: Brahman alone is real; Purusha-Prakriti dualism is itself within Maya
- One universal Atman-Brahman — individual selves are apparent, not ultimately real
- Mind (Antahkarana) is part of the apparent world — Maya within Maya
- Liberation = Moksha: recognition that one was never bound — Atman = Brahman
- The world is Vyavaharika (conventionally real) but not Paramarthika (ultimately real)
- Practice works at the Vyavaharika level as preparation for Jnana (direct recognition)
- Liberation requires direct knowledge of one's identity with Brahman (Brahma Jnana)

## 2.5 The Six Darshanas in Context

Both the Yoga and Vedanta schools belong to the six orthodox philosophical schools (Astika Darshanas) of Indian philosophy — schools that accept the authority of the Vedas as their ultimate scriptural foundation. Understanding how each school positions itself within this broader philosophical landscape illuminates the relationship between yoga and Advaita Vedanta.

School	Metaphysics	Key Text	Relationship to Yoga/Advaita
Samkhya	Strict dualism: Purusha + Prakriti	Samkhya Karika (Ishvarakrishna)	Provides the cosmological framework for classical yoga; rejected by Advaita as stopping short of non-dualism
Yoga	Modified Samkhya dualism; adds Ishvara	Yoga Sutras (Patanjali)	Classical yoga uses Samkhya framework; its meditative insights converge with Advaita's experiential claims
Nyaya	Logical realism; God as eternal cause	Nyaya Sutras (Gautama)	Systematic logic; Advaita and Yoga both borrow its epistemological tools

Vaisheshika	Atomistic realism	Vaisheshika Sutras (Kanada)	Complementary to Nyaya; Advaita critiques its realist metaphysics
Mimamsa	Eternal Vedas; ritual orthodoxy	Mimamsa Sutras (Jaimini)	Vedanta (including Advaita) emerged partly as a correction of Mimamsa's ritualism
Vedanta (Advaita)	Non-dualism: Brahman alone is real	Brahma Sutras + Shankaracharya's Bhashya	Considers itself the highest teaching; incorporates and transcends the other schools

## 2.6 Reflection Questions

- The Samkhya system posits many individual Purushas; Advaita Vedanta affirms one universal Atman-Brahman. What are the practical implications of this difference for how a yoga teacher understands their relationship to their students?
- Advaita's three-level ontology suggests that the world is conventionally real but not ultimately real. How do you hold this position in daily life without either dismissing ordinary reality or over-investing in it?
- Gaudapada's Ajatavada teaches that nothing has ever been created — bondage and liberation are both ultimately appearances. If this is true, why practise yoga at all? How does the tradition answer this question?



## CHAPTER 3

# The Nature of Reality

*Sat, Brahman, and the Tattvas*

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***Sarvam khalv idam Brahma — Chandogya Upanishad 3.14.1***

*— All this, indeed, is Brahman — the entire universe is nothing but Brahman*

### 3.1 What Is Real? — The Fundamental Question

The question of what is ultimately real — the question of ontology — is the most fundamental question in both yoga philosophy and Advaita Vedanta, because the answer to it determines everything else: how practice works, what liberation consists in, what the relationship between the individual and the universe is, and what a yoga teacher is ultimately pointing students toward when they guide them into the depths of their own experience.

The philosophical tension between yoga philosophy's Samkhya-grounded dualism and Advaita Vedanta's non-dualism is, at its core, a difference in the answer to this fundamental ontological question. For Samkhya-Yoga: both Purusha and Prakriti are ultimately real — they are two co-eternal, qualitatively distinct realities that together constitute the complete picture of existence. For Advaita Vedanta: only Brahman is ultimately real — Purusha and Prakriti, however useful as conceptual tools within the framework of conventional inquiry, are both appearances within the one unlimited consciousness.

### 3.2 Brahman — The Absolute in Advaita Vedanta

Brahman is the central concept of Advaita Vedanta — the name given to the ultimate reality, the single ground of all existence, the one without a second. The word derives from the Sanskrit root 'Brh' — to be great, to expand, to grow. Brahman is the unlimited, unbounded, self-subsisting reality that is the source, substance, and goal of everything that appears to exist.

Shankaracharya's characterisation of Brahman rests on three primary negative (Neti-neti) and positive approaches. The negative approach — Neti neti ('not this, not this') — is the

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad's method of describing Brahman by systematically negating every finite attribute: Brahman is not the body, not the mind, not the senses, not the world, not any object, not any concept. Every conceivable attribute falls short of Brahman's unlimited nature, because Brahman is the ground and substance of all attributes without being limited by any of them.

The positive approach describes Brahman as Sat-Chit-Ananda — pure being, pure consciousness, pure bliss. These are not three separate attributes of Brahman; they are three aspects of the single, undivided reality of Brahman viewed from three different angles: Sat (being) — Brahman is existence itself; it does not have existence, it is existence. Chit (consciousness) — Brahman is not a being that is conscious; it is consciousness itself, self-luminous and self-knowing. Ananda (bliss) — Brahman is not a being that experiences bliss; it is the very ground of bliss, whose nature is an unconditional fullness that is not dependent on any external cause.

*“Brahman is existence-consciousness-bliss absolute. It is self-luminous. It is the subtlest of all substances. Every name and form rests in it. It is all and it is one.”*

— Adi Shankaracharya, Vivekachudamani

### 3.3 The Samkhya-Yoga Account of Reality — The 25 Tattvas

In contrast to Advaita's single-principle ontology, the Samkhya system describes reality through a map of 25 tattvas (principles or categories) — the complete evolutionary sequence from the two ultimate principles (Purusha and Prakriti) through all levels of manifestation to the physical world of the five elements. This 25-tattva map is not merely cosmological speculation — it is a psychological and philosophical map that provides the framework for Patanjali's entire practice programme.

No.	Tattva	Category	Significance for Yoga Practice
1	Purusha	Pure Consciousness	The true self; the witness; the goal of liberation is the recognition of Purusha's distinction from all Prakriti
2	Prakriti	Primordial Nature	The matrix of all manifestation; the source of the mind-body complex
3	Mahat / Buddhi	Cosmic/Individual Intelligence	The discriminative faculty; the highest product of Prakriti; instrument of Viveka

4	Ahamkara	Ego-Principle	The I-maker; source of misidentification of Purusha with body-mind; primary cause of bondage
5	Manas	Processing Mind	Coordinates sensory input; purified through practice to support meditation
6–10	Five Jnanendriyas	Sense Faculties	Hearing, touch, sight, taste, smell — the capacities of perception
11–15	Five Karmendriyas	Action Faculties	Speech, handling, locomotion, procreation, elimination — the capacities of action
16–20	Five Tanmatras	Subtle Elements	Sound, touch, form, taste, smell in subtle form — basis of sensory experience
21–25	Five Mahabhutas	Gross Elements	Space, air, fire, water, earth — the physical world

The yogic practice of pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi can be understood as the progressive reversal of this evolutionary sequence: the outward-moving energy of consciousness is gradually withdrawn from its identification with the grosser tattvas (the physical world, the sense organs, the action faculties) toward the subtler tattvas (the mind, the intellect) and ultimately to Purusha itself, recognised as distinct from and prior to all the Prakriti-derived tattvas.

### 3.4 The Doctrine of Maya — How Advaita Explains Appearance

If Brahman alone is real — one, undivided, unlimited — how does the apparent world of multiplicity, individuality, and change appear? This is the central philosophical challenge that Advaita Vedanta must address, and its answer — the doctrine of Maya — is one of the most sophisticated and most disputed positions in Indian philosophy.

Maya is the cosmic power of appearance — the inexplicable force (Shakti) by which the unlimited Brahman appears as a world of limited, individual phenomena. Maya has two principal operations: Avarana Shakti (the power of concealment) — Maya conceals the true nature of Brahman, veiling its unlimited, non-dual nature and making it appear as if the unlimited were limited, the non-dual were dual, the impermanent were permanent. Vikshepa Shakti (the power of projection) — Maya projects a false appearance in place of the concealed truth, creating the apparent world of multiple individual beings and separate objects.

The crucial philosophical point: Advaita Vedanta describes Maya as Anirvacaniya — indescribable as either real or unreal. Maya is not real, because reality belongs to Brahman alone, and Maya is not Brahman. But Maya is not unreal either, because it is not the same as a logical contradiction or a purely imaginary entity — the world it creates is coherent, consistent, and practically significant. Maya is neither real nor unreal — it is the cosmic inexplicability that makes the appearance of the world possible without compromising the absolute reality of Brahman.

### **Vivartavada vs. Parinamavada — Two Theories of Appearance**

Advaita Vedanta employs the concept of Vivartavada (the doctrine of appearance or superimposition) to explain the relationship between Brahman and the world. Vivartavada holds that the world is not a real transformation of Brahman — it is an apparent transformation, a seeming change that does not actually affect Brahman's nature. The classic analogy: a rope mistaken for a snake in dim light. The snake is not a real transformation of the rope; the snake 'appears' in the rope through the operation of ignorance (Avidya) and disappears completely when correct knowledge of the rope is attained. Similarly, the world 'appears' in Brahman through Maya-Avidya and will be 'cancelled' when Brahma-jnana (direct knowledge of Brahman) arises.

Other Vedanta schools — particularly Vishishtadvaita (Ramanuja) and Dvaita (Madhva) — employ Parinamavada (the doctrine of real transformation) instead: the world is a real transformation of Brahman, as milk is really transformed into curd. This is not an idle scholastic dispute for the yoga teacher: it determines whether the world of practice and teaching is ultimately real (Parinamavada) or ultimately an appearance (Vivartavada). Advaita's Vivartavada does not make the world practically unreal — it makes it ultimately unreal at the Paramarthika level while remaining conventionally real and practically significant at the Vyavaharika level.

*“The world is real. The individual is real. God is real. But all three — the world, the individual, and God — are appearances of the one Brahman. When you know the ocean, you know every wave.”*

— Sri Ramakrishna

## **3.5 Practical Implications for the Yoga Teacher**

The metaphysical difference between Samkhya-Yoga's dualism and Advaita's non-dualism has direct and practical implications for the yoga teacher's understanding of their work. If the

Samkhya-Yoga framework is adopted, the yoga teacher's role is to help students develop the discriminative awareness (Viveka) that recognises the difference between the changing contents of experience (Prakriti) and the unchanging witness-consciousness (Purusha) — a practice of discernment within the framework of two genuinely distinct realities. If the Advaita framework is adopted, the yoga teacher's deepest role is to point students toward the recognition that the very awareness that is being discovered through yoga practice — the pure witnessing consciousness that yoga reveals — is not a limited individual consciousness but Brahman itself, identical with the ground of all reality.

These are not mutually exclusive in practice. Most great yoga teachers have been, whether explicitly or implicitly, operating within an Advaita framework at the deepest level while using the Samkhya-Yoga methodology at the practical level. The Advaita framework and the yoga methodology work together precisely because the Advaita goal (Brahma-jnana) requires the psychological preparation that yoga practice provides, and the yoga methodology points toward a recognition that, when fully realised, cannot be contained within the Samkhya framework's dualistic structure.

### 3.6 Reflection Questions

- Shankaracharya says Brahman is Sat-Chit-Ananda. In your meditation practice, have you touched a quality of being, consciousness, and fullness that is not dependent on any external condition? How would you describe it?
- The Samkhya-Yoga system maps 25 tattvas; Advaita reduces everything to Brahman appearing through Maya. Which framework do you find more useful in your practice? In your teaching? Are they compatible?
- Maya is described as 'neither real nor unreal.' How do you hold this paradox without either dismissing the world as meaningless or investing it with an absolute reality it does not have?



**PART II**

# Consciousness and the Self

*The Heart of the Comparative Study*

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## CHAPTER 4

# The Nature of Consciousness

*Purusha, Chit, and Pure Awareness*

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***Chit-shakti is the self-luminous nature of the Absolute — it is not that Brahman has consciousness; Brahman IS consciousness***

### 4.1 Consciousness as the Central Problem

If there is one issue that lies at the absolute heart of the comparative study of yoga philosophy and Advaita Vedanta, it is the question of consciousness. What is consciousness? Is it a property of matter — something the brain produces and the body uses? Or is it something irreducibly different — a distinct reality that cannot be reduced to or explained in terms of anything material? And if consciousness is irreducibly distinct, is it ultimately individual — the private experience of each separate person — or is it ultimately universal — the single, unlimited awareness that appears as individual consciousnesses through the power of Maya?

These questions are not theoretical puzzles. They determine the entire structure of the yoga philosophical system and the entire vision of Advaita Vedanta. They determine what liberation means, what practice is aimed at, and how the yoga teacher understands their own nature and the nature of their students. The difference between Patanjali's Purusha and Shankaracharya's Brahman-as-Chit is not a minor scholastic distinction — it is a fundamental difference in the philosophical account of what consciousness is, and it has profound practical implications.

### 4.2 Purusha — Consciousness in the Samkhya-Yoga Framework

In the Samkhya-Yoga framework, Purusha is pure consciousness — the ultimate ground of subjective experience, the eternal witness that underlies and illuminates all mental activity without itself being subject to change or modification. Purusha has several defining characteristics that the yoga teacher must understand with precision:

Purusha is Drashtr — the seer, the witness. It is the pure subject that is never itself an object. Every object of experience — the body, the breath, the emotions, the thoughts, the meditative states — is an object within the field of Purusha's witnessing. Purusha itself is never an object; it is always and only the subject.

Purusha is Chit-svarupa — consciousness as its very nature. Consciousness is not something Purusha has or produces; consciousness is what Purusha is. This self-luminous quality (Svaprakasha) is the most fundamental characteristic of Purusha: it does not need to be illuminated by anything external, because it is itself the light by which all other things are known.

Purusha is Akriya — without action. Purusha neither moves, acts, suffers, nor enjoys. It is the pure presence in which all actions and experiences appear. The confusion of Purusha with Prakriti — the misidentification of the witness with what is witnessed — is the fundamental cause of all suffering (Duhkha). Liberation is the recognition of Purusha's absolute distinction from all Prakriti-derived experience.

The critical philosophical point: in classical Samkhya-Yoga, there are many individual Purushas — each a distinct, eternal, individualised centre of pure consciousness. This 'plurality of Purushas' (Purusha Bahutva) is one of the most important points where classical yoga philosophy diverges from Advaita Vedanta's position of one universal consciousness.

### **The Purusha in Yoga Sutras 1.3**

*Tada drashtuh svarupe avasthanam — Yoga Sutras 1.3*

*Then the seer abides in its own true nature. This single sutra contains Patanjali's entire vision of liberation: the Purusha, no longer entangled in the modifications of chitta, rests in the pure self-luminous awareness that is its own nature. This is Kaivalya.*

## **4.3 Brahman as Chit — Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta**

In Advaita Vedanta, consciousness is not a distinct principle alongside matter (as in Samkhya's Purusha-Prakriti dualism) but the single, unlimited reality — Brahman — whose nature is pure consciousness (Chit). The difference is profound: for Samkhya-Yoga, consciousness (Purusha) is real and matter (Prakriti) is equally real, though of a completely different nature. For Advaita,

consciousness is the only reality, and what appears as matter is an appearance of consciousness through the power of Maya.

The Advaita concept of Chit has several dimensions that go beyond the Samkhya concept of Purusha:

Brahman-as-Chit is not just the witness of experience but the very ground and substance of experience itself — not just the seer but the seen, the seeing, and the seeing-relationship, all recognised as one. In Samkhya-Yoga, Purusha witnesses Prakriti's modifications from a position of absolute separateness. In Advaita, at the level of ultimate truth, there is nothing other than Brahman for Brahman to witness — the witness and the witnessed are ultimately one.

