THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SPIRITUAL AWAKENING IN ADVAITA

VEDANTA: FROM BONDAGE TO LIBERATION

by

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Abstract

Advaita Vedanta, based on the Hindu Upaniṣads of India, is a spiritual teaching tradition that has gained attention in the West over the past century. The teachings address the fundamental spiritual question of the nature of reality by expounding on the nature of the individual, and the relationship between the individual, the creation, and God. This dissertation focuses on the psychology of the individual in Advaita Vedanta, aiming to identify and amplify the implicit psychology embedded in the traditional texts. The research contributes to developing scholarship between the East and West in the related fields of east-west psychology, contemplative psychology, and Western academic psychology by presenting the essential teachings of Advaita Vedanta in a language oriented toward a Western contemporary audience.

Advaita Vedanta claims that the true nature of the human individual is a non-dual Self, defined as limitless existent consciousness. This non-dual Self is shown to be one with Brahman, the Self of the entire cosmic creation. Thus, the teachings ultimately affirm a non-dual relationship between the individual and the creation as a whole as they are both seen as manifestations of one undivided Self. According to Vedanta, bondage (samsāra) is the human condition caused by
inborn ignorance (avidyā) of this fact, and liberation (mokṣa) is what takes place when a person gains knowledge of this truth. This research utilizes a theoretical methodology to study the teachings on bondage and liberation presented in the primary and secondary texts of the Advaita Vedanta teachings. The dissertation presents an organized system of human psychology that is centered on answering two psychological questions: What is human identity? and What is the root cause for human suffering? In answering these questions, this study presents a theoretical model of human psychology based on the teachings of Advaita Vedanta.
This work is dedicated to my teacher with love and gratitude.

Om
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation focuses on the spiritual teachings of Advaita Vedanta and aims to identify and amplify the implicit psychology that is embedded in the texts of the tradition. Though the teachings of Advaita Vedanta approach the nature of reality from many different standpoints, my interest lies primarily in what they have to say about the psychology of the individual. This research aims to present a psychological model based on the teachings, which will be given the name “Psychology of Advaita Vedanta.”

The general goal is to make the teachings of Vedanta more available to a Western audience. Specifically, it is to introduce the Psychology of Advaita Vedanta into the academic discourse in the fields of East-West Psychology and Western Psychology. This dissertation adds an original contribution to these fields because the topic has not been developed in the research. Over the past three decades Western Psychology has exhibited a growing interest in the spiritual dimension of psychological work, particularly in the related fields of East-West, and Transpersonal Psychology. Therefore this research carries with it the possibility of bearing fruit at a time when the related fields of study are ripe with interest for what it has to contribute.

The theoretical method of research is used in this dissertation to study the primary and secondary texts of Advaita Vedanta. The subject matter is human psychology, which is being approached through the lens of Advaita Vedanta. The standpoint that I take in engaging with the texts of the tradition is from within it as opposed to viewing it through a particular Western psychological lens. This
approach has been chosen because it best serves the purpose of presenting the essential teachings of Advaita Vedanta on the nature of individual psychology.

Two related concepts form the basis for psychological inquiry in Advaita Vedanta; the question of individual identity and the root cause for human suffering. Exploring these key concepts and their association to the psychology of bondage (samsāra) and liberation (mokṣa) in Advaita Vedanta is at the heart of this study. In addressing this central theme the following four objectives are covered: to identify the structural landscape and function of the human psyche, to define bondage (samsāra) and liberation (mokṣa) as two different psychological states rooted in different core-beliefs about the identity of the individual, to identify the goal of gaining Self-knowledge as the means by which the psyche is liberated from the state of bondage, and finally to define emotional maturity according to Vedanta, and discuss the relationship between developing emotional maturity and gaining Self-knowledge.

Advaita Vedanta understands the fundamental cause for human suffering to be rooted in the fact of our mistaken identity as individuals. The teaching asserts that due to inborn Self-ignorance, we are falsely identified with the limited mind-body-sense-complex. This identification leads us to believe that we are separate and lacking a basic sense of wholeness. According to Vedanta, the core-beliefs, rooted in Self-ignorance, propel us naturally on a lifetime journey of seeking experiences, objects, and situations that we believe will give us the sense of wholeness, completeness, or the lasting happiness that we want. The following
verse from *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, a commonly used text for teaching, captures this essential point of mistaken identity and its result:

> When Self (ātmā), which is of the nature of pure awareness free from any impurity, is eclipsed, the person considers the anātmā (not-Self) body as ātmā (Self). Then the strong power of rajas, known as vikṣepa (projection), afflicts him much with the binding qualities of desire, anger, and the like. (Sankaracarya, 1997, p. 132, v. 41)

According to Vedanta, living within the psychological state called *samsāra*, or bondage, brings with it a level of ongoing suffering because the attempts that we make to solve the perceived problem are temporarily successful at best. The sense of wholeness that comes when we fulfill a desire is initially satisfying, but is ultimately bound by time. When the feeling of satisfaction comes to an end we quickly return back to the state of feeling unfulfilled and wanting. Thus, the seeking behavior is once again propelled into motion.

Advaita Vedanta asserts that the solution to this problem of bondage (*samsāra*), and its associated suffering, comes about by clearing up the case of mistaken identity, through gaining Self-knowledge.

> For the one whose mind is committed to the śruti (revealed scripture) as a means of knowledge, a commitment to one’s own dharma (individual duty) is there. By that commitment alone purification of his mind follows. For the one whose mind is purified, recognition of the limitless self takes place. By that recognition the destruction of the samsāra (bondage) along with its cause, i.e. ignorance, results. (Sankaracarya, 1997, p. 144, v. 44)

This verse from *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* asserts the direct relationship between gaining Self-knowledge, and liberation (*mokṣa*) from bondage (*samsāra*).

According to Vedanta, when a person recognizes the Self (ātmā) to be one’s true nature, the person experiences liberation because the Self is recognized as being free and limitless by nature. The belief in oneself as separate and lacking that had
fanned the flame of *samsāra* is crushed by the recognition of the Self that is already free and complete (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 1973). Advaita Vedanta claims that the need to become anything different than who we already are is rooted in ignorance (*avidyā*), therefore once the mistaken identity with the limited mind-body-sense- complex is cleared up, a person’s identity naturally shifts to the Self, which has always been the true nature of the individual. All of the chapters in this dissertation aim to elucidate, clarify, and support the core of Advaita psychology outlined here, namely the psychology of bondage (*samsāra*) and liberation (*mokṣa*).

**Field of Study**

The approach taken in this study is based on the premise put forth by Han de Wit (1991) in his book, *Contemplative Psychology*, where he defines his field as psychology that is connected with and is often an intrinsic part of the contemplative traditions that we find in practically all religions (p. 12). De Wit points out that the psychology present in a given spiritual tradition or religion may be meaningfully engaged from within the tradition, but remains relatively invisible due to its embedded nature in the tradition:

> The term contemplative psychology refers to the psychological insights and beliefs that are often implicitly present in the visions of religions, and that become concretized in the authentic religious practices of individuals. (de Wit, 1991, p. 12)

De Wit claims there is value in examining spiritual traditions to find, and make explicit, the psychological underpinnings otherwise implicit in their beliefs and practices. I agree with de Wit and the development of my thesis begins on a shared platform with his central idea.
Why is it valuable to study these spiritual psychologies? de Wit suggests several reasons: It provides an opportunity for students of a particular tradition to deepen their understanding of its psychological dimension. It supports dialogue between world religions as far as their psychological aspects are concerned and fosters communication bridging contemplative and academic psychology (de Wit, 1991). This study, focusing on the psychology of Advaita Vedanta, serves two of the explicit purposes mentioned above: namely to benefit the practitioners of the tradition itself by clarifying and amplifying its psychological dimension, and to support dialogue with both other spiritual traditions and Western Academic Psychology.

In addition to its placement in the field of Contemplative Psychology, this study is tied to the larger academic dialogue between the East and West, which has given rise to the related fields of East-West Psychology and Transpersonal Psychology. These fields share the common interest of studying the interface between Psychology and Philosophy in the West, and ancient wisdom teachings of the East. Generally speaking this topic applies to both fields; however for reasons I will further explain, this study is more appropriately associated with East-West Psychology.

T. W. Organ (1989) writes on the interface of East and West in his book, *Radhakrisnan and the Ways of Oneness of East and West*. Organ makes a subtle distinction between the ways of accommodation, integration, and synthesis that helps to clarify one of the grounds for differentiating East-West Psychology and Transpersonal Psychology as separate fields:
In accommodation, Eastern and Western philosophers recognize each other’s influence, conduct dialogue, have fellowship with each other, discuss similarities and differences, and cooperate as far as they can within the limits of being faithful to their own traditions. In the oneness of accommodation no East-West philosophical mixture is fashioned. Integration is a way to a closer oneness. In integration East and West find identical elements as bridges to one another. In an integration of East and West the East remains the East and the West remains West. Each retains its status as a part of a whole. But in a synthesis of East and West the East ceases to be the East and the West ceases to be West. A new unit has replaced East and West. (p. 80)

Within Organ’s (1989) categorical framework, East-West Psychology tends to follow the middle way of “integration” in its approach to dealing with the cross-cultural interface between the East and West. Transpersonal Psychology generally leans more to the side of “synthesis” in its approach. I choose to situate this study in the field of East-West Psychology because the approach that I will take regarding the interface between East and West is most aligned with the way of “integration” as defined by Organ.

The current discourse in East-West Psychology includes a wide range of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary study. Its founding concept arose out of the interest that Westerners began to have during the psycho-spiritual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Many movements developed out of this period socio-politically and academically, one of which was a scholarly dialogue between Eastern spiritual traditions and Western philosophy and psychology. In addition, East-West Psychology relies on the assumption that both sides have something uniquely valuable to offer, and that bringing wisdom traditions from the East and the West into dialogue creates the conditions for the cross-pollination of knowledge. The expected result is that both sides end up positively transformed
by way of contact with each other. This dissertation is aligned with the basic goal of East-West Psychology in that its contribution seeks to bear the fruit of cross-pollination between Advaita Vedanta and the West, presenting a wisdom teaching from an Eastern tradition in a form that makes its psychological dimension more accessible to Westerners.

**Scope of Study/Limitations**

**Western psychology.**

The scope of this study finds its limits around the central task of identifying and amplifying the psychological underpinnings of Advaita Vedanta. The comparison of Vedantic concepts with concepts used in Western psychology will only be used as a tool to support a clear expression of the Vedantic concepts themselves. Therefore the discussion of Western psychological theories will be limited in two ways. First, the references to Western psychological theories are limited to three of the most well-known theorists that I have chosen to represent the field of Western Depth Psychology, namely Freud, Jung, and Kohut. Second, the discussion of these theories will be limited to comparisons of similarity or difference with two Vedantic concepts, namely “Self” and “ego.” The goal of this study is simply to present the psychology of Advaita Vedanta, not to compare and contrast Advaita psychology with Western Psychology or any other psychological theory. The theoretical limitations have been drawn tightly around this central goal.
Advaita Vedanta teachings.

Regarding the teachings of Advaita Vedanta this dissertation is limited in scope to the perspective related to the psychology of the individual. To the extent that it relates to the individual a discussion of other elements will be covered such as the creation and God (Īśvara); however, some aspects of the cosmology presented in the Upaniṣads, such as the laws of karma, the transmigration of the soul (jīva), and the existence of other realms of experience (lokas) are only introduced and not covered in any depth. While it could be argued that all dimensions of the Advaita teachings on the nature of reality are psychologically relevant, the goal of this study is focused on amplifying the dimension of the teaching related to the individual psyche. The teachings of Advaita Vedanta in total are extremely comprehensive. This study precludes an in depth presentation of certain elements of the teachings in order to focus in great depth on the intricate details of the elements related to the topic of individual psychology.

The primary texts for Advaita Vedanta are written in the Sanskrit language. My knowledge of Sanskrit is relatively limited, therefore, this research is based on English translations of the primary texts and their commentary. This limitation has precluded a number of texts that have not been translated into English from being included in the research. Fortunately, all of the primary and secondary texts have plenty of English translations available at this time. Therefore, this limitation is not one to be overly emphasized here.
Language.

Lastly, a basic limitation presents itself anytime words are used for communication. The limitation of effectiveness in linguistic communication is most evident in the teaching of Advaita Vedanta when it comes to addressing the nature of the Self; the essential subject matter for teaching. The Vedantic Self, which is pointed to as the innermost subject of the individual is described by many words such as non-dual, limitless, existence, and pure consciousness. In the oral teaching methodology of the tradition the teacher takes time during the class to carefully unfold the meaning of each word used in the text to describe the Self. The meaning of the word is broken down, all other potential associations with the word are negated, and the word is used as a pointer to direct the mind of the student to recognize the non-dual Self, which can only be known through a direct cognition and not by association with a known object. The Self, by nature of being non-dual, cannot be described nor captured in a word. In expounding on the psychology of Advaita Vedanta, the task of unfolding the Vedantic Self is central. Therefore, the words are handled carefully with the aim of overcoming this limitation.

Methodology/Theoretical Tools

This dissertation is a theoretical study of the psychological underpinnings of the Advaita Vedanta teachings. The subject matter of this study is human psychology, and this subject is being approached through the lens of Advaita Vedanta. In applying a Vedantic lens to human psychology, the goal is to present that which the teachings have to say about the individual psyche. The following
areas of human psychology are covered in Advaita Vedanta and will be discussed in this study: the structural make up of the human psyche, the functional processes of the mind, the nature of suffering, individual identity, relationships with others, relationship between mind-body-self-world, conscious and unconscious processes, emotions, attitudes, psychological bondage and liberation, and the process of developing emotional maturity. The research focuses on identifying the places in primary and secondary texts and their commentary that address the various areas of individual psychology mentioned. Then these concepts are amplified using psychological language that is familiar to a mind that has been schooled in Western psychological theories and therapeutic practices.

Some may think that because I am a Westerner by birth, it would be more appropriate to take the position of studying this Eastern tradition through a Western psychological lens. The choice not to use a Western lens, but to take a standpoint from within the tradition is supported by two factors. First, using a Western psychological lens to study the psychology of Advaita Vedanta would limit the study to those aspects of human psychology that are included in that lens. No theory of the individual in Western psychology that I have found accounts for a non-dual Self as the true nature of the individual. This concept is so central in the psychology of Advaita that choosing to approach its study from a Western psychological lens would be too limiting. Therefore the choice to take a standpoint from within the tradition comes from the conviction that this approach will better support the goal of this study to present the essential teachings of the tradition without distortion.
Secondly, Advaita Vedanta asserts itself as presenting a view of human psychology that is universally true for all human beings regardless of culture, race, gender, or class. If this assertion is true, then it is possible for a person of any background to adequately grasp the vision of human psychology that it puts forth. This perspective supports the standpoint that I take toward the subject matter and counters the idea that my personal limitation as a Westerner inhibits my capacity to understand the vision of human psychology presented in this Eastern tradition. Additionally, my personal study of thirteen years within the Advaita tradition supports the position that I take in this study, to present the essential teachings of Advaita Vedanta without distortion.

In addition to the theoretical approach outlined above, the methodology employed in this research also includes a heuristic dimension. The subject matter under consideration in this study is one that I have personally explored for twenty years, and have studied academically for twelve years. I have many years of direct experience studying Advaita Vedanta in the traditional method of oral teaching and engaging in the practice of other methods prescribed in the tradition for gaining and assimilating Self-knowledge. In addition I have been a student of Western Psychology for twelve years studying a wide variety of psychological theories and perspectives. I have also experienced psychotherapy both as a therapist and a client for many years. In sum, my personal experience exploring both the teachings of Advaita Vedanta and human psychology is substantial. The core of the heuristic method is outlined by Moustakas (1990):

In heuristic research the investigator must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated. There must have been
actual autobiographical connections. Unlike phenomenological studies in which the researcher need not have the experience, the heuristic researcher has undergone the experience in a vital, intense and full way. (p. 14)

My own heuristic inquiry related to the subject matter is a thread that is woven throughout this entire dissertation. As I engage in the research process, the heuristic dimension comes into play as I grapple with the key concepts of Advaita Psychology and attempt to grasp the essential meaning being conveyed in the teachings. This process can be likened to an inner dialectic between what I have directly experienced in relation to the topic, and the objective scholar aspect that engages the topic from a theoretical perspective. Thus, as the various topics are being explored throughout this study, this inner dialogue is an essential part of what informs the research.

It is important to highlight the critical role that heuristic inquiry plays as a method of research employed in this work, which aims to present a system of psychology built upon the foundation of a non-dual Self. According to Vedanta, the Self is a reality, which can only be known through direct recognition, as the innermost reality of the psyche. Therefore, gaining knowledge of the Vedantic Self is posited in the teaching as a process that takes place through heuristic inquiry into one’s direct experience. Thus, theoretically speaking, from the standpoint of Advaita epistemology, the psychology of Advaita Vedanta can only be grasped and expounded on by an individual who has engaged in heuristic inquiry with the subject matter. Moustakas (1990) writes about the heuristic researcher:

Through an unwavering and steady inward gaze and inner freedom to explore and accept what is, I am reaching into deeper and deeper regions
of a human problem or experience and coming to know and understand its underlying dynamics and constituents more and more fully. The initial “data” is within me; the challenge is to discover and explicate its nature. (p. 13)

**Literature Review**

**Background.**

Vedanta means literally, “end of the Vedas,” which is a reference to the Hindu *Upaniṣads* located in the end section of the Indian scriptural texts known as the Vedas. The *Upaniṣads* are the section of Vedic writing devoted to expounding on the nature of reality. Vedanta, in a broad sense, refers to the large body of Indian philosophical discourse and spiritual teachings, which take the Hindu *Upaniṣads, Bhagavādgīta*, and *Brahmasūtras* as authoritative texts. George Victor (2002) identifies the main canon for Vedanta in his book, *Life and Teachings of Adi Sankaracarya*. He writes:

The *Upaniṣads* have influenced Indian thinkers from the earliest times onwards and represent the culmination of Indian thought. In the later period, the *Brahmasūtras* and the *Bhagavādgīta* have become the source books of Vedanta along with the *Upaniṣads*. To this extent, the exponents of different schools of Vedanta drew their inspiration and interpretation from these scriptures. (p. 3)

As with any spiritual teaching or religion, different interpretations of these texts have emerged throughout the history of Vedic culture and literature, giving rise to a number of systematized schools of thought. Sri Adi Sankaracarya is considered to be the primary commentator and authority for Advaita Vedanta (non-dualism), Ramanujacarya for Visistadvaita Vedanta (qualified non-dualism), and Madhavacarya for Dvaita Vedanta (dualism) (Victor, 2002).
This dissertation focuses on the school of Advaita Vedanta, and does not include discussion on the philosophical differences that set these schools apart from one another, which would be an entire study of its own. Let it suffice to say that differences exist in the respective positions taken on the nature of reality, and there is much debate that takes place both formally and informally in Indian scholarship about the true interpretation of the main canon of Vedantic texts.