The Mandukya Upanishad's description of the fourth state of consciousness — Turiya — as the ground of the three ordinary states (waking, dreaming, deep sleep) is the Upanishadic basis for the Advaita understanding of consciousness: Turiya is not a state that comes and goes but the ever-present, ever-aware ground in which all states arise and dissolve. This is what Advaita means by Brahman-as-Chit: not a consciousness that exists sometimes and not others, but a consciousness that is always and unchangingly present, the silent ground of all experience, never absent, never modified.

*“Consciousness does not shine by the sun's light or the moon's light. It is the light of consciousness that makes the sun able to shine, the moon able to reflect, the eye able to see. That light is Brahman — and it is your own deepest nature.”*

— Kena Upanishad 1.6–9 (paraphrase)

## 4.4 Sakshi — The Witness Consciousness

The concept of Sakshi (the witness) is one of the most important bridges between the yoga philosophical tradition and Advaita Vedanta — a concept that both traditions use, though with somewhat different implications.

In the Samkhya-Yoga framework, Purusha is understood as the Sakshi — the pure witness of all mental modifications. The entire practice of yoga — from the Yamas and Niyamas through asana, pranayama, and meditation — can be understood as the progressive cultivation of Sakshi Bhava: the quality of being the witness rather than the identified experiencer. As the practitioner learns to

observe thoughts, emotions, sensations, and even meditation states as objects within awareness rather than as what they are, the grip of misidentification with Prakriti gradually loosens, and the pure witnessing quality of Purusha becomes more and more directly apparent.

In Advaita Vedanta, the Sakshi concept is used in the same way at the level of preliminary practice — cultivating the witness quality is an essential step on the path. But Advaita takes the Sakshi teaching one step further: even the witness is not the final position. The witness is still a relational concept — there is still an implicit duality of witness and witnessed. At the level of Paramarthika (ultimate reality), even this duality dissolves: what remains is not the witness of experience but pure, non-dual awareness — Brahman — in which there is no distinction between witness and witnessed, because there is only one reality. The final dissolution is even of the witness-position — the recognition that Brahman is not the witness of the world but the single reality in which the appearance of witness and world arises.

#### Yoga Philosophy (Patanjali)

- Purusha = pure witness consciousness, distinct from all Prakriti
- Many individual Purushas — each person is a distinct consciousness
- Liberation = Purusha recognising its distinction from Prakriti
- Sakshi (witness) is the final position — permanent Kaivalya
- Consciousness illuminates mind but never contacts it
- Practice reveals the distinction between Purusha and chitta
- Goal: Tada drashtuh svarupe avasthanam — seer in own nature

#### Advaita Vedanta (Shankaracharya)

- Brahman = consciousness itself, the only reality — not a witness but the ground
- One universal Brahman — individual selves are apparent not ultimately real
- Liberation = recognition of Atman as Brahman — 'I am that'
- Sakshi is a teaching device; ultimately even witness-object duality dissolves
- Consciousness IS the substrate of all appearance — nothing is other than it
- Practice purifies the mind (Antahkarana Shuddhi) for Jnana to dawn
- Goal: Aham Brahmasmi — I am Brahman, the unlimited consciousness

## 4.5 The Yoga Teacher's Own Consciousness — Practical Implications

For the yoga teacher, the philosophical difference between Purusha-as-individual-witness (Samkhya-Yoga) and Brahman-as-universal-consciousness (Advaita) has a profound and practical dimension: it determines how you understand yourself in the teaching relationship. If you operate from the Samkhya-Yoga framework, you understand yourself as a particular Purusha — a distinct,

individual consciousness that has cultivated clarity and discrimination and is now sharing this with students who are also distinct individual consciousnesses. This is a meaningful and practically valid understanding.

If you operate from the Advaita framework, the teaching relationship takes on a different quality: the awareness in you that recognises the truth of yoga philosophy is the same awareness — Brahman — that is also the deepest nature of every student who sits before you. Teaching, from this perspective, is not one individual illuminating the path for other individuals; it is Brahman — through the apparent medium of the teacher — recognising itself in the apparent medium of the student. This is not a mystical flight of imagination; it is the direct practical implication of Advaita's non-dual metaphysics, and it transforms the quality of presence that a teacher brings to every interaction.

## 4.6 Reflection Questions

- Sit in meditation for fifteen minutes. Observe the thoughts, emotions, and sensations arising and passing. Now ask: what is aware of all these? Can you find a limit to that awareness? What does this inquiry reveal about the difference between Purusha (individual witness) and Brahman (universal consciousness)?
- The Advaita teaching is that Brahman-as-Chit is the light by which all experience is known. In your teaching, how might this understanding change the way you hold the teaching relationship?
- Patanjali's Purusha is permanently distinct from Prakriti even after liberation (Kaivalya). Advaita's Brahman is the single reality in which Purusha and Prakriti are both appearances. Which account resonates more deeply with your own meditation experience? Why?



## CHAPTER 5

# The Self

*Atman, Ahamkara, and the Question 'Who Am I?'*

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### ***Aham Brahmasmi — Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10***

*— I am Brahman — the individual self, at its deepest, is the universal ground of all reality*

## 5.1 The Question That Yoga Is Answering

Every yoga practice, every philosophical teaching, every moment of meditative inquiry is, in some fundamental sense, an answer in progress to the most irreducibly personal question that any human being can ask: Who am I? Not 'what am I?' in the biological or psychological sense — not what kind of organism, not what personality type, not what social role or occupational category. But who: what is the subject of all this experience? What is the entity that breathes, feels, thinks, doubts, suffers, and seeks? Is it the body? Is it the mind? Is it a combination of both? Is it something beyond both?

Both the yoga philosophical tradition and Advaita Vedanta are, in their deepest essence, sustained answers to this question. And while they approach the answer from different philosophical frameworks and arrive at somewhat different positions, they share the same foundational conviction: the answer that ordinary experience provides — that 'I' am this particular body-mind, this individual personality with its history and preferences and fears — is not the complete or ultimate answer. The true self, they both teach, is something more fundamental, more stable, and more remarkable than the ego's story of who it is.

## 5.2 Ahamkara — The Ego-Principle and Its Philosophical Status

In the Samkhya-Yoga framework, the ego (Ahamkara — the I-maker) is the third tattva to evolve from Prakriti, emerging from the cosmic intelligence (Mahat-Buddhi) and giving rise to the mind (Manas), the sense and action faculties, and the five elements. Ahamkara is the principle of individuation — the mechanism by which the undifferentiated intelligence of Mahat becomes

organised into a particular, bounded perspective that says 'I am this body,' 'I am this mind,' 'I am this person.'

Philosophically, Ahamkara is entirely a product of Prakriti — it belongs to the material side of the Purusha-Prakriti divide. The suffering that yoga practice addresses arises precisely from the misidentification of Purusha with Ahamkara: pure consciousness (Purusha), which has no characteristics and no boundaries, comes to 'believe' (through the power of association — Samyoga) that it is the bounded, characterised, story-bearing ego. The aim of yoga practice is the dissolution of this misidentification — not the destruction of the ego as a functional personality, but the liberation of Purusha from the false belief that it is the ego.

In Advaita Vedanta, Ahamkara has a somewhat different philosophical status. Since Advaita holds that the mind (Antahkarana, including Ahamkara) is part of Maya — the cosmic appearance that arises through Brahman's power of self-concealment — the ego-principle is understood not merely as a misidentification within the framework of a real dualism, but as part of the fundamental ignorance (Avidya) that makes the appearance of individuality possible at all. Ahamkara, for Advaita, is not merely a psychological phenomenon but an ontological one: it is the principle by which the unlimited Brahman appears as a limited individual. Its dissolution through Jnana (direct knowledge) is not merely a psychological event but an ontological recognition — the recognition that there was never, in ultimate truth, a bounded individual to begin with.

### **5.3 Atman — The True Self in the Upanishadic Vision**

The Upanishadic concept of Atman is one of the most sophisticated and most radical philosophical ideas in the history of human thought. Atman is the individual self — but the Upanishadic teaching is that this individual self, when followed to its deepest source, turns out to be nothing other than Brahman: the unlimited, universal ground of all reality. This is not the teaching that the individual self is similar to Brahman, or related to Brahman, or a part of Brahman, or in loving relationship with Brahman. It is the teaching that the individual self IS Brahman — that the apparent individuality and limitation of the self is the product of Maya-Avidya (the power of cosmic ignorance), and that beneath this apparent limitation there is only the one, unlimited, self-luminous awareness of Brahman.

The Upanishads use several powerful analogies to illustrate this teaching. The most famous is from the Chandogya Upanishad — the dialogue between Uddalaka Aruni and his son Shvetaketu. Uddalaka demonstrates the omnipresence of the subtle essence (Brahman) through a series of analogies: the salt dissolved in water is everywhere in the water and cannot be separated from it; the tiny seed of the Nyagrodha tree contains the entire vast tree; the rivers flowing into the ocean become the ocean. In each case, the teaching is the same: the individual (the drop, the river, the salt) is not annihilated in the universal (the ocean, the water, the Brahman) — it is recognised as having always already been the universal, and the apparent individuality is seen as an appearance within the universal rather than a genuinely separate reality.

### **Ramana Maharshi on Self-Inquiry**

1879–1950 — Tiruvannamalai (Arunachala)

*The Self is always present. All that is required is to remove the ignorance that covers it. The direct path is to ask 'Who am I?' — not as an intellectual question but as a meditation that turns attention toward the source of the sense of 'I.' Where does this 'I' arise from? Follow it to its source. What remains when the 'I' thought dissolves?*

## **5.4 The Mahavakyas — The Four Great Sayings**

The four Mahavakyas — the great sayings of the Upanishads — are the direct scriptural expressions of the Advaita realisation. They are not philosophical propositions to be argued about; they are transmission statements that point directly at the recognition of Atman-Brahman identity. Each comes from one of the four Vedas, and together they constitute the core of the Advaita teaching:

<b>Mahavakya</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Veda</b>	<b>Meaning for Advaita</b>
Prajnanam Brahma	Aitareya Upanishad	Rig Veda	Consciousness is Brahman — consciousness is not a property of Brahman; it IS Brahman. All consciousness is Brahman.
Aham Brahmasmi	Brihadaranyaka Upanishad	Yajur Veda	I am Brahman — the individual 'I' that one normally takes oneself to be is, at its deepest source, Brahman itself.

Tat tvam asi	Chandogya Upanishad	Sama Veda	That thou art — the individual self (tvam) is identical with the ultimate reality (tat). The most direct formulation of Atman-Brahman identity.
Ayam Atma Brahma	Mandukya Upanishad	Atharva Veda	This self is Brahman — the self that one immediately is, right here and now, is not different from Brahman.

For the yoga teacher, the Mahavakyas are not credal statements to be affirmed intellectually. They are contemplative pointers — statements to be held in meditation, to be brought into the practice, to be tested against direct experience. The traditional Advaita teaching is that a Mahavakya heard from a qualified teacher in the right context of preparation can produce immediate recognition of its truth — a recognition that is not conceptual understanding but direct, non-dual awareness of one's own nature as Brahman. This recognition is Brahma-jnana: the liberating knowledge.

## 5.5 The Yoga Sutras' Account of the Self — Purusha vs. Atman

Patanjali never uses the term 'Atman' in the Yoga Sutras. His term for the true self is Purusha — and as discussed in Chapter 4, Purusha in the Samkhya-Yoga framework is understood as individual and distinct from other Purushas, as the pure witness that is permanently separate from Prakriti. This is a significant difference from the Upanishadic Atman, which is universal and identical with Brahman.

However — and this is one of the most interesting points in the comparative study — later commentators on the Yoga Sutras, including Vacaspati Mishra and Vijnana Bhikshu, have read the Yoga Sutras through a Vedantic lens that brings Patanjali's Purusha closer to the Upanishadic Atman. Vijnana Bhikshu, in particular, argues in his Yoga-Varttika that Patanjali's system is ultimately compatible with Vedanta, and that the multiple Purushas of the Samkhya system are ultimately one Brahman appearing as multiple through the power of Upadhi (limiting adjuncts).

This interpretive move — reading classical yoga through an Advaitic lens — is not merely scholastic. It reflects the lived experience of generations of yoga practitioners for whom the deepening of meditation practice eventually dissolves the apparent boundaries between individual

consciousness and universal awareness — an experience that the Samkhya framework of multiple individual Purushas struggles to account for, and that the Advaita framework of one Brahman-consciousness describes with extraordinary precision.

*“Ramana Maharshi used to say: you are not in the world — the world is in you. This is not poetry. It is the direct experiential implication of Advaita's teaching on the self. When the ego-self dissolves in the inquiry 'Who am I?', what remains is not nothing — it is the unlimited awareness that was always the true self.”*

— Dr. Shivam Mishra

## 5.6 Asmita — The Yoga Sutras' Account of Ego

Patanjali identifies Asmita (I-am-ness, or ego-identification) as the second Klesha (affliction) — the specific psychological mechanism by which pure Purusha consciousness comes to misidentify with the mind-body complex. Asmita is the felt sense of 'I' — the continuous background hum of self-referentiality that runs through all waking experience and is the source of the possessive stance toward experience ('my body,' 'my thoughts,' 'my practice,' 'my students') that drives the grasping and aversion patterns at the root of suffering.

The Yoga Sutras' prescription for addressing Asmita is the progressive deepening of Viveka-Khyati (discriminative awareness) through the eight-limbed practice — the sustained, consistent practice of distinguishing the pure witness (Purusha) from the misidentified ego (Asmita) until the misidentification is permanently dissolved in Kaivalya. Advaita Vedanta's prescription is somewhat different: since Asmita is itself part of Maya, the direct path is not discrimination within the framework of dualism but the direct inquiry into the nature of the 'I' that feels the Asmita — the recognition, through self-inquiry, that there is no such individual in the first place.

## 5.7 Reflection Questions

- Sit quietly for ten minutes. Notice the continuous background sense of being 'you' — the Asmita, the sense of 'I am here.' Now ask: what is aware of this sense of 'I'? Can you find the boundary of that awareness? What does this reveal?
- The Yoga Sutras use Purusha (individual witness); the Upanishads use Atman (universal self = Brahman). In your direct experience of meditation, do you encounter a consciousness that feels individual and bounded, or one that feels boundless and universal? Or both at different depths?

- Ramana Maharshi taught self-inquiry as the direct path to Moksha. Patanjali taught the eight-limbed path as the methodical approach to Kaivalya. Are these different paths to the same recognition, or different recognitions entirely?



## CHAPTER 6

# Maya, Avidya, and the Root of Illusion

*The Cosmic and Psychological Sources of Bondage*

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*Avidya kshetram uttaresam prasupta tanu vicchinna udaranam — Yoga Sutras*  
**2.4**

*— Avidya is the field for the remaining afflictions — dormant, attenuated, interrupted, or fully active*

## 6.1 The Architecture of Bondage

Both yoga philosophy and Advaita Vedanta agree on one fundamental point: the suffering of ordinary human existence — the Duhkha that Patanjali identifies as the central problematic and that the Upanishads describe as the condition of the person who does not know their true nature — has a definable, investigable cause. It is not random, not inevitable, not permanent. It arises from a specific kind of error — a specific cognitive and existential misorientation — that has a name and a remedy.

That error is called Avidya in both traditions, though its precise philosophical characterisation and its ultimate ontological status differ significantly between them. Understanding this difference is essential for the yoga teacher, because it determines whether the yoga practice is understood as a psychological technology for correcting a misidentification within a framework of two genuine realities (the Samkhya-Yoga view) or as a spiritual and philosophical preparation for the direct dissolution of the cosmic ignorance that creates the appearance of individual existence in the first place (the Advaita view).

## 6.2 Avidya in the Yoga Sutras — The Root Klesha

Patanjali defines Avidya precisely in Yoga Sutra 2.5: Avidya is the mistaking of the impermanent for the permanent (nitya), the impure for the pure (shuchi), the painful for the pleasurable (sukha), and the non-self for the self (Atman). This is not mere factual ignorance — not the absence of

information about specific topics. It is a fundamental misorientation of consciousness: the primordial error of taking what is temporary, conditional, and suffering-producing to be what is permanent, pure, and bliss-producing.