The nature of reality according to Advaita Vedanta is *advaita*, meaning “not-two,” or “non-dual.” Advaita Vedanta, therefore, is the name of the tradition that teaches the non-dual nature of reality as revealed in the *Upaniṣads*. While Advaita Vedanta can be seen as one among many schools of thought in Vedantic discourse, it is worth emphasizing the widespread influence that the Advaita perspective has had throughout time. Eliot Deutsch expresses this viewpoint in *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophic Reconstruction* (1985):

> Advaita has been and continues to be, the most widely accepted system of thought among philosophers in India, and it is, we believe, one of the greatest philosophical achievements to be found in the East, or in the West. (p. 3)

Sri Adi Sankaracarya is considered to be the most significant author of Advaita scholarship and his commentaries are authoritative for commentators who followed him. Although there is clear evidence that the teaching tradition was alive well before his lifetime, dating back to antiquity, prior to his time the teaching had been limited to the form of oral transmission, yet to be documented in writing. Sankara was the first to establish significant written material expounding on the Advaita perspective. There has been debate in the past on the
exact dates of his life, however scholars today generally agree that he lived 788-820 in India (Victor, 2002).

Sankara’s body of written work is extensive. To begin, he wrote commentaries on the Bhagavadgita, the Brahmasūtras, and ten out of what is thought to be over a hundred Upaniṣads in existence. He set apart these ten Upaniṣads, known as Dāsopaniṣads, and deemed them of special import. They are Isā, Kena, Kaṭha, Praśna, Muṇḍaka, Māndūkya, Aitreya, Taิตtirīya, Chāndogya, and Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣads. Sankara’s authorship is also attributed to several other Sanskrit texts that expound on the vision of reality put forth in the Upaniṣads, explaining various topics in more depth as well as discussing the teaching tradition, its methodology, and the nature of the relationship between the teacher and student. These texts are called Prakarana Granthas, and constitute the second level of primary source texts for the tradition of Advaita Vedanta. The titles attributed to Sankara include Dṛg-Dṛśya-Viveka, Vākya-Vyṛtti, Bhaja Govindam, Dakṣināmūrti Stotra, Aparokṣānubhūti, Ātmā-Bodha, and Tattva-Bodha.

Additional Prakarana Grantha texts have been written by other authors in the tradition, some of whom are known and some unknown. It is widely accepted that the authorship of certain texts has been incorrectly attributed to the original Sri Adi Sankaracarya, and were likely written by another teacher of the tradition who followed him (Victor, 2002). It is undisputed that the original Adi Sankaracarya established four main Advaita monasteries in the north, south, east, and western quarters of India, known as the “four mutts.” At the head of each
“mutt,” or monestary, Sankara seated a head Advaita teacher, each of whom was also given the respected title “Sankaracarya.” Therefore, many believe that some of the texts attributed to the original Sakaracarya, were actually authored by one of the heads of the four mutts (Victor, 2002). It is widely accepted at the very least that these authors were directly connected to the teaching lineage of the original Sankaracarya and the vision presented in all the Prakaraṇa Granthas is congruent with the commentary of Sri Adi Sankaracarya on the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavād Gita, and the Brahmaṇtras. Therefore the question of original authorship on certain texts that are attributed to him remains an unknown fact; however, all of these texts are considered equally valid as authentic sources for the tradition.

**Organization of literature.**

The review of the literature for this study is organized into four sections. The first section discusses the most important body of literature used in this research, namely the primary texts for the tradition of Advaita Vedanta. The second section discusses the secondary source works used in this study in the form of written commentary and books authored by teachers of the Advaita tradition. The third section discusses a number of secondary source texts used in this research written by scholars on the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. The fourth section discusses the sources used in this study to represent the field of Western Depth Psychological theory as a whole as well as the dialogue in Chapter 2 where the Vedantic concepts of “Self” and “ego” are compared to similar concepts found in Western Psychological theories.
Primary sources for Advaita Vedanta.

As discussed already, the primary body of literature that is considered authoritative for the tradition includes the “main canon” texts, the Vedic Upaniṣads, the Bhagavādgita, and Brahmasūtras, as well as the Prakaraṇa Grantha texts, Ātmā-Bodha, Advaita Makaranda, Bhaja Govindam, Dakṣināmūrti Stotra, Dṛg-Dṛśya-Viveka, Jīvanmūkti-Viveka, Pañchadaśī, Tattvabodha, Vākya-Vṛtti, Vedantasāra, Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, and Upadeśa-Sahasrī.

In Advaita Vedanta each of the primary source texts listed above is understood as being complete in presenting its vision on the nature of reality. These texts are used as a teaching tool to give the teacher an organized and methodic direction for imparting Self-knowledge to the student. Thus, in a general way all of the primary source texts cover the topics related to the psychology of Advaita Vedanta, which is an undercurrent that runs throughout every text. At the same time, each of the texts takes a different approach in conveying that vision, and some texts go into greater depth and detail in explicating particular topics. Therefore, the referencing of the primary source texts for this study focuses specifically on a handful of the primary source texts, which explicate the psychological dimension of the teaching with more clarity, precision, and depth.

Of the main canon texts, the Kaṭha Upaniṣad, Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, Taittirīya Upaniṣad, Chāndogya Upaniṣad, Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad, Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, and the Bhagavādgita are the primary texts used in this research for presenting the Vedantic teachings. These texts are quoted as primary
source references for Vedantic Psychology throughout the dissertation. Of the Prakaraṇa Grantha texts, Aparokshānubhuti, Advaita Makaranda, Dṛg-Drśya-Viveka, Pañchadaśī, Vedantasāra, and Vivekacūḍāmani also play a large role in the research as primary sources for Vedantic Psychology. These texts expound on key topics such as the teacher-student relationship, mutual superimposition, discrimination (viveka), psychological dynamics of gaining Self-knowledge, requirements of the qualified student (adhikāri), developing emotional maturity, and the assimilation Self-knowledge in greater depth and detail.

Secondary Sources: Commentary of Advaita Teachers

The works of Sri Adi Sankaracarya, discussed above, play a large role in this research study. Sankaracarya’s commentaries on the Eight Upaniṣads Volumes 1 & 2 (2003), on the Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad (1995), and on the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad (1993) provide in-depth discussions expounding on the topics presented in the verses. Sankaracarya’s commentaries also include dialogue with an “objector,” the voice of another scholar presenting challenging arguments that contradict Sankaracarya’s claims. This type of dialogue, while cumbersome at times, is representative of the specific arguments that were presented to him in his time. They serve the purpose of refining the Vedantic arguments and ultimately strengthen the logical foundation of the Vedantic claims.

In addition to these commentaries, this research focuses on two of Sankara’s Prakaraṇa Grantha texts. Dṛg-Drśya-Viveka (1998) is a key work that presents a detailed outline of the psychological process involved in discriminating
between the Self (ātmā) and the mind-body-sense-complex (jīva).

Aparokshānubhuti (2000), another of Sankara’s works, plays a central role in this research as it covers topics such as mutual superimposition, nature of ignorance, bondage, and Self-knowledge, which are essential elements of Vedantic Psychology. Both of these Prakaraṇa Grantha texts provide excellent sources for explicating the psychological dimension of Advaita Vedanta.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati is a living teacher of Advaita Vedanta who has taught employing the traditional methods of teaching for over forty years in India and the United States. In addition to his teaching, Swami Dayananda has produced a large body of work in English on Advaita Vedanta in the form of translations and commentary on primary source texts as well as books written on all topics related to Advaita Vedanta. His work is focused on extensively in this research study as he explicates the psychological dimension of the teaching with great clarity and depth. In addition to the fact that Dayananda is an exceptionally clear speaker on the teachings of Advaita Vedanta, his long-term exposure to Western culture and Western students supports his ability to convey the teaching in a language that is easy to grasp for the Western mind.

Of Dayananda’s large body of work, his translation and commentaries on the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad (2006) the Bhagavādgita (2007), and Vivekacūḍāmaṇi (1997) play a large role in this study. His commentary on these texts goes into great depth and detail in expounding on the psychological dimension of the teachings. In particular, the definitions he provides in English for Sanskrit terms, such as ānanda, and other key psychological concepts, are critical to this research,
which seeks to present a comprehensive understanding of the psychology of Advaita Vedanta. In addition to his commentaries, this research utilizes several short books have been created from Dayananda’s teachings on psychological topics. One such work is The Value of Values (1993), which discusses a number of dharmic attitudes, which are affirmed in the Bhagavadgītā as being emblematic of a person who has gained Self-knowledge. Dayananda amplifies the meaning of each of the dharmic attitudes in a psychological language and emphasizes the importance of practicing these values in one’s everyday life as a means for developing emotional maturity. Swami Dayananda’s books, Freedom from Fear (2000), Freedom from Sadness (1999), Discovering Love (2004), and You are the Whole (2001) have also gained focus in this study as they discuss the psycho-emotional dimension of the teaching. To enhance these written texts, in September 2005 I conducted a face-to-face interview with Swami Dayananda on the topic of “Bondage and Liberation in Advaita Vedanta” asking questions directly related to the topic of this study. The transcript of this interview provides an additional source for this research.

Finally, Swamini Pramananda Saraswati’s book Talks on Vedic Dharma and Culture (2001) deserves mention as this text provides an excellent source book covering topics related to following dharma in a psychological language.

**General scholarship on Advaita Vedanta tradition.**

In addition to the secondary sources written by teachers of Advaita Vedanta, this research also focuses on several key texts written by Vedantic scholars from the East and West. Paul Deussen’s book, Outline of the System of
Philosophy According to Sankara (1987), Swami Satprakashananda’s book The Goal and the Way (1977), Anantanand Rambachan’s book The Advaita Worldview: God, World, and Humanity (2006), and D. Venugopal’s book, Vedanta: the solution to our fundamental problem (2012) each provide comprehensive source references for the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. These four texts are used as references throughout this dissertation as they expound on all of the topics relevant to this study. In specific, these texts cover the epistemology and ontological vision of Advaita Vedanta, the Vedantic teaching methodology, nature of the human problem of bondage, Self-knowledge as the solution to the problem, dharma, and developing emotional maturity. R. Balasubramanian’s book The Tradition of Advaita: Essays in Honor of Bhasyabhavajna V.R. Kalyanasunara Sastri (1994) also provides hearty discussions and material related to the topics mentioned above.

Anantanand Rambachanan’s work, Accomplishing the Accomplished (1991) and The Limits of Scripture (1995), as well as Swami Satprakashananda’s work, Methods of Knowledge (1995), are the three texts that provide secondary source material for topics in chapter two related to Advaita epistemology such as the six valid means of knowledge accepted in Advaita, the Vedas as revealed knowledge, and the Vedantic teaching methodology.

There are two books to be highlighted as sources that discuss the structure and function of the human psyche according to Vedanta. Raghunath Safaya’s, Indian Psychology (1976), traces the development of psychological thought in Indian literature and defines the four distinct aspects that make up the Vedantic
mind with clarity and precision. Jadunath Sinha’s three volume work, *Indian Psychology* (1985), provides another substantial reference for the structure and function of the mind in Vedanta as well as other psychological elements of the teaching.

**Sources for Western depth psychology.**

The works of Sigmund Freud, Carl G. Jung, and Heinz Kohut are utilized in this research as sources that represent the field of Western Depth Psychology in two different capacities. First these three authors have been selected to represent the school of Western Depth Psychology as a whole, as they are the most widely accepted scholars that established the theoretical foundation for the field. I found that using these three authors was sufficient for the purpose of this study; however, there are a number of prominent researchers in this field such as T.W. Winnicott and James Stolorow, who have not been mentioned. Therefore, whenever the concept of Western Psychological theory is referenced in the chapters, it should be clear that I refer specifically to the field of Depth Psychology in the west, as represented by the primary and secondary sources listed below for Freud, Jung, and Kohut. The following books have been chosen because they cover the founding ideas that form the building blocks of each author’s psychological theory. Secondly, in chapter three the Vedantic concepts of “Self” and “ego” are defined and compared to similar concepts found in the theories of Freud, Jung, and Kohut. In this discussion these three theorists are referenced directly to show how their definition of terms is similar or different to the Vedantic definition.
The original writing of Sigmund Freud, the primary founder of psychoanalysis in the United States, is almost entirely comprised of discourse on psychoanalytic practice. This being so, the only work included in this research that is authored by Freud alone is his text *The Id and the Ego* (1960). This work provides definition of some of the key psychological concepts of the structure of the human psyche according to Freud. Two additional secondary resources for Freud’s psychological theory included in this research are, *The Basic Writings of Freud* (1995) authored by S. Freud and A. A. Brill, and the *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (1995) authored by S. Freud, J. Strachey, A. Freud, and A. Richards. These secondary resource texts more clearly articulate the basic theoretical principles that form the foundation of Freud’s psychological theory and discuss case material that exemplify how his theory was applied in his practice of psychoanalysis.

Carl G. Jung was a prolific writer, producing a vast body of written text expounding on his psychological theory and case studies documenting the application of his theories in his psychoanalytic practice. For the purposes relevant to this study the primary texts written by Jung chosen to support this research are, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (1966b), *The Practice of Psychotherapy* (1966a), *Psychology and the East* (1978), and *On the Nature of the Psyche* (1960). These texts present a comprehensive account of Jung’s psychological theory including the structure and function of the human psyche and his theory of human development known as “individuation.” The secondary texts for Jung’s psychology including Jacobi’s *The Way of Individuation* (1967),

In referencing the work of Heinz Kohut’s psychological theory, his three most well known works are included in this study, *The Restoration of the Self* (1977), *The Search for the Self* (1980), and *How Does Analysis Cure?* (1984). These texts present a comprehensive account of Kohut’s theory of individual psychology as well as case studies that exemplify the application of his theory in a clinical setting.

Lastly, the concept of “core-beliefs,” introduced in chapter four, plays a key role in the theoretical foundation developed in this study on the structure of the human psyche and the nature of bondage and liberation as defined in Advaita Vedanta. While I make a point to define the meaning of the term “core-belief” in chapter four and throughout the discussion in chapters four, five, and six, two source books are included in this research which define the term similarly. First, Mathew McKay and Patrick Fanning’s book, *Prisoners of Belief: Exposing and Changing Beliefs That Control Your Life* (1991) is provided as a reference from Western Psychology that defines the term, and discusses the operating function of core-beliefs in the psyche. Second, author and scientist Gregg Braden has written a book, *The Spontaneous Healing of Belief* (2008) in which he elucidates the significance of our beliefs as that, which dictates our basic experience of reality. I chose these two authors as references for the concept “core-belief,” because their
The definition of the term is most closely aligned with the way I have developed the meaning of the concept in this study.

**Significance**

**East-West scholarship.**

This study carries great significance academically in the original contribution it makes to the development of knowledge in the relevant fields of study. To begin, the literature on Advaita Vedanta teachings available in English is relatively little compared to other Eastern spiritual teachings; for example Zen, or Tibetan Buddhism. Therefore, generally speaking, this study adds to the literature that is available on these particular spiritual teachings, making the tradition of Advaita Vedanta more accessible to any English speaking academic audience interested in studying it. This audience may include students of philosophy and religious studies, in addition to psychology.

The academic significance of this study is most pronounced in the contribution it makes to East-West Psychology and Western Academic Psychology as it deals with a specific topic that had not been explored in any depth until now. Thus, I believe, this study creates a new theoretical link in East-West studies connecting Advaita Vedanta with the West. The contribution this work makes to Western Psychology should be emphasized. Introducing the psychology of Advaita Vedanta into the discourse of Western Psychology opens the doorway for new perspectives to be considered. The Vedantic understanding of the Self, as this work makes clear, offers a radically new and innovative perspective on the concept of individual identity to Western Psychology.
Introducing this definition could potentially expand currently held notions of the self, thereby transforming the psychological theories and practices built upon it.

Secondly, this study presents a psychology of the individual that addresses the spiritual dimension of the individual and the relational nature of the individual within the context of the world and God. Western Psychology as a discipline has traditionally taken a skeptical stance on the appropriateness of spirituality or religion to its aim of psychological healing, having grown out of the hard sciences. Aside from Carl G. Jung’s work, which itself falls outside of the mainstream in Western Psychology, the spiritual dimension has not been included in most traditional psychological theories. Over the last thirty years, following the influence of the humanistic movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Western Psychology as a whole has shifted away from a strictly skeptical stance toward spirituality. In fact there appears to be a growing trend in the field moving toward an expressed openness and curiosity about the role that spirituality plays in psychological health. By presenting a model of human psychology that is contained within a spiritual teaching, this study contributes vital ideas to Western Psychology, which is ripe with interest in this area.

**Personal.**

This research is deeply significant to me on a personal level as well. At age nineteen I experienced a spontaneous spiritual awakening, which was so powerful that it changed my fundamental understanding of reality in an instant. This experience set my life on a course that had a single-pointed aim, namely to know the truth and to learn how to be a human being that lives in full accordance
with the truth. My personal journey led me again and again to the teachings of India. My first encounter with the Vedantic teachings was in an undergraduate class on the *Bhagavadgītā*. This was the first time I found a spiritual teaching that was revealing a vision of reality that was the same as what I had experienced directly. After several years of studying spirituality of all forms through books, and travel in Asia, in 1999 I met a teacher in the Advaita Vedanta tradition. I have been a student of this teaching for the last twelve years, being exposed to the traditional method of study with a qualified teacher belonging to a lineage of teachers. In addition I have now been a student of Western psychology, have trained as a psychotherapist, and have seven years of experience as a practicing psychotherapist. Therefore, that which is personally meaningful to me is very much alive and connected to the topic of this research study.