In the Yoga Sutra framework, Avidya is the first and root Klesha from which the other four Kleshas (Asmita, Raga, Dvesha, Abhinivesha) emerge. The causal sequence is precise: Avidya gives rise to Asmita (the false identification of Purusha with the ego-mind complex); Asmita gives rise to Raga (attachment — grasping at what seems to support the ego-self) and Dvesha (aversion — pushing away what seems to threaten it); and from the fundamental anxiety of the ego-identified consciousness arises Abhinivesha (the instinctive clinging to existence and fear of death). All human suffering traces, through this causal chain, back to the root error of Avidya.

The cure, in the Yoga Sutra framework, is Viveka-Khyati — the sustained, deepening discriminative awareness that correctly distinguishes Purusha (pure consciousness) from Prakriti (all modifications of matter, including the mind). As this discrimination is cultivated through practice and deepened through Samadhi, the Kleshas are progressively attenuated (Tanukarana) and eventually eradicated (Prahana) — and Kaivalya, the isolation of pure Purusha-consciousness from all Prakriti identification, is the result.

### **6.3 Maya in Advaita Vedanta — The Cosmic Power of Appearance**

In Advaita Vedanta, the concept that corresponds to Avidya in the Yoga Sutras is both psychologically equivalent and ontologically more radical. Shankaracharya uses both 'Maya' (at the cosmic level) and 'Avidya' (at the individual level) to describe the fundamental ignorance — but the crucial difference from the Yoga Sutra account is the ontological scope of the ignorance.

In the Yoga Sutra framework, Avidya is a psychological event — the individual Purusha's misidentification with Prakriti. The Prakriti itself is real and fully exists; the error is the wrong identification, which can be corrected by Viveka. In Advaita Vedanta, Maya operates at the level of Brahman itself (as it appears from the conventional perspective) — it is not merely a psychological error within a framework of two genuinely existing realities, but the cosmic power by which the one unlimited Brahman appears as if there were many limited individuals, by which

the eternal appears as if it were temporal, and by which the non-dual appears as if it were dual. Maya is the ontological ground of the entire appearance of multiplicity.

Aspect	Avidya in Yoga Sutras	Maya-Avidya in Advaita Vedanta
Level of operation	Individual psychology — the individual Purusha's misidentification with Prakriti	Both cosmic (Maya) and individual (Avidya) — the cosmic power by which Brahman appears as world of multiple beings
Ontological status	A psychological error within the framework of two genuinely real principles	Anirvacaniya — neither real nor unreal; the inexplicable ground of all apparent multiplicity
What it produces	The individual's suffering through false identification with mind-body	The apparent world of multiplicity, individuality, and the appearance of duality itself
What it conceals	The distinction between Purusha and Prakriti — Viveka corrects this	The identity of Atman and Brahman — Jnana dissolves this
The remedy	Viveka-Khyati through the eight-limbed path — discrimination deepened through meditation	Sravana-Manana-Nididhyasana — hearing, reflecting, and meditating on the Mahavakya-teaching
After the remedy	Kaivalya — Purusha rests in its own nature, permanently distinct from Prakriti	Moksha — recognition that Atman was always Brahman; there was never actually any bondage
The moment of liberation	A positive achievement — the Purusha has arrived at Kaivalya through sustained practice	A recognition — what was always true is seen to be true; liberation is not achieved but recognised

## 6.4 Sublation (Badha) — The Advaita Test of Truth

One of Advaita Vedanta's most important philosophical tools — and one of the clearest illustrations of the difference between Advaita's account of Maya and the Yoga Sutras' account of Avidya — is the concept of Badha (sublation or cancellation). A cognition is sublated when it is cancelled by a subsequent, more accurate cognition that reveals it to have been erroneous. The classic example is the rope-snake: seeing a rope in dim light and mistaking it for a snake is an

erroneous cognition that is sublated when better light reveals it to be a rope. The snake was not a real entity that was then removed — it was an appearance that was cancelled by correct knowledge.

Advaita Vedanta applies this model of sublation to the entire apparent world. The conventional world of individual selves and separate objects is like the rope-snake: it appears real from within the framework of Avidya (ordinary ignorance), but when the direct knowledge of Brahman arises (Brahma-jnana), the appearance of multiplicity is sublated — not destroyed, but seen through, recognised as an appearance of the one Brahman rather than a genuinely independent multiplicity. The world does not disappear at liberation — the liberated sage continues to perceive the conventional world. But they perceive it correctly: as an appearance of Brahman, not as an independent reality.

This model of sublation is not available to the Yoga Sutras' account of Avidya, because in the Samkhya-Yoga framework, Prakriti is genuinely real — it is not merely an appearance of Purusha. There is no sublation of the apparent duality of Purusha and Prakriti by a more fundamental recognition; there is only the permanent discrimination between them. This difference has profound implications for how each tradition understands the liberated state — a topic explored in detail in Chapter 8.

## **6.5 Practical Teaching: Working With Maya and Avidya**

The yoga teacher who understands both the Yoga Sutra account of Avidya and the Advaita account of Maya is equipped to address students' experiences of confusion, suffering, and misidentification at multiple philosophical levels simultaneously.

At the psychological level — the level of the Yoga Sutras' account — the teacher helps students identify specific instances of Avidya in operation: the mistaking of the temporary for the permanent (seeking lasting satisfaction from transient pleasures), the mistaking of the impure for the pure (identifying with the reactive patterns of the conditioned mind), and above all the mistaking of the non-self for the self (suffering because of thoughts that are not the self, emotions that are not the self, opinions that are not the self). This level of teaching is immediately practical, accessible to students at any stage, and directly effective in reducing the Kleshas.

At the philosophical level — the level of Advaita's account — the teacher points toward the more radical recognition: that the sense of being a bounded individual who has these confusions is itself part of Maya; that the awareness that observes all these confusions is not itself confused; and that the recognition of one's true nature as that awareness — unlimited, self-luminous, identical with Brahman — is the complete and final resolution of all Duhkha. This level of teaching is appropriate for students who have cultivated sufficient Viveka (discrimination) and Vairagya (dispassion) to receive it without turning it into a philosophical concept to be added to the collection rather than a living recognition to be embodied.

## 6.6 Reflection Questions

- Identify a current source of suffering or dissatisfaction in your life. Can you trace it back through the Klesha chain — from the specific suffering to Raga or Dvesha, to Asmita, to the underlying Avidya? What is the specific misidentification (taking what is non-self as self)?
- Advaita says Maya is neither real nor unreal. Sit with this paradox in meditation. What happens when you try to identify whether your present experience is 'real' (in the ultimate sense) or 'unreal'? What does this inquiry reveal?
- The Advaita concept of sublation says the world is not destroyed at liberation — it is seen correctly, as Brahman's appearance. How does this understanding change the quality of your engagement with the world?



## CHAPTER 7

# The Three States and the Fourth

*Turiya, Samadhi, and the Ground of All Experience*

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### ***Turiyam sarvadrk — Mandukya Upanishad 7***

*— The Fourth is the seer of all — it is the ground of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep*

## **7.1 The States of Consciousness — An Upanishadic Map**

Among the Upanishads, the Mandukya Upanishad — though the shortest of the principal Upanishads, consisting of only twelve verses — is considered by the Advaita tradition to contain, in compressed form, the complete teaching of Vedanta. Its subject is the nature of consciousness as revealed through the analysis of the four states of experience: waking (Jagrat), dreaming (Svapna), deep dreamless sleep (Sushupti), and the fourth (Turiya) — the ground that underlies and pervades all three ordinary states.

This four-state analysis is of direct relevance to the comparative study of yoga philosophy and Advaita Vedanta, because it provides the most precise Upanishadic framework for understanding what both traditions are pointing toward in their accounts of the liberated state — Kaivalya in the Yoga Sutras and Moksha in Advaita Vedanta. And the relationship between the Yoga Sutras' Samadhi and the Mandukya's Turiya is one of the richest and most rewarding topics in the comparative study.

## **7.2 The Three Ordinary States**

The waking state (Jagrat) is the state of ordinary consciousness in which the mind is engaged with the external world through the five senses and the action faculties. The experiencer in the waking state is called Vishva. This is the state in which the Vyavaharika (conventional) reality of the world is most fully operative. The individual in the waking state experiences themselves as a bounded person in a world of external objects — the full force of Maya's projection is most active here.

The dreaming state (Svapna) is the state of consciousness in which the mind creates its own world from the impressions (Vasanas and Samskaras) stored in the deep unconscious. The experiencer in the dream state is called *Tajjasa*. Advaita Vedanta uses the dream state as one of the most important analogies for understanding the waking state: just as the dream world appears entirely real from within the dream but is recognised as the mind's own projection upon waking, so too the waking world — while more stable and practically consequential than the dream — is, from the *Paramarthika* perspective, the mind's own projection (*Vikshepa Shakti* of *Maya*) appearing within *Brahman*.

Deep dreamless sleep (*Sushupti*) is the state in which both the gross world of waking experience and the subtle world of dream experience are absent — and yet consciousness is not absent. The experiencer in deep sleep is called *Prajna*. We know, upon waking from deep sleep, that we slept — and many people report that deep sleep was peaceful, restful, free from suffering. Advaita Vedanta regards this as a significant philosophical observation: in deep sleep, the objects of experience (the world, the body, the mind) are absent — and yet there is a quality of peace and fullness that is not absent. What remains in deep sleep when the world and the mind are gone? Advaita's answer: *Brahman* — the pure, self-luminous consciousness that is always present, whether the mind is active or not.

### 7.3 Turiya — The Fourth

*Turiya* (literally 'the fourth') is Advaita Vedanta's most important concept in the comparative study with yoga philosophy, because it is the *Mandukya Upanishad*'s description of what both traditions are pointing toward in their highest practices. *Turiya* is not a fourth state that comes after the other three — it is the ground, the substratum, the ever-present awareness in which all three states arise and dissolve. The *Mandukya Upanishad* describes *Turiya* as:

*Pranchopashamam* — that in which the appearance of the world has ceased; *Shantam* — the peaceful; *Shivam* — the auspicious; *Advaitam* — the non-dual; *Chaturtham manyante* — what the sages know as the fourth; *Sa Atma* — this is the *Atman*; *Sa Vijneyah* — this is to be known.

*Turiya* is not produced by meditation — it is not a state that arises and passes like the other states. It is the unchanging, ever-present awareness that was always already the ground of all experience.

The 'attainment' of Turiya through practice is not the acquisition of something new but the recognition of what was always present — the recognition of Atman as Brahman, of the individual awareness as the universal awareness.

## The Mandukya Upanishad

*The Shortest and Most Complete — 12 Verses (Atharva Veda)*

*OM — this syllable is all this. Past, present, future — all that is the syllable OM. And whatever else is beyond these three times — that too is the syllable OM. All this is Brahman. This Atman is Brahman. This same Atman has four feet (states). (Mandukya 1–2). Turiya is the fourth — pure consciousness, the ground of all states, the Atman that is to be recognised as Brahman.*

## 7.4 Samadhi in the Yoga Sutras — Progressive Absorption

Patanjali's account of Samadhi in the Yoga Sutras is one of the most detailed and systematic descriptions of deep meditative absorption in any philosophical tradition. Samadhi is not a single state but a progression of states corresponding to the progressive stilling of the vrittis (modifications) of chitta and the progressive clarification of the Purusha-Prakriti distinction.

Stage of Samadhi	Sanskrit	Characteristics	Comparative Status
Gross-object Samadhi	Savitarka Samadhi	Absorption in a gross object with fluctuations of conceptual thought (vitarka) still present	Dhyana with slight mental disturbance — not yet Turiya
Clear gross-object Samadhi	Nirvitarka Samadhi	Absorption in a gross object without conceptual thought — object shines in its own nature	Deepening clarity; vrittis becoming subtler
Subtle-object Samadhi	Savichara Samadhi	Absorption in subtle objects (tanmatras, the gunas) with some reflection (vichara)	Movement toward Prakriti's subtler levels
Clear subtle-object Samadhi	Nirvichara Samadhi	Clear absorption in subtle objects without reflection — the mind reflects Purusha with great clarity	Approaching Viveka-Khyati; highest Samprajnata
Seedless Samadhi	Asamprajnata / Nirbija Samadhi	Complete cessation of all vrittis; no object, no reflection, no seed	Kaivalya — Purusha resting in its own nature;

		of future modification	most closely parallel to Turiya in Advaita
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## 7.5 Turiya and Nirbija Samadhi — Convergence and Difference

The comparison between the Mandukya Upanishad's Turiya and Patanjali's Nirbija Samadhi (seedless, objectless absorption) is one of the most philosophically rich topics in the entire comparative study. At the level of phenomenological description — what is it like to be in these states — the accounts are strikingly similar: both describe a state in which ordinary object-consciousness has ceased, in which the duality of subject and object is dissolved, in which the mind's modifications are absent, and in which something — a quality of pure, luminous, peaceful awareness — remains.

But at the level of philosophical interpretation, the accounts diverge significantly, reflecting the deeper metaphysical difference between the two traditions:

From the Samkhya-Yoga perspective, Nirbija Samadhi is the state in which Purusha is freed from all identification with Prakriti's modifications — a state that reveals Purusha's own nature as pure consciousness, distinct from and prior to all Prakriti. Kaivalya — the liberated state that follows the stabilisation of Nirbija Samadhi — is the permanent establishment of this distinction: Purusha resting in its own nature, no longer entangled with Prakriti.

From the Advaita Vedanta perspective, the same deep state of absorption — in which the sense of individual subjectivity and the world of objects both dissolve — is interpreted as the recognition of Turiya: the awareness that was always present as the ground of all three ordinary states is recognised as what one truly is. And that recognition, in the Advaita account, is not the recognition of an individual Purusha distinct from Prakriti but the recognition of Brahman — the unlimited consciousness that was always the ground of the individual awareness. The 'individual' who achieved Samadhi is recognised to have been Brahman all along.

*“The difference between Patanjali's Kaivalya and Shankaracharya's Moksha is not a difference in the depth of the realisation — it is a difference in the philosophical framework within which that realisation is interpreted. The*

*experience converges. The interpretation diverges. And the interpretation has practical consequences.”*

— Dr. Shivam Mishra

## 7.6 Turiyatita — Beyond the Fourth

Some Advaita teachers — particularly in the Tantric and Kashmir Shaivite traditions — speak of a state beyond Turiya: Turiyatita ('beyond the fourth'). If Turiya is the ever-present ground of awareness that underlies and pervades the three ordinary states, Turiyatita is the recognition that this Turiya-awareness is not a state alongside the other states but the very nature of all experience, including the waking and dreaming states. The liberated sage does not live permanently in the fourth state; they live in the recognition that Turiya is the substance of all four states — that waking, dreaming, and sleep are all expressions of the one, unlimited, self-luminous awareness of Brahman.

This concept of Turiyatita brings the Advaita position to its fullest expression and creates an interesting further convergence with the yoga tradition's concept of Sahaja Samadhi — the natural, spontaneous, effortless state of Samadhi that is the stabilised fruit of Nirbija Samadhi, in which the yogi lives in continuous absorption in the Self even while engaging fully with the world. Both Turiyatita and Sahaja Samadhi point toward the same recognition: liberation is not a special state that excludes ordinary life; it is the recognition of the nature of awareness that makes ordinary life itself an expression of the unlimited.