**Social-cultural.**

What this dissertation offers is most immediately relevant to the small population of Western society who is seeking to gain spiritual fulfillment through the teachings of Advaita Vedanta; however this work emerges out of a cultural moment in the Western contemporary world where society at large seems to bebeckoning for a deeper sense of meaning. The fact that there appears to be a growing interest in psychological and spiritual meaning in the Western world leads me to believe that the dissertation could gain the interest of the mainstream culture at this time or in the near future.
Spiritual.

Advaita Vedanta, at the center of the study, is a spiritual teaching. I consider this work to be my own personal svadharma (expression of my nature) and offer it as a creative work that aims to serve my deep commitment to the human pursuit for freedom from bondage and suffering for myself and others. This scholarly work has been produced with an attitude of curious respect for the mysterious nature of creative expression, and a prayer that this work has beneficial results.

In addition this study adds to the contemporary spiritual dialogue happening between different traditions. By making the psychological dimension of Advaita Vedanta more visible and accessible, the potential is heightened for meaningful dialogue and understanding to take place between traditions and in any contemporary discussion about spirituality.
Chapter 2: Background on Advaita Vedanta Tradition

Introduction

This chapter presents key background material on the tradition of Advaita Vedanta, which will support the overall aim of this study to bring forward a model of human psychology that is rooted in these teachings. The three areas that will be discussed in this chapter are the Vedantic system of epistemology, teaching methodology, and ontological vision of the cosmic universe as a whole.

Advaita psychology hinges on the central idea that at the center of all psychological problems is human bondage rooted in Self-ignorance. The teachings claim that the solution to the problem of bondage and its associated suffering is found through gaining a particular kind of knowledge, namely Self-knowledge. Therefore, understanding the Advaitic epistemological assumptions about how valid knowledge is established is critical to understanding the Advaita system of Psychology as a whole. This chapter begins by presenting the central pillars of Advaita epistemological theory including the six valid means of knowledge, the theories of self-validity and self-luminosity of knowledge, and the Vedas as a source of revealed knowledge. This is followed by an in depth discussion of the process by which Self-knowledge is gained through the age-old Advaitic tradition of oral teaching. The teacher-student relationship is then expounded on, emphasizing the unique way that words are used as a means of knowledge to reveal the nature of the Self.

Finally, this chapter presents the ontological vision of reality according to Advaita Vedanta. The teachings of Vedanta address the nature of reality from a
number of standpoints, including but not limited to, human psychology from the standpoint of the individual. They also address the nature of reality from the standpoint of the cosmic universe as a whole. The ontological vision presented in the teachings implies an intimate connection between the individual and the cosmic universe as a whole. Therefore, to approach this system of psychology it is necessary that the reader be exposed to what the teachings have to say about the relationship of the individual to the whole. With this perspective available, the implicit connections that apply to the psychology of the individual can be clearly drawn.

The term used in Advaita Vedanta to refer to the cosmic universal whole is Īśvara. In discussing Īśvara, the Advaita system of metaphysics will be outlined to show how the teaching affirms a non-dual vision of reality by introducing the concept of Māyā, the creative power that is responsible for the projection of the time-space creation. Māyā is said to belong to an order of reality (mithyā), which is defined as a dependent reality. The relationship between Brahman, the absolute non-dual reality, and the creation (jagat), a dependent reality, will be discussed including the cyclical nature by which the creation is manifest and unmanifest. Finally, the teachings present a system of universal laws that govern an intelligent order in the creation. This system will be presented including a discussion of the laws of karma, dharma, and reincarnation, each of which have psychological implications for an individual living within the creation.
Epistemology of Advaita Vedanta

The foundation of Advaita epistemology includes an outline of six valid means for gaining knowledge, a distinction between relative versus absolute knowledge, as well as the related theories of self-validity and self-luminosity of knowledge. Another important aspect of Advaita epistemology is its emphasis on the role of a living teacher in the process of gaining Self-knowledge. Each of these aspects will be discussed here with the aim of clarifying the underlying assumptions that Advaita Vedanta relies upon in order to make the claims that it does about human psychology.

There are six means of knowledge, called pramāṇas in Sanskrit, which are accepted in Advaita Vedanta as valid. They are perception (pratyakṣa), inference (anumāna), comparison (upamāna), postulation (arthāpatti), non-cognition (anupalabdhi), and verbal testimony (śabda-pramāṇa). A pramāṇa is the unique instrument that acts as a cause for valid knowledge to arise. In Methods of Knowledge, Swami Satprakashananda (1995) describes the way that a means of knowledge operates as an instrument in producing specific knowledge.

By “instrument” is meant a special cause which, being operative, produces a specific effect. In visual knowledge, for instance, the organ of vision and the mind are both operative; as such, both are its causes but; but the organ of vision and its operation constitute the special cause (karana). Thus, pramāṇa is the special means by which some kind of right knowledge (pramāṇa) is attained. The implication is that each pramāṇa has a characteristic way of conveying knowledge and presents a distinct type of knowledge; and it is not in the nature of one pramāṇa to contradict another. (1995, p. 35)
Each of the *pramānas* is capable of producing valid knowledge within a given scope of experience. Within that scope, a particular means of knowledge is further limited depending on its capacity. For example, within the scope of sense perception, the ears are only capable of producing knowledge of sounds, while the eyes can only produce knowledge of form, color, and light. The eyes and ears each have a separate domain over which they preside (Satprakashananda, 1995).

The Advaita theories of self-validity and self-luminosity of knowledge form the basis for how the tradition understands valid knowledge to be established. The theory of self-validity assumes that when valid knowledge takes place it arises simultaneously with a quality of being undeniably true. For example when the eyes are used to perceive the color of the sky, the knowledge, “the sky is blue” is affirmed. The fact that the sky is blue is not doubted. The cognition and its validity arise simultaneously. In his book *Accomplishing the Accomplished*, Anantanand Rambachan (1991) discusses the epistemology of Advaita Vedanta in detail. He affirms the Advaita theory of self-validity in saying that if all the conditions necessary for the successful operation of any one of the *pramānas* are fulfilled, valid knowledge will result as well as a belief in its validity (p. 19).

Similarly the theory of self-luminosity of knowledge states that whenever there is knowledge of an object, the fact of this knowledge is immediately known. (Rambachan, 1991) The emphasis here is on the immediacy of knowledge. A fundamental claim in Advaita Vedanta is the self-luminous (*svataprakāśa*) nature of the Self. In brief, the teaching affirms the Self as being self-luminous.
(svataprakāśa) or self-shining because its nature is pure consciousness (Vidyaranya, 1982). Being of the nature of consciousness, the Self lights up any object of knowledge that comes into contact with it, creating the experience of the object being known. Therefore, this epistemological theory states that the gaining of valid knowledge is an immediate experience in the sense that there is no distance between the knowledge and the Self.

The valid means of knowledge (pramāṇas) are emphasized in Advaita Vedanta. It is important to understand how knowledge takes place in order to see how the teaching methodology is used to communicate the vision. The theories of the self-validity and self-luminous nature of knowledge support a basic principle of Advaita epistemology, namely that valid knowledge can be established immediately and directly.

The undoubted motivation behind Advaita’s powerful advocacy of the theories of self-validity and self-luminosity of knowledge is the necessity for incontrovertibly establishing the possibility of valid knowledge. This possibility is imperative to any outlook, like Advaita, where ultimate human freedom lies in the gain of valid knowledge. (Rambachan, 1991, p. 22)

Six Valid Means of Knowledge (pramāṇas)

Each of the six means of knowledge (pramāṇas), outlined in Advaita epistemology, reflects a distinct pathway by which valid knowledge can be gained assuming that the appropriate conditions are present. This section outlines the six pramāṇas and the respective scope of experience to which they apply. Advaita Vedanta differentiates between the means of knowledge that produce relative knowledge of the empirical world (aparavidyā) and those that produce knowledge of absolute reality (paravidyā). All six of the pramāṇas accepted by Advaita are
capable of producing valid knowledge within the scope of the relative, empirical world. However, according to Vedanta, verbal testimony (śabda-pramāṇa), in the form of the Vedas, is considered to be the only means of knowledge out of the six that has the additional capacity to produce absolute knowledge (paravidyā) (Datta, 1960).

Perception (pratyakṣa) is that which is directly known either through the sense organs having contact with an object, or through knowledge of a subjective experience in the mind and body such as a thought, emotion, or physical sensation. Rambachan (1991) discusses the four variables involved in gaining knowledge of sense objects through the means of perception.

In any act of external perception, four factors are present, the absence of any one of which, therefore, makes it impossible. These are the ātmān (Self), the antahkaranah (mind), the sense organ, and the object. Of these four elements, the ātmān (Self) alone is immanently luminous, being of the nature of consciousness. In any act of knowing, the object is revealed by the ātmān (Self), which is conjoined to the former through the mind conjoined with the sense organ. In reaching out to the objects, the (sense) organs are accompanied by the mind. The mind assumes a modification (vṛtti) which corresponds to the object and which is illumined by the ātmān (Self) as awareness. The result of this entire process is perception. (Rambachan, 1991, pp. 24-25)

The same set of interrelated factors, minus contact of sense organs with their objects, applies for subjective perceptions in the mind and body. The senses may be involved in contributing to an internal perception as in the case of emotions, which are experienced by the sense of touch in the body. However, the sensation that is perceived arises from within the body, without having any contact with an external object. Perception, as a means of knowledge gives rise to immediate valid knowledge as long as the appropriate causal conditions are in
place. For example, the respective sense organ must be working and the mind must be alert to that sense organ in order for the knowledge of the sense object to take place (Rambachan, 1991).

Inference (anumāna), based on sense perception, is the method that deduces knowledge based on already established knowledge of an invariable cause and effect relationship between two things. A common example used to describe inference is the relationship between smoke and fire. When smoke is perceived on the mountain, it is deduced that fire exists because there is an invariable relationship between smoke and fire, which is already established, namely, if there is smoke then there must be fire. In Methods of Knowledge (1995) Swami Satprakashananda defines this common method of reasoning.

This is the knowledge that is derived from another knowledge. This refers to the logical process of gaining knowledge. This is the knowledge that is derived from the knowledge of an invariable relation between what is perceived and what is deduced. (1995, p. 142)

Using inference as a means of knowledge requires a properly functioning mind in order to be a reliable source for gaining valid knowledge. The knowledge that is gained by way of inference can be infinitely extended as a principle throughout the empirical world that is perceivable through the senses.

Comparison (upamāna) gives rise to valid knowledge by way of comparing one thing to another thing that is similar. Specifically this refers to the knowledge that is gained about a thing that is already known by way of comparing it to an object, which is directly perceived as being similar. Satprakashananda (1995) elucidates a common example used in the tradition to explain how this means of knowledge works.
To illustrate, a person who has seen his cow at home goes to a forest and sees a *gavaya* (wild cow). He perceives the similarity of the *gavaya* to his cow at home, which he remembers and forms a judgment, “This *gavaya* is like my cow.” From this experience he gains additional knowledge in the form of “My cow is like this *gavaya*.” *Upamāna* (comparison) is the means by which he gains the knowledge of his cow’s similarity to the *gavaya* from the perception of the *gavaya*’s similarity to his cow. (p. 154)

The knowledge gained through comparison can also be infinitely extended within the scope of empirical reality. If the cow and the *gavaya* are established as similar in one place that fact will also be true in any other place or time in the creation.

Postulation (*arthāpatti*) is a logical method that produces knowledge by way of assuming what must be true in light of some other established facts. For example, if I wake up in the morning and see that the sun is shining and the ground is soaked with water, I postulate that it must have rained last night. In the case of postulation, the critical factor for affirming the validity of knowledge, “that it rained last night,” is the impossibility that the circumstances could have been caused by something else. The conclusion, “It rained last night” can only be established if there is no other imaginable explanation to account for the facts that the ground is soaked and the sun is shining in the sky (Datta, 1960).

Non-cognition (*anupalabdhi*) is a means of knowledge that affirms the absence of an object based on the fact that the object is not perceived in a given place and time. It means that the non-existence of a thing is apprehended by its non-perception. By not seeing a jar in a given place, one knows that it is not there (Rambachan, 1995).
Verbal testimony (śabda-pramāṇa) is the communication of knowledge through the use of words that are put together into meaningful sentences, either written or spoken, to communicate knowledge about a particular thing. In order for the knowledge to be valid it must come from an authentic source, namely from a competent person who possess accurate knowledge about the subject matter. Rambachan (1991) distills the essence of verbal testimony and draws a clear line of difference with inference.

śabda-pramāṇa (verbal testimony) is a unique method of access to knowledge and cannot be subsumed under any of the other pramāṇas. Advaita contends that the comprehension of the significance of a sentence depends upon grasping the relation among the meanings of its individual words. It does not depend only on the cognition of an invariable relation between the individual words and their meanings. For this reason, claims Advaita, śabda-pramāṇa cannot be reduced to inference, for the latter depends upon the knowledge of invariable concomitance. (1991, p. 29)

Verbal testimony (śabda-pramāṇa), like the other five pramāṇas, can be employed to gain knowledge about the relative empirical world and this knowledge can be infinitely extended within this scope. Most of our knowledge about the world is gained through this means of knowledge in the form of written, oral, or video communication. In addition to its capacity to give knowledge of the empirical world, Advaita accepts that verbal testimony (śabda-pramāṇa) as a means of knowledge can give rise to knowledge of absolute reality, or Brahman.

The special nature of śabda (verbal testimony), for Advaita, lies in its function as a means of knowledge for ultimate reality. In this capacity, śabda-pramāṇa (verbal testimony) is synonymous with the Vedas or śruti. Advaita seeks to justify the view that because of the very nature of ultimate reality, the Vedas alone can transmit accurate knowledge. (Rambachan, 1991, p. 31)
Here Rambachan singles out the *Vedas* from all the other means of knowledge including verbal testimony based upon perception. In referring to “the *Vedas*” Rambachan points to the *Upaniṣads*, the second portion of the *Vedas* (*jñānakṛṇḍa*) whose primary purpose is to reveal the nature of absolute reality. The *Upaniṣads*, therefore, as a form of verbal testimony (*śabda-pramāṇa*), are the means of knowledge that are differentiated from the rest in the sense that they have the unique capacity to reveal absolute reality. Thus, the *Upaniṣads* are seen as the cornerstone of Advaita Vedanta because they are the scriptural source on which the teaching is based.

It is important to note that the *Vedas* are considered to be a means of knowledge as a form of verbal testimony (*śabda-pramāṇa*). Although the *Upaniṣads* are separated out from the rest of the *Vedas* in the sense of their unique capacity to reveal absolute knowledge, the first portion of the *Vedas* is also accepted as being a valid means of knowledge that gives indirect knowledge of the empirical world for things that are beyond the scope of our other means of knowledge (Chandrasekharendra, 2005)

**The Vedas as a means of knowledge.**

The *Vedas* are considered in Advaita Vedanta to be a means of valid knowledge for both indirect and direct knowledge of subjects that are beyond the epistemological limits of the other *pramāṇas*. In a published volume of talks and essays by Swami Dayananda Saraswati (2004), a living teacher of Advaita Vedanta, he writes:

The subject matter of the entire *Veda* is one to which various means of knowledge, such as perception and inference, have no access. There is no
way to prove or disprove the existence of good and bad fortune (puṇya and pāpa). So, too, one has no epistemological access to heaven, rebirth, and the structure of a ritual and its end, etc. Therefore (the) Vedas have to be looked upon as an independent means of knowledge (svatūpramāṇa). The Upaniṣads, forming the last portion of the Vedas, also have a subject matter that is not available for human sensory perception and inference. (2004, p. 100)

Anantanand Rambachan (1991) affirms Sankara’s position toward the Vedas in saying:

The general justification of Sankara for a special means of knowledge like the Vedas is that it provides the knowledge of those things, which cannot be known through any of the other available sources of knowledge. According to Sankara, the two categories of knowledge inaccessible to all other pramāṇas and attainable exclusively through the Vedas are dharma (law of values) and Brahman (absolute reality). (1991, p. 39)

The first portion of the Vedas (karmakāṇḍa) provide indirect knowledge of many subjects having to do with the laws and order of the creation, which are beyond the epistemological limits of our means of knowledge. Some of these subjects are: the moral order (dharma/adharma), the existence of heaven and hell worlds, what happens after you die, and rituals that are prescribed as methods to achieve desirable outcomes.

The end portion of the Vedas (jñānakāṇḍa) consists of the Upaniṣads, which give direct knowledge of absolute reality, which can be known immediately. The following verses from the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad speak of these two kinds of knowledge contained in the Vedas.

Angiras said to Saunaka, “Those who know the Veda say that there are indeed two types of knowledge to be gained, which are (known as) higher and lower. Among the two, the aparavidyā (relative knowledge) is, Ṛgveda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda, Atarvaveda, phonetics, know-how of rituals, grammar, etymology of Vedic words, science of meters, astronomy, and astrology. And paravidyā (absolute knowledge) is the one by which that imperishable Brahman is known.” (Dayananda, 2006, pp. 44-46, vv.1.1.4-5)
The teachings of Advaita Vedanta, in the strictest sense give knowledge of absolute reality (paravidyā) as revealed in the Upaniṣads, however the tradition accepts all of the Vedas as revealed knowledge. The Upaniṣads overlap with the teachings in the first portion of the four Vedas and other Vedic texts. For example, the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavādīta contain verses that reference such topics as how to follow dharma (law of moral order), addressing the attitudes a person should have that are helpful in the pursuit of gaining Self-knowledge, and karma, the law that governs positive and negative effects of actions. While the teachings on the laws of karma and dharma fall into the category of relative reality (aparavidyā), they are interspersed throughout the texts that teach the vision of absolute reality. The person who is studying these texts is living within the relative world and, therefore, the teachings address the situation of the student from within that context (Satprakasananda, 1995).

Furthermore, the vision of absolute reality presented in the teachings includes the relative world as being non-separate from the absolute. Therefore, while the aim of Advaita Vedanta is to reveal the absolute non-dual nature of reality, relative knowledge regarding how a human being can learn to live in harmony with oneself and the world is also an essential part of the study for developing the emotional maturity that is necessary in order to gain Self-knowledge. Developing emotional maturity is intimately related to the process of gaining Self-knowledge and, therefore, integral to the psychology of Advaita Vedanta. This topic will be covered in depth in a later chapter. In sum, the point to emphasize is that all of the Vedas, which contain both absolute and relative
knowledge, are considered as revealed knowledge for the tradition of Advaita Vedanta.

**Absolute and relative knowledge.**

What is the relationship between absolute knowledge gained through the *Vedas* and empirical knowledge gained through the senses if they are both valid? In a text that includes a collection of essays titled *The Tradition of Advaita*, R. Balasubramanian (1994) clarifies this relationship discussing the respective authority of the different *pramāṇas*.

According to Advaita, since there is a clear demarcation of the scope of the *sruti* (scriptures) on the one hand and the other *pramāṇas* on the other-the former being concerned with *Brahman*, the trans-empirical reality, and the later with empirical things--there is, strictly speaking no conflict between *sruti* and the other *pramāṇas*. It means, first of all, that perception and other *pramāṇas* can neither prove nor disprove *Brahman*, the super-sensuous reality. Secondly, when a *pramāṇa* such as perception transgressing its limits claims to prove something that goes contrary to evidence of *sruti*, the latter alone is authoritative and final. Thirdly, scriptural declarations about empirical things which are in conflict with the evidence of perception are not authoritative. That is why Sankara says that “even a hundred scriptural texts, which declare fire to be cold, or non-luminous, will not attain authoritativeness.” (1994, p. 8)

Balasubramanian (1994) affirms the authority that each *pramāṇa* has within its scope of knowledge as well as the limits to that authority. The view of Vedanta is that any claim of valid knowledge, irrespective of the means by which it is gained, is not considered valid if it can be negated by another means of knowledge. In Advaita Vedanta, the vision of one non-dual reality includes the co-existence of the relative world and the absolute. One does not cancel out the other, but each reflects a different order of reality, a key concept that will be developed later in the chapter.
Validity of the Vedas as a source of knowledge

The Vedas, accepted as revealed knowledge in the tradition, make knowledge claims about both absolute reality and relative reality. Are the knowledge claims of the Vedas verifiable? To answer this question it is first necessary to divide the first and last portion of the Vedas and look at each in a separate category. The first portion of the Vedas, also called the karmakāṇḍa, reveals indirect knowledge of the creation and the principles of order that make it function as a whole. These claims are accepted as valid in Advaita Vedanta, based on the understanding that the Vedas contain revealed knowledge, but they are accepted as unverifiable beliefs because there are no means of knowledge available to verify them directly.

The last portion of the Vedas, which contain the Upaniṣads, give Self-knowledge, which is verifiable through direct experience. Based on the theory of self-validity and self-luminosity of knowledge, Vedanta responds to the question of validity by affirming that the scriptural claims regarding the nature of the Self are directly verifiable. In order to test the validity a person must utilize the Upaniṣads as a means of knowledge (śabda-pramāṇa) and see what the result is just like one has to open the eyes in order to see what is in front of them. The Advaitic claim is that if the pramāṇa is properly wielded, and the appropriate conditions are in place, then one can directly test whether Vedanta produces valid knowledge of the Self, or not.

The teachings of Vedanta found in the Upaniṣads are a means of knowledge (pramāṇa). Just as we have eyes and ears for seeing and hearing we have Vedanta--a means of knowledge in the form of words--for knowing the self. Its validity is established when you use it to gain
knowledge; you will discover that it works and that the knowledge it gives cannot be negated. (Dayananda, 2004, p. 121)

According to the tradition, the claims made in the scriptures about the nature of reality, are validated through direct experience when a person gains Self-knowledge. This in itself is enough to establish the validity of the knowledge, according to Advaita Vedanta. In addition, knowledge that is available through perception and inference supports the validity of the vision presented in the *Upaniṣads* and is used in the teaching of Advaita Vedanta.

Inference is used in Advaita Vedanta to corroborate the metaphysical truths declared by the *sruti* (scriptures). Reason is not an independent means to suprasensuous knowledge, since it cannot decisively establish the transcendental facts, such as *Brahman*, *Ātmā*, Liberation, and its means, but can show their possibility. Inference is based on sense perception, which has its own limitations. (Satprakasananda, 1995, p. 152)

While it is true that knowledge gained through perception and inference is used in support of unfolding the *Vedic* claims, the *Vedas* are accepted in the tradition as being an independent means of knowledge that does not require another means of knowledge to validate its claims.

To look upon Vedanta as an independent means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) is very important. One who does so is said to have faith (*śraddhā*). In this tradition, a believer is not necessarily one who believes in God; it is one who accepts the scriptures as a means of knowledge. Unless you accept Vedanta as a means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), you will not examine what it has to say; you will not use it as a means of knowledge. (Dayananda, 2004, p. 122)

The Advaita claim that the *Vedas* are an independent means of knowledge is challenged by schools of thought from within Indian and Western philosophy who do not accept the idea from an epistemological standpoint (Satprakashananda, 1995).
Use of Verbal Testimony (śabda-pramāṇa) in the Teacher-Student Relationship

Verbal testimony (śabda-pramāṇa) as a means for revealing absolute reality is not limited to the words in the texts alone, but extends to include verbal communication of the teaching through the words of a qualified teacher (guru). The traditional method of passing on this knowledge is through oral transmission. This transmission uses the texts as a basis for teaching, but relies on the teaching methodology employed by a living teacher to unfold the meaning of the words.

As with the other means of knowledge, in order for the Upaniṣads to be successful in imparting the knowledge they have to give, the causal conditions must be right. The Upaniṣads cannot simply be read as a book in order to be successful in imparting the knowledge contained within them. According to Vedanta, a qualified teacher who has both gained Self-knowledge, and is well versed in the scriptures must wield the text (Rambachan, 1995). The Kaṭha Upaniṣad mentions the importance of having a proper teacher in this verse.

The Self is not certainly adequately known when spoken of by an inferior person; for It is thought of variously. When taught by one who has become identified with It, there is no further cogitation with regard to It. For It is beyond argumentation, being subtler even than the atomic quantity. (Śankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 139, v.1.2.8)

In order for the Vedanta teaching methodology to work as a pramāṇa, the student must also be adequately qualified by having reached a certain level of emotional maturity. These qualifications will be discussed in a later chapter.
Self-knowledge and self-Ignorance.

Having the background of Advaita Vedanta’s epistemology in mind, the central topic of inquiry, Self-knowledge, can now be approached. However, before going straight to the question of how Self-knowledge takes place through the teaching methodology, let us broaden the context to consider the question of why Self-knowledge is understood to be of interest to a seeker of this knowledge.

According to the Vedanta, a person becomes interested in studying the teachings because they are suffering from the condition (samsāra) created by bondage--rooted in Self-Ignorance--and they have come to realize that all other attempts to solve this problem through gaining experiences and objects in the world will never work. Therefore, one comes to study the teachings hoping to find a lasting solution to one’s confusion and suffering. This confusion can take the form of different existential questions that the student has when they come to the teacher such as: Who am I? or What is reality?

The solution that Advaita Vedanta offers for this problem is Self-knowledge, the idea being that when knowledge of the Self takes place, the seeker recognizes the Self as being full, complete, and not lacking. In the light of this knowledge, all of the false notions of oneself, which had been the cause of one’s suffering and confusion, are destroyed.

In the view of the Upanisads all that is undesirable is the result of self-ignorance, ignorance that can be destroyed by self-knowledge. And when self-ignorance is destroyed, all suffering and sorrow born of self-ignorance are also destroyed. (Dayananda, 2004, p. 119)

Self-knowledge liberates a person from bondage and suffering because the Self is revealed to be limitless, whole, and the source of happiness. The
concluding verse of the *Kena Upaniṣad* reflects the state of a person who has gained Self-knowledge, emphasizing its lasting nature.

Anyone who knows this thus (gained Self-knowledge), he, having dispelled sin, remains firmly seated in the boundless, blissful, and highest Brahman. He remains firmly seated (there). (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 94, v. 4.9)

The student, who has realized his own nature to be the Self, proclaims his overwhelming joy to the teacher in the text *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*.

Due to your grace I am blessed; I am the one who has accomplished all that is to be accomplished; I am released from the hold of *samsāra* (bondage); I am of the nature of *ānanda* (limitlessness/fullness) free from any lack and always there; I am the whole. (Dayananda, 1997, p. 287, v. 102)

In sum, Self-knowledge is understood to be the direct cause for liberation from the bondage created by Self-ignorance. The ignorance is said to fall away as a natural result of gaining knowledge.

**Teaching methodology of Advaita Vedanta.**

The essential practices or disciplines, called *sādhanas*, that form the means to gaining Self-knowledge in Advaita Vedanta are divided into two categories. The primary means (*upāya-nṛṣṭā*) for gaining Self-knowledge are discussed in this section. The secondary means (*upāya-nṛṣṭā*) are practices that are designed to help a person develop the kind of emotional maturity that is required for Self-knowledge to be gained. These practices are an important part of the Advaita system of psychology and will be discussed in a later chapter.

The threefold method that the tradition presents as the primary means for gaining Self-knowledge is *śravaṇa* (listening), *manana* (reflection), and *nididhyāsana* (contemplation) (Sadananda & Nikhilananda, 2002). *Śravaṇa*,
means listening, and refers specifically to the act of listening to the words of a
teacher who unfolds the verses of the Upaniṣads or other Vedantic texts, where
the teacher utilizes a particular method of teaching to communicate the vision to
the student. Both methods of reflection (manana) and contemplation
(nididhyāsana) are based on the knowledge that is gained in the context of
listening to the teaching (śravaṇam). The practice of reflection (manana) allows
the knowledge gained at the time of listening to be grappled with in order to work
through any questions or doubts that may arise. The practice of contemplation
(nididhyāsana) is a specific type of meditative practices designed to allow the
mind to rest in the knowledge of the Self that was initially apprehended at the
time of listening to the teaching. This threefold method for gaining Self-
knowledge is referenced in the following verse from the Brhadāranyaka
Upaniṣad.

The Self, my dear Maitreyi (name of student) should be realized—should be
heard of (śravaṇam), reflected on (manana) and meditated upon
(nididhyāsana).’ (Sankaracarya & Madhavananda, 1993, p. 247, v. 2.4.5)

The Vedantic teaching methodology, as a means of knowledge, works in a
twofold manner. One is to bring to awareness and negate false conclusions that
the student has made about the Self, and the second is to positively assert the true
nature of the Self and its identity with Brahman (Rambachan, 1991, chap. 3). To
understand what is involved in gaining Self-knowledge, we have to start by
looking into the nature of Self-ignorance to see how it operates dynamically in the
psyche.
An essential aspect emphasized in the teaching regarding the nature of the Vedantic Self is the fact that it is the simple existing awareness that one refers to as oneself when using the word “I.” In, *The Advaita Worldview* (2006), Anantanand Rambachan makes this point simple and clear.

The atman (Self) is the content of the word I and it is because of its self-revealing nature that one has the immediate sense of existing. A person cannot question his or her existence, without at the same time proclaiming it. To say, “I do not exist,” means, “I am aware that I do not exist.” The existence of the self as awareness, is implied in the statement. The words of the *Upanishads* do not reveal an entirely unknown self….The problem, argues Sankara is that while the self as awareness shines of itself in the mind, and one knows oneself to be an existent being, the specific nature of the self remains unknown. (Rambachan, 2006, pp. 52-53)

In sum, Self-ignorance does not imply complete ignorance of the Self; rather it refers to the false conclusions that are made about the specific nature of the Self, causing it to be mistakenly identified with the limited mind and body.

How does Self-ignorance function to produce false conclusions about the Self? In Advaita Vedanta ignorance (avidyā) is conceived of as a positive substance, which exists in the mind and produces a twofold dynamic effect: it covers (āvaraṇa) and projects (vikṣepa). The ignorance (avidyā) first acts as a covering (āvaraṇa) of the Self so that the nature of the Self is missed, then the mind projects (vikṣepa) false notions onto the Self, identifying it with those things that are closest to it experientially like the mind and body (*Vedantasāra*, 2002).

The effect of Self-ignorance, as a result of this twofold process, is that layer upon layer of false conclusions about the Self are produced in the mind and believed by the person to be true. These deeply rooted beliefs about oneself are lodged in the person’s psyche and this creates the conditions for much confusion
about oneself and the world. The term, Self-ignorance is used broadly in the tradition to refer to the ignorance itself that exists in the mind as well as the false conclusions about the Self are the effects of ignorance (avidyā).

The methodology employed by a teacher of Advaita Vedanta consists of words to guide the student in both of the ways mentioned above, to negate false conclusions about the Self and to point to its true nature as revealed in the scriptures.

The teacher handles Vedanta more as a means of knowledge than as a system of thought. As a means of knowledge, it analyzes common experiences of waking, dream, and sleep; of happiness and sorrow; of the known, the knowledge, and the knower-to prove the relative nature and dependent status of these. When the student is able to appreciate the relative nature and dependent status of these experiences, a context for communication of the Absolute and the Independent is created. With the help of the context, a teacher can use certain words that retain their essential sense, giving up their relative meaning to unfold the Absolute. Thus a teacher is able to communicate to the student and maintain a tradition of learning. (Dayananda, 2004, pp. 67-68)

Each Upaniṣad is structured as a dialogue between teacher and student. The student begins by asking an appropriate question and elicits a response from the teacher, providing a starting point for the teaching to begin. The verses of each Upaniṣad take a unique course in imparting the vision to the student and they vary in highlighting different aspects of the teaching; however the essential vision of reality is always the same. In the commentary of the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad Sankaracarya affirms this idea in saying:

We hold that it is the definite conclusion of all of the Upaniṣads that we are nothing but Ātmā, the Brahman that is always the same, homogeneous, one without a second, unchanging, birthless, undecaying, immortal, deathless and free from fear. (Sankaracarya & Madhavananda, 1993, p. 499)
The conclusion of the *Upaniṣads* is summed up in what is called a great statement (*mahāvākya*), which proclaims the identity of the individual Self with *Brahman*, the Self of the whole universe. One such statement is made in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* when the teacher says to the student: “You are that” (*tat tvam asi*), meaning “you,” the Self of the student, are “that,” *Brahman*. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 1997, p. 468, v. 6.8.7) There are statements such as these in each *Upaniṣad* however each of the four Vedas contains one great statement (*mahāvākya*) that is famously known.

In following with the teaching methodology, the Advaita teacher uses words to provide a context in which the student can have an immediate recognition of their own nature, by differentiating what is their true nature (*ātmā*) and what is not (*anātmā*). Swami Dayananda (2004) refers to the Vedanta *pramāṇa* as a “word-mirror” that throws you on your own lap and makes you see yourself. The teacher faces a unique challenge in teaching the subject matter of Advaita Vedanta, because unlike any other pursuit of knowledge, the topic of study, the Self, cannot be simply pointed to as an object of experience (2004). The Self, by its nature is a subjective reality. Another challenge the teacher faces is that the student comes to the teaching with layers of false ideas about the Self, which are to a large degree unconscious.

The teacher understands these challenges, and therefore unfolds the verses of the scriptures by employing the words with precision and care. When it comes to negating false conclusions about the Self, the use of relative language is not a problem because these conclusions are easily associated with objective reality.
For example in the teaching methodology known as seer-seen differentiation 
\textit{(Dṛg-Dṛśya-Viveka)}, the teacher points out that objects of experience that are usually taken to be one with the Self, like the body and mind, can in fact be differentiated from the Self, the subject who is aware of these as objects. In this example the meaning of the words “body” and “mind” are immediately known because the student is able to relate each word to an object of experience that obviously correlates with it. The meaning of the words “mind” and “body” in this example are just as obvious to the student as the meaning of any word that refers to an object of knowledge such as “tree” or “book.”

The situation is different when it comes to unfolding the nature of the Self. The scriptures use many different words that point to the nature of the Self in a positive way, however, because the Self is a non-objectifiable reality, the meaning of the words does not resolve into an object of experience in the world, as do the words “tree” or “book” (Dayananda, 1997, pp. 197-200). According to Vedanta, the Self is a self-evident reality that is subjective in nature (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000). It is the one who is aware of the objects, and itself cannot be objectified. Therefore, the words used in the teaching as descriptors to point to the Self, must resolve directly into the experiential reality of the Self in order for their meaning to be known.

The problem that the teacher faces is that all of the language that they have available to use has already been given meaning in the mind of the student from within the context of duality. Even words like infinite or consciousness have an immediate meaning \textit{(vācyārtha)} for us within duality. Therefore, the teacher has
to find a way to use these words to imply a secondary meaning of the word, an implied meaning (*lakṣārtha*) (Sadananda & Nikhilananda, 2002). The teachings of Vedanta go into a tremendous amount of discussion about how to do that. They present a way to use words that are locked within duality in such a way that they can break open the immediate meaning (*vācyārtha*) of the word and point to an implied meaning (*lakṣārtha*). For example, in interpreting the meaning of the statement “the wave is the ocean” the immediate meaning of the word “wave” is the waveform, and “ocean” is the entire ocean form. So if the immediate meaning is taken when I say “the wave is the ocean” the statement is not going to make sense because the tiny little wave is obviously not the same as the enormous ocean. In order for the statement to make sense it must be interpreted in such a way that the person understands the implied meaning which points to the essential nature of wave and ocean, water. If it is understood that the essential nature of both the wave and the ocean is water, then the implied meaning is grasped and the statement rings true.

This is what the teacher of Advaita is facing when they are trying to make the student understand the essential nature of the Self and its relationship to the creation. The teacher must use words that already have an immediate meaning assigned to them in such a way as to get to the essential truth of those words, which comes, through an implied meaning (Sadananda & Nikhilananda, 2002). This is done by taking time with each of the words used to describe the Self. The teacher reminds the student of the immediate meaning (*vācyārtha*) of the word and negates that meaning thereby creating the opportunity for the implied
meaning (*lakṣārtha*) to be understood. Words like consciousness, awareness, existence, limitless, infinite, eternal, non-dual, immortal, immutable, indestructible, unborn, and unattached are examples of the descriptive words that are used to point to the Self. If this communication is successful, the words will resolve into their implied meaning, which is known directly as the self-evident nature of the subject. This is what is meant by Dayananda (2004) when he refers to a “word-mirror.” The mind of the student is guided by the words of the teacher to turn inwards and reflect on the nature of the self-evident subject. When the teaching methodology is successful, the mind of the student becomes like a mirror reflecting the nature of the Self like still water clearly reflects the sun.

In sum, the teaching methodology that is used in Advaita Vedanta to impart Self-knowledge is rooted in the teacher-student relationship in which the teacher unfolds the meaning of the verses in the scriptures. This method is based on the understanding that the subject of study, the Self, is present at the time of the teaching as the innermost subject of the student.