## 7.7 Reflection Questions

- In deep dreamless sleep, there is no ego, no world, no body — and yet most people experience it as restful and peaceful, not as annihilation. What does this reveal about the nature of the awareness that is present in deep sleep? How does the Advaita account of this differ from the Samkhya-Yoga account?
- Patanjali's Nirbija Samadhi is the cessation of all vrittis — including the witness-sense. Turiya is described as the 'seer of all.' Are these descriptions of the same state or different states? What philosophical question does this difference open?
- The concept of Sahaja Samadhi suggests that liberation is not a special state but the natural condition of consciousness that has recognised its own nature. How does this affect your understanding of yoga practice — is it building toward something, or uncovering something always already present?



**PART III**

# Liberation and the Path

*Moksha, Kaivalya, and the Roads to Freedom*

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## CHAPTER 8

# The Goal

*Moksha, Kaivalya, and Jivanmukti*

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***Kaivalyam moksha ity ahuh — traditional Vedantic statement***

*— Kaivalya and Moksha are both called liberation — but they describe it differently*

### 8.1 What Is Liberation?

Both yoga philosophy and Advaita Vedanta are, at their core, soteriological traditions — their ultimate concern is not cosmological speculation or intellectual satisfaction but the liberation of the human being from the suffering of conditioned existence. Every practice instruction, every philosophical analysis, every meditative technique in both traditions is in service of this single goal: the permanent, irreversible freedom from the Duhkha (suffering) that characterises unawakened human experience.

Yet when the two traditions describe what liberation consists in, they reveal the deep philosophical difference that separates them. This difference is not trivial — it is the clearest expression of the metaphysical divergence between Samkhya-Yoga's dualism and Advaita Vedanta's non-dualism. Understanding this difference with philosophical precision, and understanding why it matters practically, is one of the most important outcomes of this comparative study.

### 8.2 Kaivalya — Liberation in the Yoga Sutras

Patanjali's term for the liberated state is Kaivalya — a Sanskrit word meaning 'aloneness,' 'isolation,' or 'absolute independence.' The philosophical precision of this term is significant: Kaivalya describes the state of Purusha as it truly is — alone in its own nature, isolated from all identification or entanglement with Prakriti's modifications. It is not the achievement of a new state but the recognition and stabilisation of Purusha's own original, intrinsic nature — a nature that was always present but obscured by the misidentification with chitta.

Patanjali describes Kaivalya in the final sutra of the Yoga Sutras (4.34): 'Purusha-arthasunyanam gunanam pratiprasavah kaivalyam svarupa pratishtha va chiti-shaktir iti' — Kaivalya is the return of the gunas to their source when they are no longer of use to the Purusha, or the establishment of the Chiti-Shakti (power of consciousness) in its own nature. This is liberation as positive self-possession: the Purusha, no longer drawn outward by the gunas of Prakriti, rests completely in its own intrinsic nature as pure, self-luminous, action-less, witness-consciousness.

Key characteristics of Kaivalya in the yoga philosophical framework: it is permanent — once achieved, the misidentification of Purusha with Prakriti does not recur; it is individual — each Purusha achieves its own Kaivalya, which is not a merger with other Purushas or with a universal consciousness; it involves the continued existence of Prakriti, which simply ceases to 'serve' the liberated Purusha; and it is, in the classical Samkhya interpretation, a form of absolute aloneness — the Purusha resting in its own nature without any relationship to anything outside itself.

### 8.3 Moksha — Liberation in Advaita Vedanta

Advaita Vedanta's term for liberation is Moksha (also Mukti) — release, liberation. The philosophical content of Moksha is quite different from Kaivalya: Moksha is not the isolation of an individual consciousness in its own nature but the recognition — by what appeared to be an individual consciousness — that it was never actually individual. The Atman that recognises itself as Brahman does not thereby become Brahman (it was always Brahman) and does not merge into Brahman (merging implies prior separation). It simply recognises what was always true.

This is the crucial Advaita formulation: liberation is not achievement but recognition. The bondage was not real; it was an appearance produced by Maya-Avidya. When direct knowledge (Jnana) of one's identity with Brahman arises — through the transmission of the Mahavakya from a qualified teacher in the context of proper preparation — the bondage is not removed; it is seen through. The rope-snake is not removed; the rope is recognised. The individual never was bound; the recognition of this is Moksha.

Dimension	Kaivalya (Yoga Sutras)	Moksha (Advaita Vedanta)
Nature of liberation	Isolation of Purusha from all Prakriti identification — positive self-	Recognition of Atman's identity with Brahman — the unlimited consciousness was

	possession of pure consciousness	always what one was
What is liberated	The individual Purusha — each person's liberation is their own Purusha's Kaivalya	Strictly, no individual is liberated — the appearance of individuality is itself what is dissolved in Moksha
Status of world after liberation	Prakriti continues to exist but is no longer 'for' the liberated Purusha — it ceases to generate Samskaras	The world continues to appear conventionally (Vyavaharika) but is recognised as Brahman's appearance — Vivarta
Permanence	Permanent and irreversible — once Kaivalya is achieved, misidentification does not recur	Permanent and irreversible — Jnana once arisen cannot be cancelled; 'once the sun has risen, darkness cannot return'
Individual vs. Universal	Individual — each Purusha achieves its own Kaivalya; multiple liberated Purushas co-exist	Universal — recognising Atman = Brahman, the liberated sage recognises the same Brahman in all beings
The liberated being's experience	Purusha rests in its own nature; the world of Prakriti continues but is not binding	Sahaja Samadhi — natural, effortless abidance in Brahman while apparently engaging with the conventional world
Path to liberation	Eight-limbed practice (Ashtanga Yoga) leading to Nirbija Samadhi and the stabilisation of Viveka-Khyati	Sravana-Manana-Nididhyasana — preparation followed by direct recognition through Mahavakya transmission

## 8.4 Jivanmukti — Liberation While Living

Both traditions recognise the possibility of Jivanmukti — liberation while still alive in the body. The Jivanmukta (one liberated while living) is the ideal of both traditions: the human being who has achieved the highest realisation and yet continues to exist in the world, teaching others and serving the tradition, until the body falls away at death (Videhamukti — liberation at the dissolution of the body).

The Jivanmukta in the Yoga philosophical tradition is the established Yogi who lives in Sahaja Samadhi — the natural, effortless state of Samadhi that does not require effortful practice to maintain. Such a person acts in the world without generating new Samskaras (Karma Yoga — action without ego-investment), teaches from direct experience of Kaivalya, and demonstrates

through their very presence the possibility and reality of liberation. In Advaita Vedanta, the Jivanmukta is the one who has had direct Brahma-jnana and lives in the recognition of Atman-Brahman identity — seeing Brahman in all things, acting spontaneously from the fullness of Brahman's nature (Ananda), and yet appearing to ordinary eyes as an ordinary human being engaged in ordinary activities.

### **Ramana Maharshi as Jivanmukta**

*1879–1950 — The exemplar of living liberation in the modern period*

*Ramana Maharshi is perhaps the clearest exemplar in modern times of the Jivanmukta as described in both traditions. His direct recognition of Atman-Brahman identity came spontaneously at the age of 16 through a near-death experience. He spent the remainder of his life in the silent teaching of self-inquiry at Arunachala, demonstrating that liberation is not theoretical but lived — a natural, effortless abidance in the recognition 'I am Brahman.'*

## **8.5 The 'Before and After' of Liberation — Practical Implications**

For the yoga teacher, the question of what liberation looks like from the outside — what a liberated being does, how they teach, how they relate to students and to the world — is not an idle speculation. It is the living question of what you are pointing toward in your teaching.

Both traditions agree on several features of the liberated teacher: they act without ego-driven motivation; they teach from direct experience rather than from memorised instruction; they hold students' wellbeing as genuinely more important than their own comfort or recognition; they maintain equanimity in the face of praise and criticism, gain and loss, comfort and discomfort; and their very presence — the quality of awareness they bring to every interaction — is itself a teaching that operates beyond the words they speak. These are not ideals to be performed; they are the natural expressions of a consciousness that has recognised its own unlimited nature and is no longer contracted around the project of self-maintenance.

## **8.6 Reflection Questions**

- Kaivalya is described as 'aloneness' — the Purusha in its own nature without relationship to anything. Moksha in Advaita is the recognition of Brahman in everything. Which vision of liberation is more compelling to you, and why? What does your preference reveal about your own philosophical tendencies?

- The Jivanmukta continues to live in the world after liberation. How does their engagement with the world differ from that of an unawakened person? What changes — and what remains the same?
- If liberation is the recognition that 'I was never bound,' what is the role of practice? Why practise if there is nothing to achieve?



## CHAPTER 9

# The Path of Knowledge

*Jnana Yoga and Advaita's Method of Viveka*

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***Jnanam bandha vimokshayor hetu — Shankaracharya, Vivekachudamani 1***

*— Knowledge alone is the cause of both bondage and liberation*

## 9.1 The Centrality of Knowledge

In the comparative study of yoga philosophy and Advaita Vedanta, no topic is more philosophically important or more practically significant than the question of the nature and role of knowledge on the path to liberation. Both traditions agree that liberation has an epistemological dimension — that it involves the transformation of knowledge, the dissolution of ignorance (Avidya), and the arising of a direct, non-conceptual recognition of the true nature of reality and the self. But they understand the nature of this liberating knowledge quite differently, and these differences have profound implications for how each tradition structures its path.

## 9.2 Viveka-Khyati — The Yoga Sutras' Path of Discrimination

In the Yoga Sutra framework, the knowledge that liberates is called Viveka-Khyati — the sustained, deepening discriminative awareness that distinguishes Purusha (the true self) from Prakriti (everything else, including the mind). Viveka-Khyati is not a concept but a direct perception — a form of knowing that progressively replaces the habitual misidentification of Purusha with chitta-vrittis.

Patanjali describes the progressive deepening of Viveka-Khyati in the Yoga Sutras: it begins as an intention and an intellectual understanding (Yoga Sutra 2.26: Vivekajam jnanam — the knowledge born of discrimination), deepens through practice into a continuous quality of inner discernment, and culminates in the spontaneous, effortless recognition of the distinction between Purusha and the finest modifications of Prakriti — including even the subtlest trace of the Sattva guna. This

final, complete Viveka is called Dharma-Megha Samadhi (the cloud of virtue Samadhi) — a state of profound absorption in which a 'rain' of liberating insight dissolves the last seeds of Avidya.

The path of Viveka-Khyati in the Yoga Sutras is embedded within the larger framework of the eight-limbed practice (Ashtanga Yoga) — the systematic preparation of the mind through ethical living (Yama-Niyama), physical practice (Asana), breathwork (Pranayama), sense withdrawal (Pratyahara), concentration (Dharana), meditation (Dhyana), and absorption (Samadhi). This is a path of gradual, systematic purification and preparation — the mind is made progressively clearer, quieter, and more discriminating until the moment of Kaivalya, when the Purusha recognises itself as distinct from all Prakriti.

### 9.3 Jnana Yoga in Advaita Vedanta — The Direct Path

Advaita Vedanta's primary path to liberation is Jnana Yoga — the yoga of direct knowledge. But 'knowledge' here means something very specific and very different from intellectual understanding. Jnana, in the Advaita context, is Aparoksha Anubhuti — immediate, non-mediated, direct recognition of one's identity with Brahman. It is not the conclusion of an argument, not the result of sustained practice (though practice is necessary preparation), and not a conceptual belief. It is the direct, self-certifying recognition — analogous to the sudden recognition of the rope in the rope-snake example — that Atman is Brahman: that the awareness reading these words right now is not a bounded individual consciousness but the unlimited, self-luminous Brahman.

Shankaracharya's path to this direct knowledge is structured around three stages, drawn from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (2.4.5): Sravana (hearing), Manana (reflecting), and Nididhyasana (meditating upon).

Stage	Sanskrit	Process	Goal
Hearing	Sravana	Systematic, repeated hearing of the Mahavakya-teachings from a qualified Advaita teacher in the context of scriptural study of the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Brahma Sutras. The student receives the non-dual teaching and understands its intellectual content.	Correct intellectual understanding of Atman = Brahman — the removal of doubts about the meaning of the teaching

Reflection	Manana	Sustained philosophical reflection on the teaching — examining every objection, addressing every doubt, testing the coherence of the non-dual position against every alternative. The student becomes intellectually convinced of the truth of Advaita.	Complete intellectual conviction — the removal of all intellectual doubts (Vishaya Sambhavana Nasha)
Meditation	Nididhyasana	Sustained, deep contemplation on the Mahavakya — bringing the intellectual understanding to the level of direct, lived recognition. This is not ordinary meditation on an object but the contemplation of the teaching 'Aham Brahmasmi' until it ceases to be a concept and becomes a living recognition.	Aparoksha Jnana — the immediate, non-mediated recognition of Atman-Brahman identity. This is Moksha.

## 9.4 The Role of Preparatory Practice — Sadhana Chatushtaya

While the Advaita path to liberation is technically a path of direct knowledge (Jnana), Shankaracharya was emphatic that this direct knowledge cannot arise in an unprepared mind. The Vivekachudamani begins with a detailed account of the qualifications required for the student of Advaita — the Sadhana Chatushtaya ('fourfold equipment for spiritual inquiry'):

1. Viveka — discrimination between the eternal (Brahman) and the non-eternal (the world of appearances). This is not the full Viveka-Khyati of the Yoga Sutras but the preliminary intellectual discrimination that allows the student to orient their inquiry correctly.
2. Vairagya — dispassion toward all enjoyments in this world and in any other world. This is not world-rejection but the freedom from compulsive seeking of satisfaction through external means — the recognition, through lived experience, that nothing in the conditioned world can provide the unconditional satisfaction that the human being is ultimately seeking.
3. Shatsampat — the sixfold virtues: Shama (equanimity of mind), Dama (control of the senses), Uparati (cessation of external engagement in favour of inner inquiry), Titiksha (endurance of pain and pleasure without disturbance), Shraddha (faith in the teacher and the scriptures), and Samadhana (one-pointedness of mind in contemplation of Brahman).
4. Mumukshutva — intense desire for liberation. Without this burning longing for Moksha — what the Vivekachudamani calls the 'desire for liberation as intense as the desire of a drowning person for air' — the path will not be followed with sufficient commitment.

The comparison with the Yoga Sutras' preparatory path is instructive. The Yoga Sutras prepare the mind through the eight-limbed path — a systematic programme of ethical, physical, and meditative discipline that progressively purifies the chitta for the arising of Viveka-Khyati. The

Advaita Sadhana Chatushtaya also prepares the mind — but the preparation is oriented specifically toward making the mind capable of receiving and retaining the Jnana transmitted through the Mahavakya teaching. The yoga path leads to the direct discrimination of Purusha from Prakriti. The Advaita preparation leads to the direct recognition of Atman as Brahman. The methods overlap significantly but the metaphysical orientation differs.

*“The student of Advaita does not go in search of Brahman as if it were somewhere else. The study and practice removes the veil — and what is revealed was always there, ever present, ever luminous, ever free. This is the whole secret of the Jnana path.”*

— Adi Shankaracharya, Vivekachudamani

## 9.5 Can Yoga Lead to Advaita Realisation?

A question of profound practical importance for the yoga teacher: can the systematic practice of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga lead to the Advaita realisation of Atman-Brahman identity? Or does the Samkhya dualism of the yoga framework itself constitute an obstacle to the non-dual recognition?

The traditional Advaita answer, as given by Shankaracharya and his commentators, is nuanced: yoga practice is an excellent and even necessary preparation for Jnana — it purifies the mind, cultivates dispassion, and progressively stills the vrittis that obscure the light of Brahman. The deepened states of Samadhi achieved through yoga practice create the psychological conditions in which the Jnana transmitted through the Mahavakya teaching can take root and germinate into direct recognition.

However — and this is the Advaita position's crucial qualification — yoga practice alone cannot produce Advaita realisation, because the Samkhya framework within which it operates maintains the dualism of Purusha and Prakriti right up to the moment of Kaivalya. The step from Kaivalya (individual Purusha resting in its own nature) to Moksha (recognition of Atman as universal Brahman) requires a transmission and recognition that the Samkhya-Yoga framework does not itself provide. This is why, in the classical Indian tradition, most great yogis who achieved deep Samadhi also studied the Upanishadic teaching and received the Advaita transmission — the two streams of practice and knowledge (Karma/Yoga and Jnana) flowing together toward the full ocean of liberation.