**Ontological Vision of the Cosmic Universal Whole- Īśvara**

In addition to their focus on revealing the Self as the true nature, or reality of the individual, the teachings of Advita Vedanta address the nature of reality from the standpoint of the entire cosmic creation. According to Vedanta, Self-knowledge is incomplete without considering the ontological vision of reality of the entire creation because the ultimate claim the teaching make affirms the Self of individual (*ātmā*) to have a non-dual relationship with *Brahman*, the Self of the creation (Sankaracarya & Jagadananda, 1989). This section presents an overview
on the Vedantic ontological vision of the nature of reality from the standpoint of the cosmic creation as a whole, which is essential background material that supports the overall aim of this dissertation.

The claims that Advaita Vedanta makes about the nature of reality from the standpoint of the cosmic creation as a whole are accepted as valid in the tradition based on their acceptance of the Vedas as a valid means of knowledge. The scriptural (śruti) claims affirming the nature of Brahman, and the identity between the individual Self and Brahman, are known by way of direct knowledge (aparokṣa-jñānam) by one who is exposed to the teaching methodology. However, the claims that the scriptures make regarding the form of Īśvara, the universal cosmic being, are known through indirect knowledge (parokṣa jñāna) because they cannot be verified by direct experience (Rambachan, 1991, chap. 2).

The following sections define Brahman, and discuss the ontological relationship between Brahman and the creation. As we will see in the following chapters, having this vision clarified is key to understanding the psychology of Advaita, which establishes a non-dual identity between the individual Self (ātmā), the Self of the cosmic universe as a whole.

**Brahman and Mithyā: Two orders of reality.**

Brahman is defined in the teachings of Advaita Vedanta as limitless, existent consciousness (satyam-jñānam-anantam) (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003). Being limitless, Brahman is affirmed to be the only thing that exists in the sense of being absolutely real. The definition of absolute reality (paramārthika satyam) accepted in Advaita Vedanta is that which exists in all
three periods of time--past, present, and future (Comans, 2000). Thus, in order for a thing to be real, in the absolute sense, its existence has to be a permanent condition. The following verse from Alātaśānti-Prakaraṇa explains the logic supporting the Vedantic definition of absolute reality.

A thing that already exists does not pass into birth; and a thing that does not pre-exist cannot pass into birth. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 325, v. 5.4.4)

The argument here is that if thing does not exist in all three periods of time, it must have come into existence at a given point in time, and therefore, its existence had a beginning. If the existence of a thing has a beginning, its prior condition was non-existence. Since nothing can come from non-existence, such a thing cannot be said to exist in the absolute sense. As we will see in the following discussion, Vedanta affirms the fact that we experience the nature of all objects in the creation through our five sense organs as having a fleeting existence that comes and goes. While the existence of such objects of experience cannot be denied, Vedanta qualifies their existence as being dependent on something else, namely Brahman (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003).

The basic premise of Vedantic ontology is that Brahman is the only reality that exists in an absolute sense, and the cosmic universe is born of the nature of Brahman, and therefore non-separate from Brahman. From an ontological perspective, the created universe is understood to belong to a relative order of reality that is dependent on Brahman for its existence. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad opens with a verse of praise, which succinctly captures the relationship of Brahman to the created universe.
Salutation to That (Brahman) which is of the nature of consciousness, from which the whole universe was born, into which it gets dissolved, and by which it is sustained. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 239, v. 1.1)

In the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad a well-known metaphor is given to express the relationship of Brahman to the individual beings in the creation.

This is the truth, oh pleasing one! From a well-lighted fire how innumerable sparks of the same nature as fire come out, so too, varieties of beings are born from the Brahman that is akṣara (indestructible) and they go back into that alone. (Dayananda, 2006, p. 5, v. 2.1.1)

The image evoked in both of these verses is one of Brahman giving birth to the creation and the “beings” in the creation, symbolizing all objects that exist within the creation, sentient and insentient. The term used in Vedanta for the creation is jagat, which includes everything that exists in the entire time-space universe on all levels (Dayananda, 2006). The birth metaphors presented in the verses above represent the absolute nature of Brahman in relationship to the relative nature of the creation (jagat), which is manifested from Brahman into existence, is sustained for some time, and then goes out of existence once again.

According to Vedanta, Brahman, with a power known as Māyā, projects and resolves the creation cyclically so that it comes into existence, is sustained for sometime, and finally is resolved back into an un-manifest condition until it projects again.

Since it is stated (in the Vedas) “There is no diversity here,” and “The Lord on account of Māyā, (is perceived as manifold),” “(the Self) without being born (appears to be born in various ways),” it follows the He is born on account of Māyā alone. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 294, v. 3.24)
The question of cause for the projection of the creation is answered in Vedanta by
the claim that Brahman is a beginningless reality, there can be no cause
established. The argument that supports this conclusion is that if Brahman is
beginningless, therefore free from time, there was never a time that Brahman did
not exist. In order for the question of cause to be relevant, there would have to be
a prior condition that existed before Brahman (Dayananda, 2006). Māyā, said to
be an inherent capacity or power that is not separate from Brahman, is responsible
for the projection of the creation. Māyā, being non-separate from Brahman, is
also beginningless and therefore has no cause. Therefore, according to Advaita
Vedanta, the existence of the creation and the particular form that it takes cannot
be explained by cause and effect reasoning.

The non-duality of Brahman and the creation.

Brahman, the non-dual limitless, existent consciousness (sat-cit-ānanda),
is established in Advaita Vedanta as being the one from whom the creation
projects, is sustained, and resolves. How does the teaching account for the
existence of the creation side by side with a non-dual Brahman that is one without
a second? How can there even be a creation? The creation, which is experienced
as being real in the sense of its existence, and is experienced through the senses as
being of the nature of duality, must be accounted for. One can easily understand
this through the commonly used example of a clay pot that is used in the teaching
to show the relationship between Brahman and the creation (jagat) (Sankaracarya
& Vimuktananda, 2000).
When we consider a pot that is made of clay we would say that in reality there is only one, non-dual, clay there that happens to be in the form of a pot. The pot does exist, but in fact it is made of nothing but clay. The pot is different than a lump of clay and it has a useful reality within the world like holding water, etc. The relationship here is that the clay is the pot, but the pot is not the clay. The clay exists in spite of the pot, but the pot is totally dependent on the clay for its existence.

This is the relationship between Brahman and the creation. The creation is totally dependent for its being on Brahman, and Brahman is not dependent on the creation. Vedanta accounts for the existence of the creation by qualifying it into an order of reality called mithyā. Mithyā is defined as “dependent reality,” or as that which is neither absolutely real nor is it non-existent (sadasadbhyām anirvacanāya). The creation is said to project from Brahman by the creative power called Māyā. Some people will define the creation, which is an effect of Māyā, as “apparent” however the word “apparent” should be carefully understood, because there is a tendency to take it to mean “illusory.” In fact mithyā, the order of reality of the creation, is that which depends on something else for its existence, and does not mean illusory in the sense of being unreal. Swami Dayananda (2004) defines the term and its usefulness in clarifying the relationship between the creation and Brahman.

Mithyā is a technical term to point out the reality of a thing that depends entirely on something else. If the Lord (Īśvara) is the fundamental cause of the entire world, that cause, being independent, would be the truth, reality (satyam); and the world being the created object, would be mithyā. (2004, p. 271)
Everything that exists within the time-space creation on every level from gross to subtle is included in the category of mithyā. This is what Vedanta refers to as the world of objective empirical reality (vyāvahārika satyam). Any object within this world is not unreal in the sense of being non-existent (tuccham), but the truth of the object is not the thing as it appears to be. The truth of the object is Brahman. Therefore, that which belongs to mithyā as its order of reality is dependent on Brahman for its reality. Going back to the clay-pot example, we would say that the clay is real (satyam), and the pot is mithyā because it depends on the clay for its reality. This is how the non-duality between Brahman and the creation is established (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000). The reality of the creation is affirmed, but qualified by the category of mithyā as being a dependent reality, and the absolute nature of Brahman is maintained to be the only real thing that exists.

**Brahman as the material and intelligent cause of the creation.**

According to Advaita Vedanta Brahman is understood to be the both the material cause (upādāna-kāraṇa) and intelligent cause (nimitta-kāraṇa) of the creation (Tattvavidananda, 2011). The creation is projected by the creative power of Māyā, which exists in Brahman. The teaching affirms the obvious fact that there cannot be creation out of nothing, since the origin of existence from nonexistence is logically contradictory (Rambachan, 2004). The creation is said to go in and out of manifest form but not in and out of existence. By the power of Māyā the creation projects, is sustained, and then resolves back into an unmanifest condition until it projects again. The following verse in the Mundaka
*Upaniṣad*, gives some examples of phenomena within the creation as illustrations for the creator and material used to create as one being.

Just as the spider creates and withdraws its web, just as the plants and trees come into being from the earth, just as hair on the head and body grow from a living person, in the same manner, here, the creation (world) comes into being from the imperishable *Brahman*. (Dayananda, 2006, p. 75, v. 1.1.7)

*Brahman* is affirmed as the intelligent cause for the creation in the following verse, indicating that the creation is a manifestation of *Brahman’s* infinite knowledge.

*Brahman* bulges by knowledge. From that *Brahman* the unmanifest is born. From the unmanifest, *hiranya*garbha (total subtle body), is born. Then the total mind, the five elements, the worlds and actions are born. And due to actions, results are born. (Dayananda, 2006, p. 91, v. 1.1.8)

In the teaching of Vedanta, a classic example is given to help understand *Brahman* as the material and intelligent cause of the creation. Swami Dayananda (2004) presents this example in saying:

When you dream you see a whole world, a world created by your own unconscious mind. Where did you go for the material to create this world of yours? It is all from you. Also all the things you see in the dream were previously known to you. For the people you created in the dream you are all-knowing (*sarva*ñ*ā*) and all pervasive (*sarv*avyāpi). There is no part of the dream that your presence is not. The whole dream is you and only you. (p. 271)

The capacity of an individual to project the dream reality is equated here to *Brahman’s* capacity to project the universe because as phenomena they are the same. The difference, which will be discussed in a later section, is that the *Māyā* that projects as the entire creation, the objective empirical reality that we experience through the senses (*Īśvara*rasṛṣṭi), while the *Māyā* that the individual projects (*jīva*rasṛṣṭi) as in a dream or otherwise is a subjective creation (Dayananda,
The dream analogy shows how Brahman can be the material and intelligent cause of the creation similar to how one experiences the phenomena of dreaming.

Brahman as Ṣvara.

The term Ṣvara, is used in Advaita Vedanta to refer to Brahman when the creation is in a manifest condition. What is meant by Ṣvara, is no different from what has been discussed so far under the terms of Brahman and the creation, however using Ṣvara, highlights the conscious nature of the creation (Dayananda, 2004, pp. 48-50). Just as the individual experiences Brahman as self-revealing consciousness that can be known as the Self, Ṣvara, as the whole, is affirmed as a universal conscious being whose Self is Brahman and whose mind-body is in the form of the creation (jagat).

Ṣvara is referred to by many names in the scriptures as--“Lord,” ”The Divine,” and “The Supreme.” In the Bhagavādgīta, a dialogue takes place between Arjuna, the disciple, and Krishna, the Lord, who is giving the teaching. In the tenth chapter, Krishna makes many statements in the first person, declaring his all-pervading relationship to the manifest creation. These scriptural statements, convey the sense of Ṣvara, in the form of Krishna, having a personal relationship with the creation as being not separate from himself.

Well, O best of the Kurus (Arjuna), according to their importance I shall narrate to you My own divine manifestations that are well-known. There is no end to My manifestations. O Guḍākeśa (Arjuna), I am the Self residing in the hearts of all the beings. And I Myself am the origin and the middle as also the end of (all) the beings. (Dayananda, 2007, p. 135 vv. 10.20-21)
O Arjuna, whatsoever is the seed of all beings that I am. There is nothing moving or non-moving that can exist without Me. (Dayananda, 2007, p. 140, v. 10.39)

The intelligent order of the creation: Universal laws of \textit{karma} and \textit{dharma}.

The creation, as a manifestation of knowledge that is non-separate from \textit{Īśvara}, is understood in Advaita Vedanta to be governed by an intelligent order. This order is manifest in the form of empirical reality and can be perceived on every level of the creation- micro and macro, seen and unseen, gross and subtle, subjective and objective. Swami Dayananda (2004) speaks about \textit{Īśvara}’s order in saying:

When you look at the world and yourself, you necessarily appreciate a certain intelligent creation. You look at a tree, and animal, or a human body. You know that every part in each of these things has a certain role to play in the scheme of things. \textit{Īśvara} is the knower of all knowledge. All of creation is nothing but a manifestation of \textit{Īśvara}. All knowledge is \textit{Īśvara}, manifest in the form of the creation. (pp. 278-9)

The creation, according to Advaita Vedanta, is understood as being one whole intelligent entity with many interrelated parts that is held together by laws and principles, which comprise a governing order. In the texts of Advaita Vedanta, and the wider body of \textit{Vedic} literature, reference is made to the existence of certain universal laws that govern a subtle order in the creation. This subtle order has direct implications for the psychology of the individual person living in the creation.

According to Vedanta, the universal laws of \textit{karma} and \textit{dharma} act as organizing principles in the creation responsible for governing all cause and effect...
relationships in the creation. This includes the experience of the individual (jīva) living in this world and extends beyond to other worlds of experience (lokas) that are a part of the creation. The law of dharma, in the broadest sense, governs the moral order in the creation distinguishing good from bad and right from wrong. The basic law of dharma is equivalent to the golden rule, “Do unto others what you would have them do to you and don’t do to others what you would not have them do to you.” In a book titled The Value of Values (1993), Swami Dayananda discusses the psychology of values, and elaborates on the definition of dharma drawing its root back to basic common sense:

*Dharma* is a standard or norm of conduct derived from the way in which I wish others to view or treat me. The ‘dharmic’ mandates for behavior and attitude, though commonly found in religious scriptures, in fact, trace their source to pragmatic commonsense ethics, which religious ethics confirm. In other words, my norm for what is ‘proper’ behavior or a ‘good’ attitude is based on the way I wish others to treat or view me. (1993, p. 6)

The law of dharma also governs subtle consequences of actions, which are experienced as emotional effects that are either positive or negative depending on whether the action is aligned with the dharmic order or not. The results of dharma are said to be felt immediately by the person doing the action. For example, one of the basic laws of dharma is the value of speaking truthfully. If a person does not tell the truth in some situation, believing that this is necessary to preserve some other value that appears important in the moment, then the person will experience some degree of emotional pain in the form of guilt. The intensity of the feelings of guilt would depend on the particular situation and the impact on the person being lied to (Pramamanda Saraswati, 2001).
The law of *karma* governs subtle results of actions, causing consequences to arise as results from a given action. Swami Satprakashananda discusses the law of *karma* in chapter five of his book, *The Goal and the Way*, (1977a). He defines the word *karma* as “action,” or “work,” but can be used in context to refer to the law itself, to a given action, or can refer to the subtle cause of an action, which results from the law of *karma*. The *karmic* result of an action will take the form of events or circumstances that manifest in one’s current lifetime or a future lifetime. In accordance with the law of *karma*, positive results (*punya*) are the consequence of good actions, while negative results (*pāpa*) come from bad actions. The law of *karma* itself determines the result of any given action, depending on the specific context and circumstances in which the action was taken. Categories of *karma* are differentiated from one another to clarify the subtle variations in the way that *karma* is accrued and manifested. One type is responsible for specific events that unfold in a person’s life (*saṅcita-karma*) while another determines the general course that a person’s life takes in a given lifetime (*prārabdha-karma*) (Satprakashananda, 1977).

The *Vedic* cosmology outlined in the scriptures identifies the law of *karma* as being the organizing principle that is responsible for governing the process of reincarnation (Deussen, 1998). The theory of reincarnation says that as long as the individual (*jīva*) remains living in the condition of bondage (*saṃsāra*) due to Self-ignorance they will continue to be reborn again and again according to their *karma*.

At death, the self, the real man, leaves the physical body, but retains the subtle and causal body. The mind and all of its contents belongs to the
subtle body. According to those impressions of karma (including volitional actions, experiences, and thoughts) that become prevalent in the mind of a dying man, a very fine physical vesture for the subtle and causal body is formed at the time of his departure from the gross body. This fine garb carries the potencies of the next gross body he assumes. (Satptakashananda, 1977, p. 211)

The *Vedic* system of cosmology includes within it the existence of different worlds of experience (*lokas*) in which the transmigrating individual (*jīva*) can be born depending on one’s *karma*. That being referred to as the “higher,” or “virtuous” worlds are the heaven worlds, which are seven in number, and the “lower” or “world of the sinful” refers to the hell worlds which are also seven in number. The *Praśna Upaniṣad* summarizes the actual event of the individual (*jīva*) leaving the physical body and traveling at the time of death.

And the *udāna* (function that ejects the soul from the body) moving upward through one of them (the subtle energy channels called *nādīs*) leads the departing soul to the world of the virtuous in consequence of his virtuous deeds, to the world of the sinful, in consequence of his sinful deeds, and to the human world in consequence of both. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, pp. 443-6, vv. 3.7-8, & 3.10)

The individual (*jīva*) in its subtle body form (*sūkṣma-śarīra*) can therefore travel to different worlds to exhaust positive or negative *karma*. But eventually, due to *karma*, the individual (*jīva*) will be reborn into this world. Once a person gains Self-knowledge in a given lifetime, and is no longer identified with the mind-body-sense-complex (*jīva*), the person is liberated from the cycle of rebirth and the process of transmigration comes to an end. The following verse from the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* indicates that it is only due to the desires born of ignorance that the individual (*jīva*) is reborn.

That person who desires objects, thinking (about them), is born in those respective worlds with those objects. Whereas for a fulfilled person for
whom everything has been achieved, all desires dissolve here itself. 
(Dayananda, 2006, p. 193, v. 3.2.2)

Conclusion

In sum, this chapter has presented three topics that are central pillars in the teachings of Advaita Vedanta, and provide key background in support of developing a theoretical platform to discuss the psychology of Advaita Vedanta. The Vedantic epistemological theories of the six valid means of knowledge and the theories of self-validity and self-luminosity of knowledge were defined. The Vedas as a revealed means of knowledge were discussed followed by a detailed outline of how Self-knowledge takes place, using words as a means of knowledge for revealing the nature of the Self. Finally, the Vedantic ontological vision of the cosmic universe as a whole was presented. The basic premise of this vision was affirmed, namely that Brahman, limitless existent consciousness, is the only reality that exists on the absolute level. The non-dual relationship between Brahman and the creation was discussed, affirming the existence of the creation as being a dependent reality (mithyā) that comes into being by Brahman ‘s creative power known as Māyā.

The following chapter presents a model for the structural landscape and function of the human psyche based on the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. This chapter will define the Vedantic psychological concepts that form the theoretical building blocks that must be developed in order to then engage the central question being explored in this study, namely the psychology of bondage and liberation.
Chapter 3: Structure and Function of the Human Psyche in Advaita Vedanta

Introduction

The previous chapter presented an overview of the epistemological assumptions that are held in Advaita Vedanta, the process of teaching that is a means for gaining Self-knowledge, and the ontological vision of the cosmic creation, which informs Vedantic psychology. This chapter continues to build a theoretical foundation for Vedantic Psychology by defining the structural landscape of the psyche. An understanding of this conceptual landscape provides a platform from which to further develop a discussion about the psychological nature of bondage and liberation in the following chapters.

In presenting a conceptual framework of the psyche, the Vedantic concepts will be defined using the Sanskrit word as a starting point, followed by the English translations that are most commonly accepted by Vedantic scholars: Gambirananda, Swami Dayananda, and Swami Chinmayananda. A number of the Vedantic psychological concepts are similar with those found in Western psychological theories. In some of these cases the English word used to translate a Sanskrit term shares the same meaning as it does in Western psychological thinking. For example, the terms will, perception, thinking, reasoning, discrimination, and memory all fall into that category. However, when it comes to some of the more foundational concepts such as the Self and the ego, the Vedantic definitions contrast with definitions ascribed to these terms in other models. In these cases differentiating the Vedantic concepts is essential in order for the differences to be made clear. Therefore, in these cases the Vedantic definition will
be presented and then compared and contrasted with definitions of the same terms found in other Western models.

**The Vedantic Self and the Jīva**

At the most basic level, the individual psyche in Advaita Vedanta is characterized as having two components. The first is the Self, which is limitless existent consciousness and the second is what Vedanta calls the jīva, the human individual. A verse from the *Mundaka Upaniṣad* uses the metaphor of two birds sitting in a tree to convey the relationship between the Self and jīva.

Two shining birds that are always together and have the same origin are perched on the same tree. One of them eats fruits of different tastes and the other watches. (Dayananda, 2006, p. 132, v. 3.1.1)

The two birds are both “shining” because they are both expressions of one consciousness. The bird that eats the fruits of experience is the jīva, awareness conditioned by a given mind, *prāna* (life force), and the senses. The bird that watches is the unconditioned Self, which is not engaged with the actions nor the fruits of experience, but is present as a witness (*sāksī*) to all experience (Dayananda, 2006).

According to Vedanta, the Self is the true identity of the human individual, and the jīva, the mind-body-sense-complex, is dependent on the Self for its existence or reality. The jīva is understood in Vedanta as belonging to the order of reality called *mithyā*, a dependent reality that relies on the Self, for its being, and does not exist apart from it (Balasubramanian, 1994, p. 63). The Self and the jīva cannot be separated from each other. Their relationship is such that, though the jīva is dependent on the Self for its existence, the Self exists independently
from the jīva. Therefore, when the jīva is, the Self is, but when the jīva is not, the Self still is. In his commentary on the verse from the Mundaka Upaniṣad stated above, Swami Dayananda (2007) describes this relationship.

The jīva himself is conscious because of the ātmān (Self) alone. The ‘I’ thought of the one who enjoys is centered on ātmān, which is pure consciousness. Whenever there is a subtle body, consciousness manifests as a doer and enjoyer. What is manifested is a shadow or reflection, and the one that manifests is the reality. This reflected consciousness in the mind, called the jīva, is mithyā. (pp. 135-6)

Even when a person, because of Self-ignorance, makes the mistake of identifying oneself with the jīva, Vedanta claims that the Self is, and always remains to be the true nature of the human individual. The Self remains as a constant reality, existing independently from the changing conditions of the mind-body-sense-complex, jīva. The Self is defined as being changeless and free from time, untouched by the fluctuations of the mind-body-sense experience of the jīva (Dayananda, 1997) and is, therefore, unaffected. The following sections will discuss the Vedantic Self and then the jīva at length, including a breakdown of the various components of the jīva and how they function together dynamically.

Defining the Self

The Vedantic Self is defined as limitless existent consciousness that exists prior to, and independent from all other aspects of the psyche. To reveal the nature of the Vedantic Self in essence, encompasses the crux of the whole teaching of Advaita Vedanta. All of the teachings contained in the Upaniṣads and other texts are aimed at the revelation of one simple assertion that defines the nature of the Self in relation to the human individual and the entire cosmic creation. This one assertion, when understood correctly, reveals the entire vision
of reality presented in the teachings, namely that the Self of the human individual
is one with the Self of all beings in the creation and the creation as a whole
(Brahman) (Sri Chandrasekharendra, 2005).

Each Vedantic text takes a unique path in unfolding the teaching, however
they are all aimed at affirming the same ultimate conclusion, which is known as
the “great statement,” or mahavakya. The great statement found in every text
proclaims the identity between the Self of the individual (ātmā), and the Self of
the entire cosmic creation (Brahman). One of the most a well-known mahavakyas
in found in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad.

That which is this subtle essence, all this (the creation) has got That as the
Self. That is the Truth. That is the Self. Thou art That. (Sankaracarya &
Gambhirananda, p. 468, v. 6.8.7)

In this verse the teacher is speaking directly to the student proclaiming the
identity of “Thou,” the individual Self (ātmā) of the student, and “That,” the Self
of the creation (Brahman).

Because this study is focused on the psychology of the individual and not
the whole cosmology of Advaita Vedanta, the central concern here is to discuss
the nature of the Self from the standpoint of the “ātmā,” the Self of the individual,
and to understand the relationship of the Self to the other aspects of the individual
which will be denoted in the discussion as “the mind-body-sense-complex.”

However, in defining the Self from the standpoint of the individual it is important
to place the discussion within the context of Advaita’s ultimate assertion about the
individual Self, namely that it is one and the same with Brahman, the Self of the
creation.
The fact that the individual Self is revealed in Advaita to be the Self of the whole creation is part of defining the Vedantic Self and therefore a definition without it would be incomplete. At the same time, it is not necessary to understand the nature of the Self as the Self of the creation (Brahman), in order to understand the Self from the standpoint of the individual. As we will see, the nature of the Self is available to be known through direct knowledge (aparōkṣa-jñānam). Therefore, it is not necessary to understand the creation in order for the Self to be known.

In addition to the reasons given so far, there is a practical reason for providing this context on the relationship of the words ātmā and Brahman to the Vedantic Self. As the discussion unfolds in this chapter, textual verses and commentaries will be quoted which use both of the terms ātmā, or ātmān, and Brahman. Based on the discussion above, the reader can assume that both terms that appear in the quoted texts and commentaries, are interchangeable with the term “Self” as it is being defined in this study.

**Use of words as a means of gaining Self-knowledge (śabda-pramāṇa).**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the key to defining the nature of the Self in Advaita Vedanta lies in the use of words in the form of the texts, commentaries, and the process of oral teaching that takes place between teacher and student. Words are used both positively and negatively to define the Self. Negation is used to state what the Self is not (neti-neti) and to negate mistaken ideas about the Self. Positive assertion is used to point directly to the nature of the Self (lakṣaṇa).
The following verse from the *Mundaka Upanishad* is an example of negative language being used to describe the Self.

The wise realize everywhere that which is invisible, ungraspable, without family, without caste, without sight or hearing, without hand or foot, immortal... (Dayananda, 2006, p. 58, v. 1.1.6)

In this verse a list of adjectives are given are in the negative to describe what the Self is not.

Language is also used in a positive manner to point to the nature of the Self. The Sanskrit word for this use of language is *lakṣaṇa*. There are two different types of *lakṣaṇa* used a means of positively defining the nature of the Self, *tatasta-lakṣaṇa* and *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa*. In the following section a definition will be given for the nature of the Self, utilizing both of these positive methods, or *lakṣaṇas*.

*Tatasta-lakṣaṇa* is the method for defining the Self that uses language to point to the Self, through something that is closely associated with it (Satprakasananda, 1995). For example, to point to the nature of the Self as “existence” (*satyam*), the method of *tatasta-lakṣaṇa* would point to the existence of the mind and body to get to the existence of the Self, which is intimately associated with the mind and body. Another word used in Vedanta to point to the nature of the Self is consciousness (*jñānam*). Using *tatasta-lakṣaṇa* in this case would use words to point the student to the mind’s experience of being conscious to get to the consciousness of the Self.

A traditional illustration for explaining the method of *tatasta-lakṣaṇa* as a means of knowledge paints the picture of a residential street where all the houses
look exactly alike. In this scene a man is standing in the street trying to point out to his friend which house belongs to him. In order to draw attention to his house, and differentiate it from the others, he looks for something distinct about his house that makes it stand apart from the others. He notices that there is a bird perched on his roof. Therefore he uses the bird as a pointer and says, “See the house with the bird perched on the roof? That house is mine.” Ultimately the bird has nothing to do with the object seeking to be defined, the house, however, acts as an indicator, something that draws the attention close to the house so that the house can be differentiated as the object to be known.

The second method for positively defining the Self is called svarūpa-lakṣaṇa. This method uses words to point directly to the nature of the Self. The use of svarūpa-lakṣaṇa is found throughout all of the texts of Advaita Vedanta. Words are presented throughout the verses, which describe the nature of the Self such as limitless, all pervasive, infinite, indestructible, formless, and self-luminous. While a variety of words are given in texts to describe the Self, there are three specific words taken together that are held in the tradition to be the formal definition as svarūpa-lakṣaṇa for the Self. The following verse from the Taittirīya Upaniṣad contains the all-important statement that defines the Self as svarūpa-lakṣaṇa. Anantanand Rambachan (1991) calls it “perhaps the most important definition of Brahman in Advaita Vedanta.”

Om! The knower of Brahman attains the highest. Brahman is truth, knowledge, and infinite. He who knows that Brahman existing in the intellect which is lodged in the supreme space in the heart, enjoys, in identification with the all-knowing Brahman, all desirable things simultaneously. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 304, v. 2.1.1)
The Sanskrit phrase that contains the svarūpa-lakṣaṇa for the Self is
“satyam jñānam anantam brahma,” which, is translated in this text by Swami
Gambhirirananda as, “Brahman is truth, knowledge, and infinite” (Sankara &
Gambiarananda, 1973, p. 304). In his commentary on this verse Sankara writes,
“the sentence (satyam jñānam anantam brahma)-Brahman is truth, knowledge,
infinite-is meant as a definition of Brahman. For the three words beginning with
satya are meant to distinguish Brahman, which is the substantive” (2003, p. 307),

To understand the meaning of the Vedantic Self through the words,
satyam jñānam anantam brahma, it is critical to first understand the unique way
that Advaita Vedanta understands the relationship between a word and its
meaning when words are being used as svarūpa-lakṣaṇa. In a commentary
Swami Dayananda (1997) discusses the paradox involved when the words
satyam, jñānam, and anantam are given as a definition of the Self, which is said
to be unknowable through words.

These words are svarūpa-laksana of Brahman. Lakṣaṇa means definition,
which reveals an object. A svarūpa-lakṣaṇa should be such that it should
reveal only the object in the mind. The defining word or words cannot
afford to cover any other object. The lakṣaṇa distinguishes a given object
from all other objects. Here the word satyam (existence) is linguistic
meaning it is commonly used in the language. How can a commonly used
word be employed to describe Brahman? Brahman is unlike anything you
know. So to reveal Brahman I should use words which are unlike any
word that you know. I cannot pick up any particular word to describe
Brahman because it is revealed only by the śruti (scriptures). And the śruti
says, “Brahman is that from where the words come back, along with the
mind.” That means it is beyond all words. At the same time Brahman is to
be known and is knowable. Being knowable it should be communicable.
And if it is communicable then it should be available for being described
by words. (p. 198)
As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a particular method employed in the Vedanta teaching tradition, which aims to establish a different kind of relationship between the word and its meaning than the way words are used in everyday communication about the world of duality. This method utilizes the words given as a definition of the Self as a means of knowledge (pramāṇa) for revealing the Self, which is beyond words.

First, the immediate meaning of the words (vācyārtha) must be negated in order to break the mind’s association of the word with everyday reality. This opens up the possibility for a different meaning to be considered. This methodology seeks to reveal an implied meaning (lakṣārtha) of the words. In this case, the word is being used as a pointer, directing the mind inward to the Self, the meaning of the word, which is experientially present and self-evident as the nature of the person listening to the teaching.

An illustration used in the tradition to explain the relationship between a word and its meaning is a person who is trying to make their friend see the sliver of a crescent moon at dusk, which is barely visible. The person points towards the crescent moon with her finger to direct the eye of her friend to seeing the image. If the friend stares at the fingertip of the person (the word) and doesn’t let the fingertip guide the eye toward seeing the moon (the meaning of the word), the subtle beauty of the crescent moon will be missed. But if the friend is able to look in the direction the fingertip is pointing and follow the line of vision up to the sky, then the crescent moon will reveal itself (meaning of the word). With this idea in
mind let us now consider the definition of the Self through each of the three words, which the scriptures use to describe it-satyam, jñānam, and anantam.

**Self as satyam.**

The meaning of the word *satyam* is best captured in English by the words existence, being, truth, or reality. Each of these words is used at various times in the translation of the Vedantic texts. *Satyam* points to the nature of the Self as existence that is independent of any other source for its being and the nature of which is unchanging. The following definitions expound on the meaning of *satyam*, referred to in some cases as *satya*.

As for *satya*, a thing is said to be *satya*, true, when it does not change the nature that is ascertained to be its own; and a thing is said to be unreal when it changes the nature that is ascertained to be its own. Hence a mutable thing is unreal. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 308)

The term *satyam* (reality) indicates the non-deviation of an object from its established nature. The opposite is *anatam* (unreality). Changeability is thus equivalent to untruth, or unreality. *Satyam*, therefore, distinguishes *Brahman* from all changing and therefore, unreal things. (Rambachan, 1991, p. 73)

Generally speaking the concept of “existence” or “is-ness” is thought of in reference to objects, people, or situations that we experience. We affirm the existence, truth, or reality of all objects of experience in the outside world such as “the chair is,” “the mountain is,” “the flower is” and in the interior world of our own minds and bodies when we experience “the thought is,” “the feeling is,” “the sensation is.” All of these things are experienced as having existence. The existence of everything we experience is implicit in the experience of the thing itself. If we experience something we are experiencing it because it exists. This is an obvious fact, “everything is.”

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The nature of existence indicated by satyam, as a pointer to the nature of the Self, is not implicitly connected to the existence of any thing in particular. Satyam is the nature of pure existence or being itself. In order to understand what is meant here, the mind has to be directed to the experiential quality of one’s personal experience of existing. The meaning of the word existence is contained in the words “I am.” When a person says “I am” they are labeling the simple experience of existing or being. The simple quality of being is so much an implicit aspect of our experience that it is easy to overlook, however if the mind is directed toward one’s own being or presence, the simple truth can be affirmed “yes, I exist…I am here.”

The difficulty in grasping the nature of the Self as pure existence, is that he mind is conditioned to think of existence in reference to an object of experience. It is generally accepted as a default assumption that all objects of experience exist, but it is not at all obvious what existence is itself. The Vedantic Self is affirmed as being of the nature of pure existence independent of any object. Therefore, in order to grasp the meaning of the word satyam to point the nature of the Self, the association of existence with objects of experience must be broken, and the meaning of the word must resolve into one’s direct experience of existence.

**Self as jñānam.**

Jñānam, the second word used to define the Self, is generally translated as “consciousness,” “awareness,” or “knowledge.” Jñānam points to the nature of the Self as pure consciousness, or pure awareness. The word “knowledge” is also
commonly found as a translation for \( jñānam \) because the nature of the Self has the quality of “knowing,” or being a “knower.” The language used to discuss the Self in this capacity can be rather confusing because our default thinking conceives of knowledge as something that is gained by a subject or entity that we call the “knower.” Vedanta explains this phenomena by saying that when the Self, as pure consciousness, is identified with the mind it appears as if the Self is a knower (Dayananda, 1997). Because all perceptions and cognitions are experienced as being known by the subject, the natural conclusion by the mind is that the experiences are known by an agent of knowing, or a “knower.”

According to Vedanta, the conclusion that the Self is a “knower” is the result of ignorance, which creates the conditions for the Self to be identified with the mind, and seemingly become a “knower.” Vedanta affirms the Self, not as a knower, but as the nature of knowing, or consciousness, which shines of its own accord independent of any object of knowledge. In other words the Vedantic Self is defined through the word \( jñānam \) as the experience of “knownness,” or “being known,” without any object of knowledge connected to it. It is that which lights up every object of knowledge and gives it the experience of being known. The “knownness” of the objects is not attributed to the existence of a knower, but is attributed to the nature of the Self as self-shining consciousness (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003).

In a section of Sankara’s commentary on the \( Taittirīya Upaniṣad \) verse (2.1.1) he presents the definition of the Self as \( jñānam \) and emphasizes the point described above. “It is said that Brahman is \( jñānam \). \( Jñāna \) means
knowledge, consciousness. The word jñānam conveys the abstract notion of the verb (jīna to know); and being an attributor of Brahman along with truth and infinitude, it does not indicate the agent of knowing (p. 309). Sankara’s (2003) commentary affirms the fact that the Self does not undergo any change to become a knower of the objects, but shines because its nature is self-luminous.