## 9.6 Reflection Questions

- Sravana-Manana-Nididhyasana is the Advaita path to direct knowledge. Reflect on your own study of yoga philosophy: at which stage do you primarily find yourself? Where is the gap between intellectual understanding and lived recognition in your own practice?
- The Sadhana Chatushtaya requires Mumukshutva — an intense desire for liberation. Do you experience this intensity in your own practice? What would it mean to want liberation as urgently as a drowning person wants air?
- In your teaching of yoga philosophy, how do you communicate the difference between intellectual understanding of the Advaita teaching and direct recognition of its truth? How do you point beyond concept toward direct experience?



## CHAPTER 10

# Meditation and Direct Realisation

*Dhyana, Nirodha, and Brahma-Jnana*

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***Dhyanena atmani pashyanti kechid atmanam atmana — Bhagavad Gita 13.24***

*— Some, through meditation, behold the Self in the self by the self*

## 10.1 Meditation as the Convergence Point

If there is one practical domain in which the yoga philosophical tradition and Advaita Vedanta most directly converge — where the philosophical differences between their frameworks recede and the lived experience of practice takes precedence — it is the domain of meditation. Both traditions regard deep meditative practice as the royal road to liberation: the most direct, most effective, and most reliable means of arriving at the transformative recognition that both traditions are pointing toward.

And yet their accounts of what meditation is, what it does, and how it leads to liberation differ in philosophically important ways — ways that reflect the deeper metaphysical difference between the two traditions. For Patanjali's yoga, meditation (Dhyana) is the penultimate stage of a progressive eight-limbed practice that leads through increasingly refined states of absorption to the culminating Samadhi in which the distinction between Purusha and Prakriti is fully recognised. For Advaita Vedanta, meditation (Nididhyasana) is the final preparation for the direct, non-mediated recognition (Aparoksha Jnana) of Atman as Brahman — a recognition that, once it occurs, does not need to be repeated or maintained through further practice.

## 10.2 Patanjali's Account of Meditation — Dhyana to Samadhi

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras present meditation as a technical, progressive discipline with precise stages of development. The meditation sequence in the Ashtanga Yoga framework moves from Dharana (concentration — the mind fixed on a single object) through Dhyana (meditation — the continuous, uninterrupted flow of attention toward the object of concentration) to Samadhi

(absorption — the dissolution of the meditator-meditation-object triad into a single, undivided experience).

This progression is captured in one of the most important sutras in the Yoga Sutras: 'Trayam ekatra samyamah' (3.4) — the three together (Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi) applied to one object constitute Samyama — the complete meditative act. Through Samyama on progressively subtler objects, the meditator develops: first, complete knowledge of the object as it truly is (not as filtered through the categories of ordinary perception); then, insight into the relationship between the object and the underlying structure of Prakriti; then, discrimination between the object's Prakriti-nature and the Purusha-consciousness that witnesses it; and finally, Kaivalya — the complete, effortless, spontaneous discrimination of Purusha from all Prakriti, which is the liberated state.

What is philosophically important about Patanjali's account is its explicit object-orientation: meditation always has an object, even in the subtlest stages. Even in Samprajnata Samadhi (Samadhi with object), there is still a trace of object-awareness. Only in Asamprajnata or Nirbija Samadhi (seedless, objectless Samadhi) does the last trace of object-consciousness dissolve — and in that dissolution, Purusha is revealed in its own objectless, pure nature. The meditation process is one of progressive refinement of the object until no object remains.

### **10.3 Advaita's Account of Meditation — Nididhyasana to Brahma-Jnana**

Advaita Vedanta's understanding of meditation is different in structure from Patanjali's, reflecting the different metaphysical framework and the different goal. In the Advaita path, meditation (Nididhyasana) is not the progressive refinement of object-focused concentration but the sustained contemplation of the Mahavakya — specifically 'Aham Brahmasmi' (I am Brahman) or 'Tat tvam asi' (That thou art) — until its truth ceases to be a concept and becomes a direct, non-dual recognition.

The key philosophical point: in Advaita's Nididhyasana, the meditator is not focusing on Brahman as an object. That would be a fundamental contradiction in terms — Brahman is the subject, not an object, and treating Brahman as an object of meditation would be the very Avidya that Nididhyasana is meant to dissolve. Nididhyasana is the sustained turning of attention toward its

own source — not 'I am concentrating on Brahman' but 'What is this I that concentrates? What is this awareness that is aware?' — the recognition that the awareness doing the meditating IS Brahman.

*“Who meditates on Brahman? Brahman meditates on Brahman — for there is nothing else. The meditator, the meditation, and the object of meditation are all Brahman. In Jnana, this is not a statement — it is the living recognition.”*

— Adi Shankaracharya, Upadeshasahasri

## 10.4 The Question 'Who Meditates?' — A Pivotal Inquiry

One of the most philosophically revealing questions in the comparative study of yoga and Advaita meditation practices is: who is the meditator? This question cuts to the heart of the difference between the two traditions' approaches and illuminates the deepest philosophical territory of the comparative study.

In the Yoga Sutras' framework, the meditator is the individual Purusha — the pure consciousness that has, through the eight-limbed practice, sufficiently withdrawn from its misidentification with Prakriti to focus with sustained attention on a chosen object. The meditator is real, the meditation practice is real, and the object of meditation is real. The practice works because consciousness (Purusha) genuinely has the capacity to discriminate itself from the modifications of matter (Prakriti) — and this discrimination, once complete, is liberation.

In the Advaita framework, the question 'who meditates?' is itself a gateway to liberation. Ramana Maharshi used to respond to students who said they couldn't meditate by asking: 'Who is the one who cannot meditate?' The inquiry into the identity of the meditator — turning attention back toward its own source rather than outward toward an object — is itself the Advaita meditation practice. If you follow the sense of 'I' back to its source, what do you find? Not a bounded individual — but the open, unlimited, sourceless awareness of Brahman, which was always the ground of the meditating self.

### **Patanjali's Yoga (Dhyana to Samadhi)**

- Progressive stages: Dharana — Dhyana — Samadhi
- Always has a support or object, however subtle
- Practice of Samyama refines discrimination

### **Advaita Vedanta (Nididhyasana to Brahma-Jnana)**

- Not progressive in same sense — a single sustained inquiry
- Not focused on an object — inquiry into the

- Nirbija Samadhi: objectless — reveals Purusha
- Active, effortful discipline leading to effortless recognition
- The meditator (Purusha) meditates on the object (Prakriti-derived)
- Culminates in Kaivalya — isolation of pure witness

- subject itself
- Practice is contemplation of Mahavakya ('Aham Brahmasmi')
- Recognition: the meditating awareness IS Brahman
- Preparation through Sravana-Manana; recognition is instantaneous
- Who meditates? The inquiry reveals: Brahman meditates on Brahman
- Culminates in Moksha — recognition of always-already-free nature

## 10.5 Nirodha — The Cessation at the Heart of Both Paths

Patanjali's famous definition of yoga — Yoga chitta vritti nirodhah (1.2) — identifies Nirodha (cessation, stilling) as the essential operation of the yoga path. When the vrittis (modifications) of the chitta cease, the Purusha rests in its own nature (Tada drashtuh svarupe avasthanam — 1.3). Nirodha is not suppression — it is the natural, effortless stilling that occurs when the chitta is perfectly purified and the Viveka-Khyati is complete.

In Advaita Vedanta, the equivalent concept is not quite Nirodha but something deeper: the recognition that what was thought to be a mind full of vrittis was always an appearance within the one Brahman-consciousness. Nirodha, in the Advaita context, is not the cessation of vrittis through practice but the recognition that the vrittis, like waves on the ocean, have no substance other than the ocean (Brahman) in which they appear. The waves do not need to be stilled for the ocean's nature to be recognised — but stilling the waves (through yoga practice) makes it much easier to see the ocean.

This is the practical synthesis of yoga and Advaita: the yoga practice of progressively stilling the chitta-vrittis (working at the Vyavaharika level) creates the conditions of inner clarity in which the Advaita recognition (working at the Paramarthika level) can most readily arise. The two paths are not alternatives but complements — each supporting the other in ways that studying either in isolation cannot reveal.

## 10.6 Reflection Questions

- The question 'Who is meditating?' is described as a gateway to liberation in Advaita. Sit with this question right now — not conceptually, but as a direct inquiry. What do you find when you turn attention toward its own source?
- Patanjali says yoga is the cessation of the mind's modifications. Advaita says the mind's modifications are appearances within Brahman. In your own meditation practice, do you experience cessation as the goal, or recognition as the goal — or both? How do they relate?
- How would you explain the difference between Patanjali's Dhyana (progressive object-focused meditation) and Advaita's Nididhyasana (contemplation of the subject itself) to a student who has only practised one form of meditation?



## CHAPTER 11

# Devotion and Surrender

*Bhakti, Ishvara, and the Path of Love*

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***Ishvaranukampartham purusha karah apekshate — Yoga Sutras 2.45***

*— From surrender to Ishvara, Samadhi is perfected*

## 11.1 The Role of Devotion in Two Traditions

A comprehensive comparison of yoga philosophy and Advaita Vedanta would be incomplete without a careful examination of the role of devotion — Bhakti — in each tradition. This is a topic on which the two traditions show some of their most interesting and most practically significant differences. Classical Samkhya-Yoga is philosophically a path of discrimination (Viveka) rather than devotion, and yet Patanjali introduces Ishvara (a special Purusha — the personal God) as an important support for the yoga path. Advaita Vedanta, on the other hand, maintains a philosophically complex relationship with personal theism: at the conventional level, devotion to a personal God is honoured and encouraged; at the ultimate level, the distinction between devotee and God is dissolved in the recognition of Brahman.

## 11.2 Ishvara in the Yoga Sutras — The Special Purusha

Patanjali introduces the concept of Ishvara in Yoga Sutras 1.23–1.29 as an optional but highly effective support for the yoga path. Ishvara Pranidhana (complete surrender to Ishvara) is one of the three elements of Kriya Yoga (the yoga of action — Yoga Sutras 2.1) alongside Tapas and Svadhyaya, and it reappears as the fifth Niyama. And in Sutra 1.23, Patanjali makes the striking statement: 'Samadhi-siddhir Ishvara-pranidhanat' — Samadhi is perfected through surrender to Ishvara.

Who or what is Ishvara in Patanjali's system? The Yoga Sutras define Ishvara in 1.24–1.26: Ishvara is 'a special Purusha (Purusha-Vishesh) untouched by affliction (Klesha), action (Karma), fruit of action (Karma-phala), and latent impressions (Ashaya).' He is the teacher of the ancient teachers,

not limited by time (Sarvajnam, Sarvadarshi — the omniscient One), and his symbol is the sacred syllable OM.

The philosophical status of Ishvara in the classical Samkhya-Yoga framework is somewhat ambiguous. Since Samkhya holds that there are many Purushas and no universal creator God, Ishvara is understood as a special, eternally liberated Purusha — a Purusha who was never in bondage — rather than as the creator of the universe or the single ground of all consciousness. Ishvara is functionally significant (surrender to Ishvara is an effective means to Samadhi) without being metaphysically ultimate (Ishvara is not Brahman in the Advaita sense).

### 11.3 Ishvara and Brahman — The Advaita Understanding

In Advaita Vedanta, the concept of Ishvara is understood at the Vyavaharika (conventional) level as Saguna Brahman — Brahman 'with qualities,' the personal God who creates, sustains, and dissolves the universe through the power of Maya. Saguna Brahman is the highest reality at the conventional level: the God of devotion, the creator and sustainer of the cosmos, the object of Bhakti yoga and ritual worship.

But Advaita's account does not stop at the conventional level. At the Paramarthika level, even Saguna Brahman — even the personal God — is an appearance within the one Nirguna Brahman (Brahman without qualities). The distinction between Ishvara (the personal God), Jiva (the individual soul), and Jagat (the world) — which is real and significant at the conventional level — dissolves at the level of ultimate truth into the single, undifferentiated Brahman. This is Shankaracharya's famous formulation: the three apparent realities (Ishvara, Jiva, Jagat) are real at the Vyavaharika level but ultimately unreal — all three are Brahman appearing through Maya.

Concept	Yoga Sutras (Patanjali)	Advaita Vedanta (Shankaracharya)
Ishvara	A special Purusha — eternally liberated, omniscient, the teacher of teachers. Useful but not metaphysically ultimate.	At the Vyavaharika level: Saguna Brahman, the personal creator God. At the Paramarthika level: an appearance of the one Nirguna Brahman.
Nature of God	Theistic but limited — Ishvara is the highest Purusha, not the single ground of all consciousness	At the conventional level, fully personal and relational. At the ultimate level, identical with the impersonal Nirguna Brahman.

Relationship between devotee and God	Devotee (individual Purusha) surrenders to Ishvara — the relationship remains a relationship of two distinct realities	Ultimately identical — the devotee IS Brahman; the God IS Brahman; Bhakti leads to the recognition of this identity
Role of devotion	Ishvara Pranidhana as one of the most effective means to Samadhi — complete surrender dissolves ego-resistance to practice	Bhakti as complete path (Bhakti Yoga) and as preparation for Jnana. At its peak, devotion dissolves the devotee-God distinction.
Symbol of Ishvara	OM — the syllable that represents Ishvara's nature (Pranava)	OM as the symbol of Brahman — both Saguna and Nirguna Brahman; the syllable that contains all of existence

## 11.4 Bhakti Yoga — The Path of Love in Advaita Context

The Bhakti tradition of India — the path of intense devotion to a personal God — sits in an interesting philosophical relationship with Advaita Vedanta. Historically, the Bhakti saints (Mirabai, Kabir, Tukaram, Namdev, Andal, Nayanmars) are not usually classified as Advaitins — many of them maintained a devotional relationship with a personal God that presupposes a distinction between devotee and God that Advaita ultimately dissolves. Some great Bhaktas, in fact, explicitly rejected the Advaita identification of Atman and Brahman in favour of what they understood as the sweeter, richer experience of loving relationship with a personal God.

And yet some of the greatest Advaita teachers have also been great Bhaktas: Shankaracharya himself composed exquisite devotional hymns (Bhaja Govindam, Soundarya Lahari) to personal deities. Ramakrishna Paramahansa moved between states of intense personal devotion to Kali and states of formless non-dual absorption with complete naturalness, treating them as two aspects of the same ultimate reality. Swami Vivekananda famously taught that Bhakti, Jnana, Karma, and Raja Yoga are all paths to the same summit — and that the highest Bhakti dissolves into the Jnana of non-dual recognition when love for God becomes so complete that the lover and the beloved merge.

*“Through Bhakti, the ego is surrendered to God. Through Jnana, the ego is dissolved into Brahman. In the deepest Bhakti, the devotee discovers that the*

*love they were giving to God was Brahman loving itself — and the difference between Bhakti and Jnana dissolves in that recognition.”*

— Swami Vivekananda

## 11.5 Ishvara Pranidhana for the Yoga Teacher

For the yoga teacher, the practice of Ishvara Pranidhana — complete surrender to Ishvara — is one of the most powerful and most practically significant practices in the entire Yoga Sutra framework, whatever their philosophical orientation on the question of personal vs. impersonal God.

Whether Ishvara is understood as the Yoga Sutras' 'special Purusha,' as Advaita's Saguna Brahman, as the impersonal Nirguna Brahman, or simply as 'that which is larger than my ego-agenda' — the practice of genuine surrender is the same: the progressive release of the ego's grip on outcomes, on recognition, on the results of practice and teaching, on the need for things to go according to one's plans. This practice — Karma Yoga at its deepest — is not passivity but a form of active engagement with life and teaching that flows from fullness rather than from anxiety, from service rather than from self-promotion, and from genuine care for students rather than from the need for their validation.