Knowledge, which is the true nature of the Self, is inseparable from the Self, and so it is everlasting. Still, the intellect, which is the limiting adjunct (of the Self) becomes transformed into the shape of the objects while issuing out through the eyes etc. (for cognizing things). These configurations of the intellect in the shape of sound etc., remain objectively illuminated by the Consciousness that is the Self, even when they are in an incipient state; and when they emerge as cognitions, they are still enlightened by that Consciousness. Hence these semblances of Consciousness-a Consciousness that is really the Self are imagined by the non-discriminating people to be referable by the word knowledge bearing the root meaning (of the verb to know); to be attributes of the Soul itself; and to be subject to mutation. But the consciousness of Brahman is inherent in Brahman and is inalienable from It, just as the light of the sun is from the sun or the heat of fire is from the fire. Consciousness is not dependent on any other cause (for its revelation), for it is by nature eternal (light). (pp. 313-4)

The self-luminous quality of consciousness that Sankara speaks of is essential to understanding the Vedantic definition of the Self. The closest example that we have of something being self-luminous is the sun, which shines of its own accord. Regardless of the atmosphere surrounding the earth- be it cloudy, stormy, or completely clear skies-the sun shines just as fully and brightly in every moment because “to shine” is simply its nature. Like that it is the nature of the Self to shine as pure consciousness or awareness. As Sankara stated in the commentary above, self-evident and self-luminous consciousness (the Self) is not dependent on any other source to light it up because its own nature is the light that lights up everything else. The following verse from the Munḍaka Upaniṣad says
this in poetic language juxtaposing the light of the Self with the most powerful objective sources of light that we experience on the earth to make the point.

The sun does not light up that Brahman. The moon and the stars do not light it. These flashes of lightening do not light it. How can this fire light it? Everything shines after that self alone which is light of all lights. By its light all this shines. (Dayananda, 2006, p. 116, v. 2.2.11)

In normal everyday language the word consciousness is associated with experiences that come and go related to changing states of the mind. For example when we are awake we are conscious versus being asleep, knocked out, or in a coma, when we say we are unconscious. Consciousness is spoken of in relation to the mind when we say some thoughts, beliefs, and feelings are conscious and some are unconscious, but can become conscious under the right conditions.

When the word consciousness is used in such a way it is referring to changing states of the mind. In order to grasp the way that consciousness is being defined in Vedanta, these associated meanings with the word need to be negated. The changing states of the mind mentioned above have nothing to do with the self-luminous consciousness of the Self as it is defined in Advaita Vedanta (Balaji, 2005).

Consciousness, when used to define the Vedantic Self, refers to pure and unchanging awareness itself, without any content attached to it. This is a consciousness in which all changing states of the mind take place, which remains present as the luminary that lights up the changing states of the mind (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, 1998). Therefore, any psychological phenomena that falls into the category of a changing state of mind—from waking to dreaming to deep sleeping and everything in between—should be disassociated with the
word consciousness for the purpose of understanding how the word is used in Vedantic psychology.

**Self as anantam.**

*Anantam* literally means “without end” and is translated as “limitlessness” or “infinite.” This word points to the nature of the Self as being beyond any form of limitation. The limitlessness of the Self is discussed in terms of time, space, quality, and number. The Self is limitless in terms of time, being eternal. The Self is limitless in terms of space being spatially infinite. The Self is limitless quantitatively in that it is only one, not belonging to any category. The Self is one undivided being, which has no parts. Being limitless in all of the ways just mentioned, logically speaking there is no room for anything else to exist outside of the Self because there is no boundary existing anywhere to make a division between two things. This is what is meant by the concept of non-duality of the Self. “It is non-dual. It is one. It is infinite. In it one cannot see any other thing, one cannot hear any other thing, one does not comprehend any other thing” (Sinha, 1985, pp. 246-247).

The concept of *anantam*, similar to *satyam* and *jñānam*, cannot be understood by taking the commonly associated meaning of the word “limitless.” The idea of something being limitless is unfamiliar to the mind, which is only capable of viewing things through the lens of duality. Through this lens the meaning is defined based on things being limited in space and time. For example an apple is limited in space by the boundary around its edges. The apple is also limited in terms of time in the sense that one moment it exists and the next
moment it will not exist if perhaps it is eaten and digested, or if it falls on the
ground and decomposes into the earth. The limitlessness of the Self cannot be
comprehended in these terms and can only be known through the direct revelation
of the Self as being without limitation.

In his commentary on the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* verse (2.1.1) Sankara
(2003) expounds on this point emphasizing the fact that if something is infinite it
cannot be known by anything other than itself because by definition infinite
implies there being no other thing outside of it that is capable of knowing it.

That, indeed, is infinite which is not separated from anything. If it be the
agent of knowing, It becomes delimited by the knowable and the
knowledge, and hence there cannot be infinitude. According to another
Vedic text: “The Infinite is that where one does not understand anything
else. Hence the finite is that where one understands something else. (p. 309)

Just like *satyam* and *jñānam*, the meaning of the word *anantam*, the
limitlessness of the Self, can only be revealed as the nature of the Self. Thus, the
word limitless should be understood to be used as a pointer to direct the mind to
the Self, a reality whose nature is limitless.

**Self as satyam, jñānam, anantam.**

The words *satyam, jñānam, and anantam* have been discussed above and
defined individually. However, in order to understand the way these three words
are meant to be taken as a positive definition of the Self (*svarūpa-lakṣaṇa*), it is
important to further clarify the meaning of the statement *satyam jñānam anantam
brahma* as it is formally taught in Advaita Vedanta. According to Vedanta, the
three words *satyam, jñānam, and anantam* are predicate nominatives in
apposition with each other with *brahma*, the Self, as the substantive of the
sentence. (Laksmidhara & Tattvavidananda, 2009) In other words, these three words are meant to be taken as a package of three because the meaning of each of the words is limited by the meaning of the other two. Therefore, to understand the definition of each word individually, it is necessary to include the other two adjectives as part of the package.

Anatanand Rambachan (2006) says that when the three adjectives are defined in the context of being mutually associated with each other, this supports the aim of disassociating each of the individual words from their everyday meanings. He states that, “the juxtaposition of anantam (limitless) and satyam (self-existent) and jñānam (self-evident) removes any suggestion of limits in the normal use of these terms” (p. 41). Therefore, when the words existence and consciousness are qualified by the word limitless, this negates the idea of an “existence” that is defined in reference to a limited object, and the idea of a “consciousness” that is defined in reference to the limited mind. Applying the concept of limitlessness to existence, and consciousness automatically negates the possibility of assuming a default position of defining the words in a worldly context as was discussed above. In sum, to correctly apprehend the use of these three essential words that are used in the tradition to define the Self, the conclusion here is that the three words must be defined within the context of their mutual proximity with each other.

In a commentary by Sankaracarya (2003) he makes this point in saying,

Brahman by nature is devoid of all distinctions. In this way, the word satya, which means external reality in general can indirectly refer to Brahman (in such expressions) as “Brahman is truth,” but it cannot denote It. Thus the words truth, consciousness, and limitless, occurring in mutual
proximity. And restricting and being restricted by each other, distinguish Brahman from other objects denoted by the words, truth, (consciousness and limitless), and thus become fit for defining it as well. (p. 315)

The Vedantic Self in Comparison

The Vedantic Self, as a psychological concept, is unequal to any concept of the self found in the models of Western depth psychologists such as Freud, Jung, and Kohut. This claim is one of the main contributions of this research, and is based upon the work of Carol Whitfield (2009), who concluded that the Jungian and Vedantic Self are fundamentally different. This study affirms Whitfield’s conclusion and shows that the same is true for Freud and Kohut as well. Although every model of the human psyche is based on a concept of the self, there is no model in the West that contains a concept that is comparable to the Vedantic Self.

Carl Jung’s psychological model for the human psyche is based on the dynamic relationship between his two fundamental psychological concepts, the Self and the ego. Although Jung studied the Hindu Upaniṣads and is known to have based his concept of the Self on those studies, Jung’s Self is fundamentally different from the Vedantic Self. Whitfield’s book (2009), The Jungian myth and Advaita Vedanta, addresses this topic in depth and concludes that indeed parallels can be drawn between Jung’s Self and the Vedantic concept of Īśvara; however, ultimately the Jungian and Vedantic Self are fundamentally different and should therefore be set apart.

The Vedantic Self is not accounted for in the Jungian model of the psyche. Jung in fact had no use for such a Self, because he did not understand the relationship of pure consciousness to the ego. Jung understood the Eastern
concept of pure consciousness to be beyond the ego and transcendent to it, and he identified himself with the ego. (Whitfield, 2009, p. 143)

The difference between the Jungian and Vedantic Self is pronounced in two specific ways. First the metaphysical reality that is attributed to the respective Self concepts is different. Second, the way that the Self is conceived of structurally in relationship to individual identity is different. Jung maintained that the origin of the Self was unconscious and therefore could only be experienced in relationship to the ego, either through being projected onto a symbol, (i.e. religious images or figures) in the outer world, or as a content of consciousness related to by the ego turned to look inward (Edinger, 1972). In either case the Self for Jung was not considered to be a metaphysical reality that existed independent from the ego as it is in Vedanta.

In terms of the role that the Self plays in individual identity, Jung defined the Self as the total personality, and the ego as subordinate to the Self, as a psychic center (Jung & Campbell, 1971). However, the ego for Jung is always identified as being as being the centre of consciousness to which all contents of consciousness are related including the Self. He believed that the mature ego could recognize its subordinate nature to the Self, and surrender to the Self as the true center of the personality, although he maintained the idea that even for the matured psyche the ego remained to be associated with the conscious principle, and individual identity. (1971)

The description above of Jung’s model of the psyche and his definition of the Self, clarifies another point of difference between the Jungian and Vedantic Self. Vedanta affirms the Self as being the true identity of the individual, even though it may appear otherwise in the state of bondage (samsāra) because of the
effects of ignorance. Jung’s model links the identity of the individual with the ego, which relates to the Self as an inner reality in the psyche. Therefore, in reference to identity, the conclusion again is that the Vedantic Self and Jungian Self are fundamentally different.

Heinz Kohut’s psychological theory, known as “self psychology,” revolves around the central concept of the self. His psychological system is developmental and focuses on the relationships between the individual self and what he calls self-objects, which are generally other people. Kohut’s theory is about the development of the self in early childhood relationships with primary care givers and the therapeutic relationship between therapist and client as a space in which the self can develop and become healthier and more cohesive (Kohut, 1984).

In comparison with the Vedantic Self, Kohut’s (1984) self concept is shown to differ in two fundamental ways. First, he clearly states that he cannot affirm anything definitive about the essential nature of the self, and second what is said about the self in different contexts indicates an entity that has form and structure, which changes through time.

The self is ..not knowable in its essence…Demands for an exact definition of the nature of the self disregard that the fact that “the self” is not a concept of an abstract science, but a generalization derived from …inner experiences to which we later refer to as “I”…We can describe certain characteristic vicissitudes of this experience. We can describe the various cohesive forms in which it appears…we can do all that but will never know the essence of the self as differentiated from its manifestations. (p. 311)

This quote from Kohut’s writing affirms the fundamental differences between Kohut’s self and the Vedantic Self in both of the ways mentioned above.
Kohut’s self is stated as being “unknowable in it’s essence” whereas the Vedantic Self is knowable directly as the experience of “I am.” In addition, the quote affirms Kohut’s self as being something that changes throughout time, while the Vedantic Self is changeless in nature.

In sum, comparing the Vedantic Self with comparable self-concepts in the theories of Western depth psychology, clarifies the differences that exist between the theories, and the therapeutic models built upon them. There is no model of Western psychology that contains a self-concept that is the same or even similar to the concept of the Self affirmed here based on the teachings if Vedanta. Therefore, the Vedantic Self is established here as being essentially different from the self-concept in any Western depth psychological theory and should therefore be set apart theoretically as a psychological concept that is unique in comparison.

**Defining the Jīva**

As was stated in the beginning of this chapter, according to Advaita Vedanta, the human psyche is composed of two co-existent elements, the Self and the jīva. This next section will define the jīva, the mind, body, and sense perceiving individual, and discuss the relationship between the Self and the jīva. The various elements that make up the jīva will be introduced in brief, however the main focus of this discussion will expound on the conceptual landscape of the Vedantic mind and how it functions.

The jīva is defined in the teachings of Vedanta as the human individual that is comprised of a number of interrelated parts that function as a unified whole. In this dissertation two terms are used to denote the Vedantic concept of
the ātma, namely the “human individual” and the “mind-body-sense-complex.”

According to Vedanta, the ātma is comprised of three bodies: the gross body, subtle body, and causal body. These three bodies are differentiated from one another metaphysically, yet they are interrelated and function as one integrated whole (Safaya, 1976). In keeping with the psychological focus of this study the discussion of the Vedantic ātma will emphasize the gross body and subtle body, however the causal body will not be discussed in any depth.¹

According to Vedanta, the gross body is the physical human body, which is made of physical elements. The definition of the gross physical body in Advaita Vedanta is the same definition of the physical human body that is generally accepted in the Western scientific model of the human being. It is the flesh and blood physical body made up of billions of cells that work together intelligently and function as a whole. The subtle body (sūkṣma-śārīra) is defined in Vedanta as being made of a subtle material, or subtle elements, and is comprised of nineteen component parts. The subtle body is said to be metaphysically unattached to the gross body and is the aspect of the individual that transmigrates from one gross body to another through reincarnation (Satprakasananda, 1977). However, while the subtle body inhabits a given gross body the two bodies, subtle and gross are hooked up intelligently and function as a single entity.²

¹ See Safaya(1976) for a detailed account of the three bodies as related to the three states of experience in Indian Psychology, Chap. 3).

² See Sankaracarya’s (1986) text Pañcikaraṇam for a complete explanation of the elements and the bodies.
The subtle body (sūkṣma-śarīra) includes the five sense organs (jñānendrya), the five organs of action (karmendriya), the five prānās (vital force), and the four mental functions (manas, buddhi, ahaṅkāra and citta). The Vedantic mind (antahkaraṇa), sometimes translated as “inner-instrument,” is comprised of the four mental functions—manas, buddhi, ahaṅkāra, and citta, which operate as a cohesive unit within the subtle body. Satprakasananda (1977) says that the mind is the principle component of the subtle body that is set apart from the other components of the subtle body in a sense, but is at the same time intimately connected to the entire subtle body, and particularly to the sense organs (jñānendrya).

**The Fourfold Mind (antahkaraṇa) and the Sense Organs (jñānendrya)**

In looking at the Upaniṣads themselves there is no distinct structural model of the mind presented in any given verse. There are, however, an abundance of references to the mind and its various aspects such that, through the work of scholarship and commentary on the verses, and through the oral teaching tradition, a cohesive structure of the mind has been put together based directly on the Upaniṣads and other secondary texts. Raghunath Safaya (1976) in his book “Indian Psychology” writes in depth on the development of different schools of thought in Indian psychology. He affirms the fact that enough material is present in the Upaniṣads to build a system of psychology. In addition he adds that all schools of Indian philosophy are based upon the psychological concepts that have been extracted from the Upaniṣads.

The importance of psychological doctrines embodied in the Upaniṣads is viewed from the angle that these form the very basis of psychological
principles developed in later Indian philosophies. A broad outline is presented fairly and accurately, and upon this foundation a detailed superstructure is constructed. The seeds of all the later philosophies were sown during the Upaniṣadic period, and hence the principles, though very few in number and pithy and terse in detail, form the backbone of Indian Psychology. (Safaya, 1976, p. 93)

The following discussion of the Vedantic model of the mind and its relation to the jīva and the Self is based upon psychological principles and concepts that have been drawn together from the Upaniṣads. These principles are widely accepted as a basis for many different schools of thought in Indian psychology and philosophy.

The mind (antahkaraṇa) in Advaita Vedanta is comprised of various thought forms (vṛittis) that are organized into four different categories. The manas is deliberative thinking, the citta is memory, the buddhi is determinative thinking, and the ahaṅkāra is the “I”-thought (Satprakasananda, 1977). In addition to these four categories, an adjunct category of thought forms (vṛittis) that are part of the mind are the thought forms that come from sense perception called jñānavṛittis. The process involved in sense perception is given a lot of attention in Advaita Vedanta and is an essential element related to the mental function of the jīva. This discussion of the Vedantic mind begins by exploring the Vedantic understanding of how sense perception takes place and how it relates to the other aspects of the mind.

The process of sense perception is understood to be twofold involving both the gross and subtle levels of experience. Satprakasananda (1977) explains this relationship in saying:
The (sense) organs located in the physical body are not the real organs according to Vedanta. They are the outer stations of the real organs that belong to the subtle body. The five visible sense organs, viz. the ears, the skin, the eyes, the palate, and the nose derive their power of hearing, touch, site, taste, and smell from their counterparts in the subtle body. (p. 60)

According to Vedanta, sense perception takes place in two parts. The first part involves the outer sense organs having contact with the sense object. Then the perception of the sense object that occurred through the outer organ is communicated to the inner sense organs of the subtle body and a thought is formed is registered in the mind. The subtle aspect of the sense organs are called the “inner” organs and this is where physical contact with the sense objects turns into a thought form (vr̥tti) and is cognized by the mind.

While Vedanta understands the process of sense-perception to be involved in the mind, the formal definition of the Vedantic mind excludes the thought forms that result from sense perception (jñānavṛtīs) because the mind is found to have the capacity to be focused elsewhere in the face of sense experience. Sankara makes this point very clear in the following statement from his commentary:

Truly there is a mind apart from the external organs such as the ear. Because it is a well-known fact that even when there is a connection between the external organ, the object, and the self, a person does not perceive the object present before him, and when asked, “Have you heard what I have said?” a person says, “I was absent-minded, I could not hear. I have not heard it.” Therefore, it is found that something else--the internal organ called the mind, which joins with the objects of all the sense organs--exists. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2000, p. 148)

Sense perception and the sense organs are concluded here as being closely related but not inherently connected to the mind. At the same time the thought
forms that are produced through sense perception (jñānavṛttis) provide the primary contents that the mind engages with from moment to moment. These thoughts (jñānavṛttis) are delivered as packages of raw information, or pure data in the mental field from the sense organs. Then the fourfold aspects of the mind—manas, citta, buddhi and ahaṅkāra—responds and relate with that data in various ways and act upon it according to their respective modes of operation.

In sum, while sense perception is not formally included in the structural model of the mind, it must be clear that the process of sense perception interfaces with the mind is an essential aspect of the mental process in Advaita Vedanta. The following discussion will define and discuss the four components of the mind, the functional processes of the mind, and the relationship between the mind and the Self.

*Manas.*

The first aspect of the Vedantic mind is manas. Manas is translated as the deliberating mind, which includes simple thoughts that float through the mind as well as active deliberation or vacillation of the mind on a given subject. These types of thoughts makes up the largest portion of the mind. As the function of deliberative thinking, the manas interfaces with other thought forms in the mind (Safaya, 1976).