## 11.6 Reflection Questions

- In your yoga practice, do you engage with Ishvara Pranidhana as surrender to a personal God, as surrender to impersonal awareness, or as something else? How does your understanding of Ishvara shape the quality of your surrender?
- Shankaracharya composed devotional hymns to personal deities while teaching radical non-dualism. Is this a contradiction, or does it represent a sophisticated understanding of the two levels of reality? How do you navigate the personal and impersonal dimensions of the spiritual life?
- Swami Vivekananda said that the highest Bhakti dissolves into Jnana. Have you experienced moments in your practice where deep love or devotion led to a dissolution of the sense of separation? Describe this experience.



## CHAPTER 12

# Ethics, Action, and Right Living

*Yama, Niyama, Viveka, and the Ethics of Liberation*

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***Sarva bhuta hite ratah — Bhagavad Gita 12.4***

*— Devoted to the welfare of all beings — the characteristic of the liberated one*

## 12.1 Can Non-Dualism Have Ethics?

One of the most common and most serious objections raised against Advaita Vedanta — particularly by students of yoga who have a deep commitment to the ethical Yamas and Niyamas — is this: if Brahman alone is real, and if the individual self is ultimately an appearance, what is the basis for ethical action? If there is no ultimately real 'other' to be harmed by my actions, if karma is ultimately within the domain of Maya, and if liberation consists in the dissolution of the individual self — what is the philosophical basis for the ethical life?

This is a serious philosophical question, and Advaita Vedanta's answer is both sophisticated and practically important for the yoga teacher. Far from undermining ethical life, the Advaita recognition — when genuinely integrated rather than merely intellectually adopted — produces a quality of ethical behaviour that is deeper, more consistent, and more genuinely compassionate than the ethics motivated by fear of karmic consequences or compliance with external rules. Understanding why this is so is one of the most important insights this comparative study can provide.

## 12.2 Yama and Niyama — The Ethical Foundation in Yoga Philosophy

Patanjali's placement of the Yamas and Niyamas as the first two limbs of the eight-limbed path is a clear statement of their foundational importance. Without the ethical purification provided by Yama (the five restraints: Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, Aparigraha) and Niyama (the five observances: Saucha, Santosha, Tapas, Svadhyaya, Ishvara Pranidhana), the subsequent

practices — asana, pranayama, meditation, Samadhi — rest on an unstable foundation and cannot reach their full depth.

The Yoga Sutras' explanation for this is both philosophical and practical. Philosophically: the Yamas and Niyamas directly address the Kleshas at the level of behaviour and character, gradually reducing the grip of Asmita (ego-identification), Raga (attachment), and Dvesha (aversion) that are the direct expression of Avidya in daily life. Practically: a person who is habitually dishonest, harmful, grasping, or sexually dissipative cannot develop the quality of inner steadiness and clarity (Chitta Prasadnam) that deep meditation requires. The ethical life creates the conditions for the meditative life.

### **12.3 Advaita Ethics — The Natural Compassion of Non-Dualism**

Advaita Vedanta's ethical framework flows from a different philosophical basis than the Yoga Sutras' Klesha-reduction model, though the two are deeply complementary. For Advaita, the recognition of Atman-Brahman identity — the direct recognition that the same Brahman-consciousness is the deepest nature of every being — spontaneously generates compassion (Karuna) and non-harming (Ahimsa) in a way that transcends the motivation of fear or rule-compliance.

When the recognition 'I am Brahman' is genuine — not merely intellectual but lived — it includes the simultaneous recognition 'You are also Brahman.' The harm I do to you is harm I do to the one Brahman that is also my own deepest nature. The compassion I extend to you is the natural expression of the recognition that your suffering is not separate from the suffering of Brahman-consciousness appearing as the individual self. Advaita's ethics is not based on the Kantian principle of treating others as ends in themselves (though it converges with it), nor on utilitarian calculation (though it produces maximally beneficial action). It is based on the direct recognition of identity — the recognition that the 'other' for whom I am compassionate is, at the ultimate level, the same awareness that I am.

*“The man of realisation, who has known the identity of his own Self with all beings and with Brahman, sees himself in all and all in himself. Seeing the whole world as Brahman, he lives for the good of all. This is the highest ethics — not a rule to be followed, but a recognition to be embodied.”*

— *Adi Shankaracharya, Vivekachudamani (verse 390)*

## 12.4 The Ethics of the Liberated — Jivanmukta's Action

A particularly important topic in the comparative study of ethics is the question of the liberated being's ethical status and ethical action. The Yoga Sutras and Advaita Vedanta both describe the Jivanmukta as someone whose actions do not generate new Karma — who acts in the world without ego-investment, without the grasping and aversion that characterise ordinary action, and without creating new Samskaras that bind consciousness.

In the Yoga philosophical framework, this is understood as Karma Yoga in its highest expression: the liberated yogi acts from the recognition of Purusha as the pure witness, not from the ego-driven Ahamkara that generates binding Karma. Actions continue — but they are expressions of Prakriti's natural functioning, witnessed by Purusha without identification, and therefore without generating new Samskaras.

In the Advaita framework, the liberated being's action is understood even more radically: since the recognition of Atman-Brahman identity dissolves the illusion of individual agency, the Jivanmukta's actions are, strictly speaking, not 'their' actions at all — they are the spontaneous expressions of Brahman's infinite intelligence appearing through the apparent form of the liberated individual. This does not mean the Jivanmukta is passive or irresponsible — it means their actions flow from the unlimited wisdom and compassion of Brahman rather than from the limited agenda of the ego.

Ethical Dimension	Yoga Philosophy (Patanjali)	Advaita Vedanta (Shankaracharya)
Source of ethics	Klesha-reduction: Yamas and Niyamas reduce the ego-driven afflictions that cause harm	Recognition of Brahman in all: 'I am Brahman' includes 'You are Brahman' — compassion is the natural fruit
Foundation	Viveka (discrimination) leading to Kaivalya — the liberated Purusha is beyond Karma	Jnana (direct knowledge) leading to Moksha — the recognised Brahman-nature is beyond individual Karma
Motive for ethical action	Practice to reduce Kleshas and purify chitta for deeper meditation and Kaivalya	Spontaneous expression of Brahman's nature: compassion, non-harming, generosity flow naturally from recognition

The liberated person's ethics	No new Karma generated — acts from Purusha's pure witness-nature through purified Prakriti	No individual agent — actions are Brahman's spontaneous expression through the apparent form of the Jivanmukta
Role of Yama-Niyama	Essential foundational preparation — first two limbs of Ashtanga Yoga	Essential preparation (included in Sadhana Chatushtaya) — without ethical purity, the mind cannot receive Jnana
Post-liberation ethics	Sahaja Karma — natural action without ego-investment, continued teaching and service	Seva (selfless service) as natural expression of Brahman's compassion — the bodhisattva-like Jivanmukta

## 12.5 Practical Integration for the Yoga Teacher

The yoga teacher who has studied both the Yoga Sutras' account of ethical practice and Advaita Vedanta's account of the ethics of recognition is equipped to teach ethics at multiple levels simultaneously — meeting students where they are and progressively deepening their understanding.

For students who are new to yoga, the ethical teaching most accessible and most immediately useful is the Yoga Sutras' framework: the Yamas and Niyamas as specific, concrete practices that reduce the Kleshas and purify the mind. Non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, right energy use, non-possessiveness — these can be taught as practical, immediately applicable principles that transform the quality of daily life, relationships, and inner experience.

For students who are ready to go deeper — who have practised the Yamas and Niyamas for some time and are beginning to ask more fundamental questions — the Advaita ethical framework adds a dimension that the Yoga Sutras' framework alone cannot provide: the recognition that genuine non-violence is not merely the avoidance of harmful action but the lived recognition that there is no genuinely separate 'other' to harm; that genuine truthfulness is not merely the avoidance of falsehood but the recognition of the single truth of Brahman that underlies all apparent multiplicity; that genuine non-possessiveness is not merely the avoidance of grasping but the recognition that Brahman — your own deepest nature — is already complete, already full, already utterly free.

## 12.6 Reflection Questions

- The objection to Advaita ethics is: 'If everything is Brahman, why not do anything?' How would you respond to this objection using the Advaita framework's own resources?
- Reflect on the relationship between your ethical practice (Yama-Niyama) and your meditation practice. How does ethical clarity support the depth of your meditation? How does meditation deepen your ethical sensitivity?
- The Advaita teaching says that genuine Ahimsa flows from the recognition of Brahman in all beings. Have you experienced moments of practice or meditation in which the sense of a separate 'other' dissolved, and compassion arose spontaneously? How did this feel different from ordinary compassion?



**PART IV**

# Deep Synthesis

*The Mind, Language, and Teaching from Non-Dual Depth*

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## CHAPTER 13

# The Mind

*Chitta, Antahkarana, and the Four Inner Functions*

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***Manah eva manushyanam karanam bandha mokshayoh — Maitri Upanishad  
6.34***

— *The mind alone is the cause of both bondage and liberation for human beings*

## 13.1 The Pivotal Role of the Mind

Of all the topics in the comparative study of yoga philosophy and Advaita Vedanta, none is more immediately practical for the yoga teacher than the understanding of the mind — its structure, its functions, its pathologies, and its potential for transformation. Both traditions have developed extraordinarily sophisticated maps of the mind — far more detailed and practically useful than anything available in modern Western psychology — and the comparison of these two maps reveals both important convergences and philosophically significant differences.

The mind, in both traditions, is simultaneously the primary instrument of bondage and the primary instrument of liberation. It is the mind's habitual misidentification with the ego-self (Asmita) that perpetuates suffering; and it is the mind's growing capacity for discrimination, equanimity, and sustained inquiry that makes liberation possible. The yoga teacher who understands the mind's structure — both in the Yoga Sutras' account and in Advaita's account — has at their disposal the most powerful tools available for supporting the genuine transformation of students' inner lives.

## 13.2 Chitta in the Yoga Sutras — The Mind-Field

Patanjali's term for the mind is Chitta — a comprehensive term that covers the entire field of mental activity: not just the thinking mind but the complete substrate of psychological experience including perception, memory, imagination, emotion, and the deep unconscious processes. Chitta is part of Prakriti — it is the finest, most Sattvic product of Prakriti, the most transparent, the most capable of reflecting the Purusha's light. But it is Prakriti — not consciousness. Its transparency

(Sattvic quality) or opacity (Rajasic or Tamasic quality) determines how clearly the Purusha's light shines through it.

The Yoga Sutras identify three aspects of Chitta: Manas (the sensory-processing mind — the faculty that receives and integrates sensory input), Buddhi (the discriminative intellect — the faculty of judgment, discrimination, and decision), and Ahamkara (the ego-sense — the faculty that appropriates experience as 'mine'). These three together, functioning as a unified field, constitute the Chitta — the complete inner psychological reality of the individual.

The five Vrittis (modifications or fluctuations of Chitta) are classified by Patanjali in Yoga Sutras 1.5–1.11: Pramana (right knowledge), Viparyaya (wrong knowledge), Vikalpa (conceptual imagination), Nidra (sleep), and Smriti (memory). The yoga practice of Chitta Vritti Nirodhah — the stilling of these fluctuations — is the entire practical programme of yoga compressed into three words.

### 13.3 Antahkarana in Advaita Vedanta — The Fourfold Inner Instrument

Advaita Vedanta uses the term Antahkarana (the inner instrument) to refer to the entirety of the inner psychological apparatus. Where Patanjali uses Chitta as the comprehensive term for the mind-field, Advaita Vedanta distinguishes four specific functions of the Antahkarana, each with its own philosophical role:

Function	Sanskrit	Primary Operation	Role in Liberation
Processing Mind	Manas	Receives, integrates, and presents sensory data to the higher faculties; the doubting, oscillating faculty	Purification through practice makes Manas steady and receptive to Jnana
Discriminative Intellect	Buddhi	The faculty of judgment and discernment; the 'decisive' faculty that determines the direction of consciousness	Viveka (discrimination) is the highest function of Buddhi — the faculty through which Jnana is received and recognised
Ego-Sense	Ahamkara	The I-maker — the faculty that appropriates all experience as	The primary seat of Avidya; its dissolution is

		'mine' and creates the sense of separate individual selfhood	the essential event of Moksha
Memory and Impression	Chitta	Stores the Vasanas (habitual tendencies) and Samskaras (impressions) that form the deep character of the individual	Purified through practice; in the liberated state, Chitta's Vasanas are burned but not active

The relationship between Patanjali's three-fold Chitta (Manas, Buddhi, Ahamkara) and Advaita's four-fold Antahkarana (Manas, Buddhi, Ahamkara, Chitta) is instructive: Advaita explicitly distinguishes Chitta (the memory-impression faculty) from Manas, Buddhi, and Ahamkara, creating a more fine-grained map of the inner instrument. This distinction is important for understanding the Advaita account of how Samskaras and Vasanas persist even after intellectual understanding of the Advaita teaching — and why Nididhyasana (sustained contemplation) is required to transform the deep impressions that intellectual Sravana and Manana alone cannot reach.

### 13.4 The Antahkarana as Upadhi — The Limiting Adjunct

In Advaita Vedanta, the Antahkarana (with all four of its functions) is understood as an Upadhi — a limiting adjunct. Just as a red glass placed before a crystal makes the crystal appear red, the Antahkarana placed before the unlimited Brahman-consciousness makes Brahman appear as a limited individual consciousness. Remove the Upadhi (through Jnana) and the crystal (Brahman) is recognised in its own unlimited, uncoloured nature.

This understanding of the mind as Upadhi is one of the most important and most practically useful concepts in the Advaita framework for the yoga teacher. It explains why the mind can practise yoga, why it can study Vedanta, why it can even be trained to discriminate between Purusha and Prakriti — and yet why these activities of the mind cannot themselves produce the liberating recognition. The mind can prepare the conditions for recognition; it cannot produce the recognition itself. Jnana — the liberating knowledge — arises not from the mind's activity but through the mind's transparency, when the Antahkarana has been so thoroughly purified by practice that it no longer obscures the Brahman-light that it was always reflecting.

**Yoga Sutras (Patanjali) — Chitta**

- Chitta = comprehensive term for the mind-field
- Three aspects: Manas + Buddhi + Ahamkara
- Composed of Prakriti — Sattvic (most refined) aspect
- Goal: Chitta Vritti Nirodhah — complete stilling of modifications
- Purified Chitta reflects Purusha perfectly (like a still lake reflecting sun)
- Five Vrittis: right knowledge, wrong knowledge, imagination, sleep, memory
- Practice: progressively stills vrittis toward Nirbija Samadhi

**Advaita Vedanta (Shankaracharya) — Antahkarana**

- Antahkarana = fourfold inner instrument
- Four aspects: Manas + Buddhi + Ahamkara + Chitta
- Part of Maya/Vyavaharika reality — an Upadhi (limiting adjunct)
- Goal: Antahkarana Shuddhi — purification for Jnana to dawn
- Purified Antahkarana is a transparent medium for Brahman's recognition of itself
- Key function: Buddhi as Viveka-faculty that receives the Mahavakya transmission
- Practice: purification through Sadhana Chatushtaya for Sravana-Manana-Nididhyasana

**13.5 Practical Application — Teaching the Mind to Yoga Students**

The yoga teacher who understands both the Yoga Sutras' Chitta framework and Advaita's Antahkarana framework is equipped to teach the psychology of the mind at multiple levels of depth and sophistication, meeting students precisely where they are in their philosophical and practical development.

For beginning and intermediate students, the Yoga Sutras' three-fold model of Chitta — Manas, Buddhi, Ahamkara — is the most practically accessible framework for understanding how the mind creates suffering through misidentification (Ahamkara) and how yoga practice progressively purifies the mind (Buddhi) and steadies the sensory-processing faculty (Manas) for deeper practice.

For advanced students who are asking deeper philosophical questions — 'What is the mind? Is it real? What is the relationship between my mind and universal consciousness?' — the Advaita framework of Antahkarana as Upadhi provides a philosophically rigorous and experientially resonant answer: the mind is real at the conventional level, but it is a limiting adjunct within the one Brahman-consciousness. Its purification makes its limiting function more transparent — and ultimately, in the recognition of Jnana, the limiting function is seen through entirely, and what remains is the unlimited Brahman that was always the ground of both the mind and its apparent limitations.

## 13.6 Reflection Questions

- Observe your mind right now: which of the four Antahkarana functions is most active — Manas (sensory processing), Buddhi (judgment and discrimination), Ahamkara (ego-sense), or Chitta (memory and impression)? How does the activity of each function affect the quality of your inner experience?
- Patanjali says chitta vritti nirodhah — yoga is the stilling of the mind's modifications. Advaita says the mind is a limiting adjunct that is seen through in Jnana. Are these two different projects, or two descriptions of the same project at different levels?
- How would you explain the Advaita concept of the mind as Upadhi (limiting adjunct) to a student who has been practising Patanjali's yoga — in a way that deepens their practice rather than creating confusion?



## CHAPTER 14

# Language, Silence, and the Limits of Teaching

*Neti Neti, Mahavakyas, and the Paradox of Transmission*

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***Yato vacho nivartante aprapya manasa saha — Taittiriya Upanishad 2.9***

*— From where words turn back, together with the mind, unable to reach it*

## 14.1 The Paradox at the Heart of Teaching

Every yoga teacher and every Advaita teacher faces the same fundamental paradox: they are trying to communicate, through language and conceptual frameworks, a reality that is by its own definition beyond language and conceptual frameworks. The Taittiriya Upanishad's statement — 'from where words turn back, unable to reach it' — is not a poetic exaggeration. It is a precise philosophical description of the epistemological situation of anyone who attempts to teach the deepest insights of either yoga philosophy or Advaita Vedanta.

This paradox is not a problem to be solved or a limitation to be overcome. It is the central challenge and the central opportunity of teaching from the depth of these traditions. Understanding the philosophical basis of this paradox — why language necessarily falls short of the ultimate, and how the tradition has developed specific linguistic strategies to work with this limitation rather than against it — is one of the most important and most distinctive contributions of this comparative study.

## 14.2 Neti Neti — The Via Negativa of the Upanishads

The most famous and most philosophically precise approach to the ineffability of Brahman in the Upanishadic tradition is the method of Neti neti — 'not this, not this.' This phrase, which appears in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (2.3.6) as the sage Yajnavalkya's most fundamental description of Brahman, establishes a radical apophatic (negative) approach to the ultimate: since Brahman is unlimited and every description is a form of limitation, Brahman cannot be positively described.

Every attempt to say what Brahman is fails, because saying what Brahman is limits it to that description. The only adequate linguistic approach is systematic negation: Brahman is not this, not this — not any of the objects, qualities, or categories that the mind can grasp.

Neti neti is not nihilism — it is not saying that Brahman does not exist or that nothing is real. It is saying that Brahman's reality transcends every description the mind can formulate, and that the most honest linguistic response to this transcendence is the refusal to limit Brahman by any positive description. This is Shankaracharya's consistent approach in his commentaries: first demonstrate that Brahman is not the body, not the mind, not the world, not any concept — and then, in the space created by this systematic negation, allow the direct recognition of Brahman's self-luminous reality to arise.

For the yoga teacher, Neti neti is a practical teaching tool as well as a philosophical position. When students ask 'What is Brahman?' or 'What is pure consciousness?' or 'What is the Self?' — the most honest answer is often not a positive description but a guided inquiry: 'Notice that you are aware. Are you the body? Can you observe the body — so you are not the body. Are you the thoughts? Can you observe the thoughts — so you are not the thoughts. Are you the emotions? Can you observe the emotions — so you are not the emotions. What remains that does the observing?' This is Neti neti as a lived inquiry rather than a philosophical doctrine.

### **14.3 The Mahavakyas — Language as Direct Transmission**

If Neti neti represents the apophatic approach to Brahman — using language to systematically negate what Brahman is not — the Mahavakyas represent the cataphatic approach: using language as a direct pointing at what Brahman is. The four Mahavakyas are not descriptions of Brahman in the ordinary sense. They are not propositions that can be verified by evidence or tested by argument. They are transmission statements — linguistic pointers that, received in the right context (from a qualified teacher, with proper preparation, in the spirit of genuine inquiry), have the capacity to produce direct recognition of their truth.

The traditional Advaita teaching on the Mahavakyas is that they can produce immediate Aparoksha Jnana (direct, non-mediated recognition) when heard from a qualified teacher in the context of the Sravana-Manana-Nididhyasana preparation. This is not a magical operation of special words — it

is the operation of right understanding communicated at the right moment to a properly prepared mind. The Mahavakya 'Tat tvam asi' (That thou art) spoken to Shvetaketu by his father Uddalaka Aruni in the Chandogya Upanishad produces immediate recognition precisely because the teaching has been systematically prepared through Uddalaka's extended series of analogies (the salt in water, the seed of the Nyagrodha tree, etc.).

*“The Mahavakya is a sword that cuts the knot of Avidya in a single stroke — but only if the student's hand is strong enough to hold the sword, and only if the moment of transmission is right. The teacher's art is knowing when that moment has arrived.”*

— Dr. Shivam Mishra

## 14.4 The Yoga Sutras' Approach to Language and Silence

Patanjali's approach to language is notably different from both the Neti neti method and the Mahavakya transmission. The Yoga Sutras are written in a highly compressed, technical Sanskrit that is deliberately opaque to the uninitiated and requires a qualified teacher and the support of traditional commentary for correct interpretation. This opacity is not obscurantism — it is a deliberate pedagogical strategy: the Yoga Sutras are not intended to be read as a self-study text but to be received as a teaching in the context of the guru-shishya relationship.

At the level of meditative practice, however, the Yoga Sutras point directly toward the dissolution of language in deep Samadhi. In Savitarka Samadhi, the meditator is still entangled with the word (Shabda), meaning (Artha), and knowledge-impression (Jnana) associated with the object of meditation. In Nirvitarka Samadhi, these linguistic associations dissolve, and the object shines in its own nature (Artha-matra nirbhasa svarupa shunram iva — 3.3). The progression from Savitarka to Nirvitarka to Nirvichara to Nirbija Samadhi is the progressive dissolution of language, concept, and even the subtlest mental modification — until pure awareness remains without any linguistic mediation.

## 14.5 Teaching the Unteachable — The Guru-Shishya Tradition

Both yoga philosophy and Advaita Vedanta maintain the traditional understanding that the deepest teachings cannot be transmitted through books, lectures, or digital content alone. The guru-shishya relationship — the living relationship between a teacher who has the direct recognition and a

student who is earnestly seeking it — is the primary vehicle through which both traditions have preserved and transmitted their deepest insights across millennia.

The guru's teaching operates at three levels simultaneously. At the level of speech (Vak), the guru uses language — philosophy, scripture, analogy, and direct pointing (like the Mahavakyas) — to communicate the intellectual content of the teaching. At the level of action (Karma), the guru demonstrates through the quality of their presence, their behaviour, and their engagement with life what it looks like to live from the recognition they are pointing at. And at the level of pure being (Satta), the guru's very presence — the quality of awareness they bring to the teaching relationship — operates as a transmission that goes beyond language and action: a recognition calling to a recognition across the apparent gap of teacher and student.

This third level of transmission — the guru's being as teaching — is what both traditions describe when they speak of the effect of Satsang (the company of truth): the experience of being in the presence of a truly realised teacher in which the student's own deepest nature is invited into recognition by the resonance of the teacher's established recognition. This is not magic and not mysticism in the dismissive sense — it is the natural phenomenon of consciousness recognising itself, mediated through the apparent separation of two individuals, in the context of the genuine guru-shishya relationship.

## 14.6 Practical Implications for the Yoga Teacher

The yoga teacher who has absorbed both the Neti neti method and the Mahavakya teaching is equipped to navigate the paradox of teaching the unteachable with philosophical sophistication and practical effectiveness. The key insights:

- The limits of language are not obstacles to good teaching — they are invitations to silence, to inquiry, and to the direct pointing that goes beyond description.
- The most important teaching tool you have is not your vocabulary but your presence — the quality of awareness you bring to every interaction, every instruction, every silence.
- Teaching philosophy is most effective when it stimulates direct inquiry rather than providing answers. The best philosophical question for a yoga student is one that they cannot answer conceptually but can only explore experientially.
- Neti neti is the tool for liberating students from false identifications. The Mahavakya approach (pointing directly at the nature of awareness) is the tool for revealing the positive reality that was always beneath the identifications.

- The guru-shishya tradition is not an outdated cultural form — it is a description of how genuine transformation is transmitted. Your own relationship with your teachers, and the quality of presence you bring to your students, is the living continuation of that tradition.

## 14.7 Reflection Questions

- Try the Neti neti inquiry right now: not the body, not the thoughts, not the emotions, not the memories — not this, not this. What remains? Can you describe what remains? What happens to language at that point?
- Have you received a teaching — a statement, a question, a moment of presence — from a teacher that produced an immediate, direct recognition rather than an intellectual understanding? How was this different from ordinary learning?
- How do you teach the relationship between practice and recognition in your own yoga teaching? When do you rely on language, when do you rely on silence, and when do you rely on the quality of your presence as the teaching itself?



## CHAPTER 15

# Practical Integration

*Teaching Yoga from Non-Dual Depth*

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### ***Sarvatr sama darshana — Bhagavad Gita 6.29***

*— The yogi who sees the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self — this one sees truly*

## **15.1 The Complete Synthesis**

We have covered, in this comparative study, the full philosophical landscape of the relationship between yoga philosophy and Advaita Vedanta: the historical and intellectual context of both traditions; their metaphysical frameworks (Samkhya dualism vs. Advaita non-dualism); their understandings of consciousness (Purusha vs. Brahman-as-Chit); their analyses of the self (individual Purusha vs. universal Atman-Brahman); their explanations of bondage and illusion (Avidya as Klesha vs. Maya-Avidya as cosmic power of appearance); their accounts of the three states and liberation (Kaivalya vs. Moksha); their paths to liberation (Viveka-Khyati vs. Jnana); their approaches to meditation (Dhyana-Samadhi vs. Nididhyasana); their understanding of devotion (Ishvara Pranidhana vs. Bhakti dissolving into Jnana); their ethical frameworks (Yama-Niyama vs. the ethics of recognition); their maps of the mind (Chitta vs. Antahkarana); and their approaches to language and teaching (progressive refinement vs. direct transmission).

Now we ask the most important practical question: what does all of this mean for you — the yoga teacher standing before a group of students, guiding them through a practice, meeting their questions, holding their struggles, and pointing toward the possibility of genuine transformation?

## **15.2 What Advaita Vedanta Gives the Yoga Teacher**

The yoga teacher who has genuinely engaged with Advaita Vedanta — not merely as additional information but as a living philosophical inquiry into the nature of their own consciousness — gains something that technical yoga training alone cannot provide: a philosophical depth that changes the quality of everything they teach. Not because they now have more philosophical

concepts to share, but because their own relationship to their practice, their students, and their teaching has been fundamentally transformed by the recognition that Advaita points toward.

Aspect of Teaching	Without Advaita Depth	With Advaita Depth
Asana teaching	Body-focused instruction; alignment and form; physical wellbeing	Body understood as appearance within consciousness; asana as inquiry into the nature of awareness; presence more important than perfect form
Pranayama teaching	Breath as physiological technique; managing the nervous system	Prana as the bridge between consciousness and matter; pranayama as working with the edge of the Prakriti-Purusha relationship
Meditation instruction	Technique-focused; progressive stages of absorption	Understanding who is meditating; pointing beyond technique toward the recognition of the meditating awareness itself
Philosophy teaching	Intellectual content; Sanskrit vocabulary; historical context	Living inquiry; philosophy as self-investigation; every concept tested against direct experience
Holding student difficulties	Practical support; modifications; therapeutic guidance	Recognition that the awareness observing the difficulty is not itself difficult; pointing toward the unchanging ground beneath the changing experience
Teacher's own presence	Technically skilled, ethically grounded, personally warm	All of the above plus: a quality of stillness and recognition that operates beyond words and technique as an invitation to students' own recognition
Understanding of suffering	Klesha-based: the specific psychological mechanics of suffering	Sees both the conventional reality of suffering and the ultimate ground of awareness that is never itself suffering

## 15.3 How Advaita Enriches Each Limb of Ashtanga Yoga

### Yama and Niyama — The Ethics of Recognition

The Yamas and Niyamas, understood through the Advaita framework, become not merely rules for reducing the Kleshas but expressions of the recognition of Brahman in all things. Ahimsa (non-

violence) is not merely the avoidance of harm but the natural expression of the recognition that every being is Brahman — harming another is harming the Brahman that is one's own deepest nature. Satya (truthfulness) is not merely honesty but the alignment of one's speech and life with the single truth of Brahman. Ishvara Pranidhana (surrender) is not merely devotion to a personal God but the dissolution of the ego's grip on agency into the recognition that Brahman is the only true agent.

### **Asana — The Body as Brahman's Appearance**

When asana is practised with the Advaita understanding that the body is Brahman appearing through Maya — that the awareness experiencing the body is the same awareness that IS Brahman — the quality of the practice transforms. There is less judgment of the body's limitations, because the judgment comes from the ego's comparison of the body with an ideal, and the ego is recognised as an appearance within Brahman. There is more genuine curiosity about the body's experience, because the body is understood as a doorway into the recognition of consciousness itself. And there is a natural quality of reverence for the body, because it is recognised as the appearance of the unlimited in the form of the limited.

### **Pranayama — Prana as the Bridge**

In the Advaita framework, Prana — the vital force that pranayama works with — is understood as the point of intersection between the physical (Prakriti) and the conscious (Purusha/Brahman): the most refined, most conscious expression of Prakriti, the faculty most directly influenced by the quality of awareness one brings to it. The Advaita understanding that Prana is ultimately an appearance of Brahman — that the same consciousness that is Atman-Brahman is expressing itself as the vital force that animates the body — gives pranayama practice a depth and a reverence that transforms it from a physiological technique into a direct engagement with the boundary between consciousness and matter.

### **Pratyahara — Withdrawal as Recognition**

The Advaita framework transforms the understanding of Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses) from a technique of mental control into a recognition of the nature of the senses themselves. The senses, in the Advaita account, are not obstacles to awareness — they are expressions of awareness.

Pratyahara, understood through the Advaita lens, is not the suppression of sensory experience but the recognition that the awareness behind sensory experience is prior to, and not limited by, the sensory inputs. When sensory input ceases in deep Pratyahara, what remains is not an absence but a presence — the awareness itself, recognised in its own nature.

### **Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi — Toward Turiya**

The entire meditative sequence of Dharana-Dhyana-Samadhi, understood through the Advaita lens of Turiya as the ever-present ground, is transformed from a progressive achievement toward a recognition that was always available. The practice of concentration, meditation, and absorption is not building toward something that doesn't yet exist; it is removing the obstacles (vrittis, Samskaras, Vasanas) that obscure the recognition of what was always already the case: that the awareness in which all meditation occurs is Turiya — the fourth state, the ever-present ground, the Atman that is Brahman.

## **15.4 A Complete Vision for the Yoga Teacher**

The complete synthesis of yoga philosophy and Advaita Vedanta that this book has been working toward can be summarised in a few essential principles for the yoga teacher:

5. The yoga practice at every level — ethical, physical, energetic, meditative, philosophical — is a preparation of the Antahkarana (inner instrument) for the recognition of its own nature as Brahman.
6. The Samkhya-Yoga framework (Purusha-Prakriti, Chitta Vritti Nirodhah, Kaivalya) is a complete and effective path when practised sincerely — it produces the purification of mind that makes the Advaita recognition possible.
7. The Advaita framework (Brahman, Atman-Brahman identity, Moksha through Jnana) provides the philosophical context that the Samkhya-Yoga path is implicitly pointing toward — the recognition that the Purusha the yogi is trying to discriminate from Prakriti is, at the Paramarthika level, the one Brahman.
8. Neither framework is complete without the other for the serious yoga teacher: the yoga path without the Advaita vision tends toward a sophisticated form of psychological technology that stops short of the most radical transformation. The Advaita vision without the yoga preparation tends toward a sophisticated philosophical understanding that remains conceptual rather than lived.
9. The yoga teacher who embodies both — who practises Patanjali's path with sincerity and depth, and who holds the Advaita vision as the philosophical horizon toward which every practice is pointing — is equipped to offer their students the full depth of what the Indian philosophical tradition has developed over four thousand years of inquiry into the nature of consciousness, the self, and liberation.

*“You are the awareness that is aware of this sentence. You are not in the body — the body is in you. You are not in the mind — the mind is in you. You are not in the world — the world is in you. This is not poetry. This is Advaita Vedanta. This is what your yoga practice, at its deepest, has always been pointing toward. Go teach that.”*

— Dr. Shivam Mishra, SKM Yoga Founder

## 15.5 Final Reflection Questions

- Looking back across the entire study: what is the single insight from Advaita Vedanta that most directly enriches your understanding of your own yoga practice? How will you bring this insight into your teaching?
- The Bhagavad Gita's Sarvatr sama darshana — seeing the Self equally in all beings — is the practical fruit of the Advaita recognition. In your teaching interactions, what would it mean to see each student as Brahman? How would this change the quality of your attention, your language, and your care?
- Patanjali says liberation is Kaivalya — the pure aloneness of consciousness. Advaita says liberation is the recognition that the individual consciousness is the universal consciousness. Which understanding speaks most deeply to your own direct experience? And what does it mean that both are considered valid descriptions of the same truth?



## CHAPTER APPENDIX A

# Glossary of Sanskrit Terms

## *Yoga and Advaita Vedanta Compared*

The following glossary provides paired definitions of key Sanskrit terms as they are used in both the yoga philosophical tradition and Advaita Vedanta. Where the term has different nuances in the two traditions, both usages are given.

Term	In Yoga Philosophy (Patanjali)	In Advaita Vedanta (Shankaracharya)
Ahamkara	The ego-principle — the third tattva of Prakriti; the I-maker that creates individual selfhood through Purusha's misidentification with Prakriti	The I-maker — part of the fourfold Antahkarana; its dissolution is the essential event of Moksha; ultimately an appearance within Brahman
Antahkarana	Used loosely to refer to the inner instrument comprising Manas, Buddhi, and Ahamkara	The fourfold inner instrument: Manas + Buddhi + Ahamkara + Chitta; an Upadhi (limiting adjunct) that makes Brahman appear as individual consciousness
Atman	Not Patanjali's primary term; implicitly equivalent to Purusha — the pure consciousness of the individual	The individual self which, at its deepest level, is identical with Brahman. Atman = Brahman is the central Advaita teaching.
Avidya	The root Klesha — misidentifying the impermanent as permanent, the non-self as self; a psychological error within the framework of Purusha-Prakriti dualism	At the individual level: the same as the Yoga Sutras' Avidya. At the cosmic level: identical with Maya — the power by which Brahman appears as world of multiplicity
Brahman	Not used by Patanjali; the concept of Ishvara (special Purusha) is the closest parallel	The single, unlimited, self-luminous reality — pure being, pure consciousness, pure bliss (Sat-Chit-Ananda). The only Paramarthika (ultimate) reality.
Buddhi	The discriminative intellect — the highest faculty of Prakriti; the instrument of Viveka (discrimination) between Purusha and Prakriti	The discriminative intellect — the highest and most important of the four Antahkarana functions; the faculty through which Jnana (direct knowledge) is received

Chitta	The comprehensive mind-field — includes Manas, Buddhi, and Ahamkara; composed of the most Sattvic form of Prakriti	One of the four Antahkarana functions — specifically the memory-impression faculty that stores Vasanas and Samskaras; also used loosely as synonym for Antahkarana
Ishvara	A special Purusha — eternally liberated, omniscient, the teacher of teachers; the symbol OM; effective support for yoga practice	At the Vyavaharika level: Saguna Brahman — the personal creator God. At the Paramarthika level: an appearance of Nirguna Brahman through Maya
Jnana	Right knowledge (Pramana) — one of the five Vrittis; also the liberating discrimination of Viveka-Khyati	Direct, non-mediated recognition of Atman-Brahman identity — Aparoksha Anubhuti. The immediate, self-certifying knowledge that is Moksha itself
Kaivalya	The liberated state — Purusha resting in its own nature, permanently isolated from all Prakriti identification	Not Advaita's primary term; sometimes used synonymously with Moksha; Advaita would say Kaivalya is the Samkhya-level description of what Advaita calls Moksha
Maya	Not used by Patanjali; the concept of misidentification (Avidya) covers the psychological equivalent	The cosmic power of appearance — Brahman's own Shakti by which the one appears as many; neither real nor unreal (Anirvacaniya); the source of all apparent multiplicity
Moksha	Liberation; equivalent to Kaivalya in the Yoga Sutras; sometimes used in the Gita context	The recognition of Atman-Brahman identity — the dissolution of the apparent bondage through direct knowledge; the permanent, irreversible recognition of one's own unlimited nature
Prakriti	One of the two co-eternal principles — the dynamic, unconscious matrix of all material and psychological manifestation; ultimately real at the Samkhya level	At the Vyavaharika level: the material and psychological world; ultimately an appearance within Brahman through the power of Maya
Purusha	Pure consciousness — the eternal, self-luminous, individual witness that is the true self; permanently distinct from Prakriti; many individual Purushas exist	Equivalent to Atman at the individual level; but Advaita would say the individual Purusha is ultimately Brahman appearing as individual through Upadhi (limiting adjuncts)
Samadhi	The eighth limb of Ashtanga Yoga — progressive states of meditative	Not Advaita's primary path; corresponds to Nididhyasana at the deepest level; Samadhi

	absorption from Samprajnata (with object) to Asamprajnata (objectless); culminates in Kaivalya	prepares the mind for Jnana but is not itself the final liberating event
Samskaras	Impressions left in the Chitta by past experience; purified through yoga practice; dissolved in Nirbija Samadhi	Stored in the Chitta-aspect of Antahkarana; form the Vasanas that constitute individual character; dissolved through Jnana (which 'burns' the Vasanas)
Viveka	Discriminative awareness — the primary cognitive tool of the yoga path; Viveka-Khyati is the sustained, deepening discrimination of Purusha from all Prakriti	The first of the Sadhana Chatushtaya (fourfold qualification) — discrimination between the eternal (Brahman) and the non-eternal (world of Maya); prerequisite for Jnana



## CHAPTER APPENDIX B

# Key Texts and Primary Sources

*For the Serious Student*

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## Primary Yoga Philosophical Texts

- Yoga Sutras of Patanjali — with Vyasa's Bhashya (the earliest and most authoritative commentary). Study with: Swami Vivekananda's Raja Yoga; Swami Satchidananda's commentary; Georg Feuerstein's scholarly translation.
- Bhagavad Gita — Shankaracharya's commentary (Bhagavad Gita Bhashya) reads it through Advaita; also study Swami Chinmayananda's comprehensive commentary for both Yoga and Advaita dimensions.
- Hatha Yoga Pradipika — for the physical-energetic dimension of yoga practice; read in conjunction with the philosophical texts.
- Samkhya Karika of Ishvarakrishna — the foundational text of Samkhya philosophy; essential for understanding the metaphysical framework of the Yoga Sutras.
- Gheranda Samhita and Shiva Samhita — important Hatha Yoga texts that work within a more Tantric and Vedantic framework than the Pradipika.

## Primary Advaita Vedanta Texts

- Principal Upanishads (Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Katha, Kena, Isha, Mundaka, Mandukya, Prasna) — the foundational scriptural source; read with Shankaracharya's commentaries.
- Brahma Sutras with Shankaracharya's Bhashya — the most rigorous and comprehensive statement of Advaita Vedanta; essential for serious study.
- Vivekachudamani (Crest Jewel of Discrimination) — Shankaracharya; the most accessible and complete practical guide to Advaita sadhana; essential reading.
- Upadeshasahasri (A Thousand Teachings) — Shankaracharya; essential for understanding Advaita methodology of teaching.
- Mandukya Karika — Gaudapada; the most uncompromising formulation of Advaita non-dualism; essential for understanding the doctrine of Ajatavada.
- Who Am I? and Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi — essential for the modern expression of Advaita self-inquiry.
- Viveka-Vritti and Atma-Bodha — Shankaracharya; accessible introductions to Advaita philosophy.

## Modern Comparative Scholarship

- The Yoga Tradition — Georg Feuerstein; comprehensive scholarly overview of the entire yoga tradition including its Vedantic dimensions.

- Indian Philosophy — Vols 1 & 2, S. Radhakrishnan; the most comprehensive scholarly introduction available in English.
- The Philosophy of the Upanishads — Paul Deussen; detailed systematic analysis.
- Yoga and the Quest for the True Self — Stephen Cope; bridges yoga practice and philosophical depth in an accessible way.
- The Collected Works of Swami Vivekananda (8 volumes) — essential for understanding the 19th-century synthesis of Yoga and Advaita.



## CHAPTER APPENDIX C

# Lineage Chart

## *The Living Transmission of Yoga and Advaita*

The following lineage chart traces the principal teachers in both the Yoga and Advaita traditions, showing their historical relationships and the continuity of transmission that connects the ancient Vedic seers to contemporary teachers.

Period	Yoga Tradition	Advaita Vedanta Tradition
Before 1500 BCE	Vedic Seers (Rishis) — the composers of the hymns of the Rig Veda; the first recorded practitioners of meditative discipline	Same — the Vedic seers are the common ancestors of both traditions
c. 800–200 BCE	The Upanishadic Sages: Yajnavalkya, Uddalaka, Pippalada, Shandilya — the teachers of the principal Upanishads	Same — Yajnavalkya (Brihadaranyaka), Uddalaka (Chandogya) are the founding teachers of both traditions
c. 500 BCE	Kapila — the legendary founder of Samkhya philosophy; also the Yoga tradition's pre-Patanjali lineage	The Upanishadic teaching of Atman-Brahman identity — pre-systematic Advaita
c. 200 BCE–400 CE	Maharishi Patanjali — systematic codification of classical yoga in the Yoga Sutras	Badarayana — codification of Vedantic teaching in the Brahma Sutras (the Uttara Mimamsa)
c. 700 CE	Continued transmission through lineages of yoga teachers; synthesis with Tantric traditions	Gaudapada — the Mandukya Karika; first systematic Advaita; paramaguru of Shankaracharya
c. 800 CE	Various Yoga and Tantra lineages; synthesis with Vedanta begins	Adi Shankaracharya — decisive systematisation of Advaita; commentaries on Upanishads, Gita, Brahma Sutras
c. 1000–1400 CE	Hatha Yoga lineages (Matsyendranath, Gorakhnath, Swatmarama); synthesis of Hatha and Raja Yoga	Sureshvara, Padmapada, Vacaspati Mishra, Vidyananda — post-Shankara Advaita scholars

c. 1500–1800 CE	Continued Hatha and Raja Yoga lineages; Bhakti-Yoga synthesis	Madhusudana Saraswati — synthesis of Bhakti and Advaita; Appaya Dikshita — Advaita scholarship
19th Century CE	Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswati — reform movements; systematic study of yoga philosophy	Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa — living embodiment of Advaita; transmission to Swami Vivekananda
Late 19th–Early 20th C	Swami Vivekananda — Raja Yoga; Swami Sivananda — synthesis of all Yoga paths	Swami Vivekananda — Jnana Yoga, synthesis of all paths; Sri Aurobindo — Integral Advaita; Ramana Maharshi — self-inquiry
20th Century	T. Krishnamacharya — synthesis of classical yoga; B.K.S. Iyengar, K. Pattabhi Jois, T.K.V. Desikachar — systematisation of modern yoga	Swami Chinmayananda, Swami Dayananda Saraswati (Arsha Vidya), Nisargadatta Maharaj — modern Advaita transmission
21st Century	Global yoga movement; SKM Yoga and other teacher training programmes — continued transmission	Global Advaita teaching; direct transmission through qualified teachers continues the unbroken lineage



## CHAPTER APPENDIX D

# Reflection Questions for Seminar and Personal Study

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These questions are designed for group seminar discussion, personal journaling, or meditative inquiry. They are intentionally open — the goal is not to find correct answers but to deepen engagement with the philosophical and practical material of this study.

## Part I — Foundations

10. How does understanding the historical emergence of both yoga philosophy and Advaita Vedanta from the common Vedic root change how you relate to apparent contradictions between the two traditions?
11. The six darshanas each offer a different 'vision' of reality. What does your own direct experience of yoga practice suggest about which metaphysical framework most accurately describes the nature of consciousness?
12. Gaudapada's Ajatavada (doctrine of non-origination) says nothing has ever been created. If this is true, what is the purpose of practice, of teaching, of this very book?

## Part II — Consciousness and the Self

13. In the deep states of meditation, do you experience consciousness as individual (corresponding to Samkhya's many Purushas) or as universal (corresponding to Advaita's one Brahman)? What does this experiential question reveal?
14. Ramana Maharshi's self-inquiry begins with 'Who am I?' and follows the 'I' to its source. Practice this inquiry for ten minutes. What do you find? Does the 'I' have a boundary? A source?
15. Maya is described as Anirvacaniya — neither real nor unreal. In your experience of the world right now, can you hold this paradox: the world is real enough to engage with fully, and not real enough to identify with completely?
16. The Mandukya Upanishad's Turiya is described as the ever-present ground of all three ordinary states. In deep dreamless sleep, there is peace and fullness without any objects of experience. What does this suggest about the nature of consciousness?

## Part III — Liberation and the Path

17. Kaivalya (Yoga Sutras) is described as 'aloneness.' Moksha (Advaita) is the recognition of identity with all of Brahman. Are these the same experience described from different philosophical frameworks, or genuinely different experiences?
18. The Sadhana Chatushtaya requires Mumukshutva — an intense desire for liberation. How intense is your desire for liberation? What does your answer reveal about where you are in the practice?
19. The question 'Who is meditating?' is the Advaita meditation practice. Sit with this question right now. What do you find?
20. Shankaracharya composed devotional hymns while teaching radical non-dualism. How do you personally hold the apparently opposing pulls of personal devotion and impersonal non-dual recognition in your own practice?
21. The Advaita ethics of recognition says genuine Ahimsa arises when you recognise Brahman in all beings. Have you experienced this spontaneous compassion — not as a moral effort but as a natural recognition? How was it different from ordinary compassion?

## Part IV — Deep Synthesis

22. After completing this study, which single insight from Advaita Vedanta will most directly change how you teach yoga? Be specific: which practice, which philosophical explanation, which quality of presence?
23. The book ends with the recognition: 'You are the awareness that is aware of this sentence.' Can you rest in this recognition for one minute — not as a thought but as a direct recognition? What is it like?
24. Patanjali and Shankaracharya are in genuine philosophical tension on several key points (individual vs. universal consciousness; Kaivalya vs. Moksha; discrimination vs. recognition). Yet the greatest practitioners in both traditions often describe the same or very similar ultimate experiences. What does this convergence of experience despite divergence of framework suggest about the nature of philosophy itself?

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# SKM YOGA

*Yoga Philosophy & Advaita Vedanta — A Comparative Study in Depth*

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