According to Vedanta, the manas is very closely connected with the thought forms that come through sense perception including perception that comes through contact with the outer world, as well as perception of physical sensations from the body, which are also perceived through the sense organs (i.e.
sense of touch). The thoughts from sense perception are funneled into the mental field and the manas thoughts will then include them in the process of deliberation. For example, I perceive that the soil in my plant is dry. This is a pure thought form that comes through a perception that is formed though contact of my eyes, and perhaps my fingers with the soil. Then the perception is formed as a thought in the mind, “the soil is dry.” The manas would then deliberate upon that perception by thinking, “maybe I should give some water to the plant now,” or “maybe I am not watering this plant often enough.”

In addition, the manas, deliberates on thought forms from memory (citta). The mind often draws upon memory as part of the deliberation process about a given topic. With the dry soil perception, for example, the deliberation process could include such thoughts as, “when did I last water this plant?,” or “who did I put in charge of watering this plant?”

Citta.

Citta is translated as memory, indicating thought forms (vṛttis), which are stored in the mind from past experiences and recalled at a given moment (Safaya, 1976). The inclusion of citta as an aspect of the fourfold mind directly implies the inclusion of an unconscious realm of the mind in Vedantic psychology. The thoughts (vṛttis) that emerge in the form of memories have to come from somewhere, namely a place where they are being stored. R. Safaya, even goes as far as defining citta as “The subconscious mind, the storehouse of past impressions” (1976, p. 86). Although, Advaita Vedanta does not go into depth or detail about the nature of the unconscious nor the relationship between the
conscious and unconscious mind as does western depth psychology, the existence of an unconscious aspect of the mind can clearly be posited from the definition of *citta*.

In addition to memory, there are a few more concepts in Advaita psychology, which presuppose an unconscious aspect of the mind. For example, in Vedantic teachings there is often reference to the existence of latent impressions, or predispositions called *vāsanās*, or *saṃskāras*. These latent impressions influence the mind unconsciously based on past experiences.

Satprakasanda (1977) discusses the process by which mental impressions are formed due to past action and shows how the word *karma* is used in Vedanta as both the cause for such impressions and sometimes the impressions themselves.

All our volitional actions in the waking state leave indelible impressions (*saṃskāras*) on the mind. The Sanskrit word for actions is *karma*, which includes not only the bodily activity, but also the sensory experiences and the mental operations, that is to say, whatever we do with the body, or any of the organs, or the mind, knowingly, intentionally, or deliberately. The greater the interest in the work that is to say, *karma*, the deeper will be the impression. In a wide sense the term *karma* also applies to the impression created by it. (1977, p. 86)

The basic principle here is that due to past experiences, intentions, or actions, mental impressions are formed in the mind as pre-dispositions, tendencies, and/or desires. An example of *saṃskāras* is the child prodigy who comes into the world with exceptional skills such as mastery of a musical instrument like piano. This pre-disposition to mastering piano is a *saṃskāra* that the child was born with and would be seen as the result of years or even lifetimes of devoted study of the piano. According to Vedanta, the specific cause of *vāsanās*, or *saṃskāras*, can be interpreted in a number of ways and depends upon
the specific context (Atreya, 1985). However, little attention or focus is placed on
the exploration and interpretation of their causes in the teachings. Understanding
that they exist, and can influence a person’s mind unconsciously is important
enough for the aim of gaining Self-knowledge.

Another related concept in Advaita psychology is called a kasāya. Kasāyas are defined
as an influx of karmic particles into the mind. Karmic particles are bubbles of emotional material that emerge from the unconscious like
a bubble of air that floats to the surface of the water (the conscious mind) and then
pops once it hits the surface releasing its contents. When asked about the
Vedantic equivalent to the unconscious in an interview that I conducted with
Swami Dayananada on “Advaita Vedanta and Psychology” (September 25, 2005)
he replied saying:

We have an equivalent concept of saṁskāras, or kasāyas is a better word. The scriptures say, ”May one understand that one has kasāyas.” If one has
certain kinds of emotions for which one is not able to find immediate
causes, or one has difficulty seeing a situation objectively, one has to
know that one has a kasāya. If one has a kasāya, how is one going to
process it? One processes it through contemplation, meditation, and a
prayerful life. Let go, let be. Don’t fight with your emotions. Welcome
them. Welcome fear.

To summarize, if Safaya’s (1976) definition of citta as “the subconscious
mind, the storehouse of past impressions” is accepted, then it can be said that
memory is but one of several different kinds of thought forms (vṛittis) that belong
to the part of the mind called citta, including vāsanās, saṁskāras, karma and
kasāyas. Each of these psychological concepts, like memory, is a thought form
(vṛitti) that arises in the mind from some unknown location. Even if the more
basic definition of citta is taken as indicating memory only, these other concepts
discussed here are relevant and important as part of the landscape of the psyche in Advaita Vedanta.

Buddhi.

The Sanskrit word Buddhi, most often translated to English as “intellect,” plays a central role in the functional processes of the mind. First, it is the aspect of determinative thinking utilizing the power of discrimination (viveka) to determine what is true or not, make decisions, draw conclusions, and take action. The buddhi (intellect) includes the faculties of discrimination, determination, reasoning, inference, knowledge, recognition, resolution, and will (Satprakasananda, 1977). As part of its functioning, the buddhi interfaces with, and acts upon, other thought forms that come through the mind including sense perception (jñānavṛttis), thoughts from the deliberative mind (manas), as well as memory, latent impressions, desires, and unconscious material (citta).

Following on the example given earlier where the plant is perceived through the senses to have dry soil, the buddhi would come into play with discriminating thought about what conclusions to draw and what action to take in the situation. Most likely after the manas deliberated about the fact that the soil is dry, the buddhi would conclude “this plant needs to be watered,” and “I am going to water this plant now.” In drawing this conclusion the buddhi has considered both the data that came through sense perception, as well as the deliberation process of the manas before it chooses a decisive action. Satprakasanda (1977) highlights the importance of this aspect of the mind in the following statement:

In Vedantic culture buddhi (the determinative faculty) has been given a very high place. It is of primary importance in the development of life. A
well-developed buddhi serves as an unfailing guide in life. It can lead us to the ultimate Goal (liberation). Strictly, buddhi means right determination or decision without doubt or wavering. It carries conviction. It includes reason and understanding. It connotes the power of discrimination between the right and the wrong, between the real and the apparent, between the eternal and the non-eternal, between the self-and the not-self. (p. 81)

In addition to having the more sophisticated functional capacities of discrimination and determination, the buddhi also has the capacity to reflect the consciousness of the Self in the mind. In a commentary from Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, Swami Dayananda (1997) says, “The vijñānamaya (buddhi) is conscious of everything. It is the one, which has got the power of illumining everything because of consciousness borrowed from the cit (Self).” Because of its nature to reflect consciousness, the buddhi, is concluded here to be the place where the notion of a conscious self arises in the mind as the “I”-thought, or ego (ahaṅkāra). The ahaṅkāra (ego/”I”-thought) will be defined and discussed in the following section because it is separated out from the buddhi as a fourth component of the mind. However, because the ahaṅkāra (ego/”I”-thought) is rooted and functions in the buddhi, it is necessary to include mention of it as part of defining the buddhi.

The buddhi is of critical importance in the teaching of Vedanta because this is understood to be the part of the mind where Self-ignorance is rooted and where Self-knowledge takes place. The nature and functioning of Self-ignorance will be the focus in the next chapter, however it needs to be mentioned here because Self-ignorance plays a critical role in the functional processes of the buddhi. It is here where the mistaken identity of the individual is created by the
effects of ignorance, and where it is eventually resolved through gaining Self-knowledge.

Self-ignorance plays a key role in creating a dynamic process in the buddhi, which is called mutual superimposition (anyonyādhyāśa) in the teachings of Vedanta. Mutual superimposition (anyonyādhyāśa) happens between the self-luminous Self and the mind whereby the two come to be perceived as one (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, 1998). The consciousness that belongs to the Self gets superimposed on the mind and the mind gets superimposed on the Self. Therefore, the mind appears to “gain” consciousness, and the Self appears to become limited because it is identified with the mind and body, which are limited. As a result of the process of mutual superimposition (anyonyādhyāśa) the mind becomes identified with consciousness and appears as if it is a conscious being. Then a secondary step happens whereby the mind identifies who that conscious being is in relation to itself and the body. The individual person, or jīva, that is identified through association with the mind and body is what Vedanta considers to be a mistaken identity of the individual. This is seen as a natural process that occurs in the buddhi because of the existence of beginningless ignorance (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, 2004).

The goal of Advaita Vedanta is to remove this mistaken identity of the individual through gaining Self-knowledge (Rambachan, 2006). Self-knowledge takes place in the buddhi because this is the part of the mind that has the capacity to gain knowledge through discrimination and determination. In addition, Self-knowledge takes place through the removal of Self-ignorance, which exists in the
buddhi as the root cause for creating the mistaken identity between the Self and the jīva. When Self-knowledge takes place in the buddhi, the Self is revealed as the true identity of the individual person (jīva), and the spell that had created the mutual superimposition between the Self and the mind is broken.

The operational processes of the buddhi are introduced and discussed here in order to define this aspect of the Vedantic psyche from a structural perspective. In conclusion, when we look at the buddhi, from a structural perspective, it should be clear that this is the part of the psyche in which individual identity is formulated, and therefore understanding it’s functioning is critical to grasping Advaita psychology.

Ahaṅkāra.

The ahaṅkāra, is translated into English as “ego” or “I-thought.” In this dissertation both terms will be used in discussing the concept. The Vedantic ego (ahaṅkāra), like the other aspects of the mind, is a thought form (ṛitti). In the purest sense, the Vedantic ego is defined as the “I-thought” (ahamṛitti). The “I”-thought is simply the thought “I” that arises in the mind, as a result of the buddhi’s capacity to reflect consciousness. According to Vedanta, consciousness is the nature of the Self, therefore, the true content of the “I”-thought is self-luminous consciousness of the Self (Venugopal, 2012). In a sense, this is a complete definition of the Vedantic ego (ahaṅkāra) taken in its purest form, that is, prior to the “I”-thought being identified with any particular content. However, according to Vedanta, until one gains Self-knowledge, the “I”-thought that
appears in the mind is identified with the contents of the mind-body-sense-complex, jīva.

For the aim of presenting an objective concept of the Vedantic ego, the simple definition given above serves as the basic outline of the concept. Borrowing Jung’s idea of an “archetype” (1966b) as a psychological “pattern of meaning,” the purest definition of the Vedantic ego--as consciousness reflected in the mind as the “I-thought”-- is the archetypal definition. It is archetypal in the sense that this definition is a pure expression of the ego concept, as unassociated with the different ways that the concept, as a “pattern of meaning” can be expressed or manifested in a given form. This concept stands alone as a definition of the Vedantic ego. However, according to Vedanta, when a person is living in the state of bondage (saṃsāra) a secondary level of thought process occurs in the buddhi whereby the “I”-thought, that labels consciousness, is superimposed on various aspects of the mind-body-sense-complex (jīva) creating an identity between the “I” and the jīva.

The secondary level of functioning of the Vedantic ego (ahaṅkāra) involves a complex process, which will be discussed in depth in the following chapter. First the consciousness of the Self is reflected in the buddhi as the primary level of the ego, the simple, “I”-thought. Then, being the faculty of drawing conclusions, the buddhi concludes that the “I” belongs to the human individual (jīva), as defined by any number of aspects of the changing landscape of the mind-body-sense-complex. Thus, as an effect of ignorance, the ego is understood as the appearance of there being an identity of the jīva that enjoys a
constancy through time, and is defined in reference to the changing landscape of the mind-body-sense-complex.

When the ego is defined in Vedanta as being no more than a thought in the mind that comes and goes, its level of importance in the psyche is diminished and the “I”-thought can be seen as simply one among many different types of thoughts (vṛittis) that occur in the mind (i.e. sense perception, feelings, inference, deliberation, and memory). According to Vedanta, for a person who has already gained Self-knowledge, the “I-thought” is said to be experienced as just another thought in the mind because the mutual superimposition between the Self and the mind has been broken. For such a person, the “I”-thought is understood to be a thought in the mind that reflects the Self, which has been revealed as the true nature of the human individual. Therefore, when the “I-thought” appears, however, the notion of “I” resolves into the Self, which metaphysically speaking is its true source.

The landscape of the mind for a person who has not gained Self-knowledge is very different. Until Self-knowledge is gained, the “I-thought” is superimposed on the mind-body-sense-complex and the person experiences the sense of having an ego-identity in reference to it. This identity is formed in the mind from the basic conclusion of the buddhi expressed in the statement, “I am the jīva.” Let us further develop the Vedantic definition of the ego, from the standpoint of a person who is living in the state of bondage (samsāra) with a mind that is operating under the influence of inborn ignorance (āvidya). For a person living in a state of Self-ignorance, the ego is experienced as the part of the mind.
that is the seat of subjective experience for the individual. The ego, seated in the
buddhi, relates with all the objects of experience both inner and outer from that
central locus of identification with the consciousness that is the Self. On the level
of the mind, every thought that passes through, whether it be from the inner
realms of memory (citta), deliberative thinking (manas), or determinative
thinking (buddhi) the thought is labeled as “my thought” by the ego. Because
each thought that passes through the mind is lit up by consciousness, and the ego
is identified with consciousness, the conclusion “it is my thought” comes along
with the cognition. The “I”-thought is superimposed on every thought.

In reference to the outer layers of experience such as sense perception,
and the physical body, the ego claims ownership here as well, concluding “this is
my body,” “these are my perceptions,” or even more directly “I am pretty,” “I am
cold,” directly identifying the Self with an attribute of the body or a specific
sensation. Rambachan (2006) discusses the ego from this standpoint in the
following statement.

The I-thought is the thinker, feeler, enjoyer, doer, and experiencer. It
comes into being as a consequence of the presence of awareness in the
mind. Whereas other thoughts come and go because the objects on which
they are centered are impermanent and occupy the attention of the ego for
a limited time span, the I-thought enjoys a relative permanency. This
permanency is a consequence of the fact that the I-thought is centered on
an awareness that is permanently present, being timeless and self-
revealing. Its content and nature are nothing but awareness, without
which it has no existence or reality. When the I-thought, whose nature is
limitless awareness, non-different from Brahman, is subject to ignorance,
it identifies itself with the characteristics of the body, sense, and mind in
notions such as, “I am short,” “I am blind,” or “I am unhappy.” (p. 61)

In an interview I conducted with Swami Dayananda (September 25, 2005),
he responded to a question about the nature of the ego in saying:
The one who owns the mind is the ego, *aham*, the “I-thought.” You call this the ego, or *ahaṅkāra*. It is the sense of I. Any ownership, knowership, enjoyership, doership, all “ships” belongs to the ego. We always look at ego like this, through the mind, through the *buddhi*, through the *citta*, through the body, through the senses.

Being identified with the human individual (*jīva*), in the state of bondage (*saṃsāra*), the ego is experienced as being center stage in the psyche, and director of the play at once. The ego is identified with the *buddhi* (intellect), and functions from that locus taking on a number of roles both in the inner and outer realms of experience to navigate the complicated landscape of experiences. The ego is the receiver of thought forms (*vrittis*) impressions from all the different parts of the mind including all sense perception from the outer world. It is also identified with other processes in the mind such as deliberation (*manas*), and decisions making (*buddhi*) (Dayananda, 1997).

From the standpoint of the mind operating in the state of bondage, it appears as if there is an ego-identity, or self, that is dynamic and changing through time, but that has a sense of continuity at its core. However, according to Vedanta, the experience of there being a cohesive entity or something that has a continuous existence in time, is attributed to the Self. As defined in the beginning of the chapter, the Self is limitless existent consciousness that lights up all objects of experience in the mind without a flicker of change in its nature.

In sum, the process of defining the Vedantic concept of the ego (*ahaṅkāra*) as an objective concept is a complicated task because of the way the mind is impacted by inborn Self-ignorance. I have presented the definition by dividing it into a primary and secondary level. The primary level serves as an
objective definition of the concept, and the secondary level defines the way in which the ego operates and is experienced in the mind of a person who is living in the condition of bondage.

**The Vedantic Ego in Comparison**

The concept of the ego in Advaita Vedanta is unique in comparison with the ego concepts found in the psychological theories of the West. The factor that differentiates the Vedantic ego from the others is Vedanta’s claim that consciousness (the Self) exists as an independent reality from the ego, and is not mutually dependent on the ego for its existence. As mentioned above, the Vedantic theory of the human psyche affirms the Self as the true source, or reality of the ego. According to Vedanta, the ego and the Self, consciousness, are intimately related in the sense that the ego cannot exist without the Self, however, the Self is understood to exist prior to the ego, and is not dependent on the ego for its existence (Sadananda & Nikhilananda, 2002). On the contrary, all of the structural models in western depth psychology that I have come across in my research equate consciousness as being inherent to the ego itself (Jung, 1958; Freud, 1960). In other words, these theories affirm consciousness and the ego to have a relationship of mutual dependence.

Sigmund Freud (1960), in the *Id and the Ego*, writes, “We have formed the idea that in each individual there is a coherent organization of mental processes, and we call this his ego. It is to this ego that consciousness is attached” (p. 8). Carl Jung (1958) in *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, expresses a
similar idea regarding the idea that consciousness and the ego cannot exist apart from each other:

To us, consciousness is inconceivable without an ego; it is equated with the relations of contents to an ego. If there is no ego there is nobody to be conscious of anything. The ego is therefore indispensable to the conscious process...If you eradicate the ego completely, there is no body left that would consciously experience. (p. 484)

Vedanta would agree with Jung when he says that the ego cannot exist without consciousness because the Vedantic ego is dependent on consciousness for its existence. Although this is not what Jung means because what he clearly points to here is the notion that consciousness and the ego are bound together in a mutually dependent relationship where one cannot exist without the other. This differentiates Jung’s ego as fundamentally different from the Vedantic equivalent.

The foundation of the Vedantic model of the psyche rests on the concept of the Self as self-luminous (svataprakāśa) consciousness, which exists independently from the ego (ahaṅkāra).

While this fundamental difference clearly differentiates the Vedantic ego concept from that of the western depth psychology theories, there is also a basic similarity to be drawn. If we consider the Vedantic ego in the secondary sense of its definition from the standpoint of a mind that is operating in the condition of bondage (samsāra), the Vedantic concept shares the common idea of the ego as being the seat for the identity of the individual, or sense of self.

As a case in point, Freud (1960) refers to the ego as” the mental agency which supervises all its own constituent processes.” The Jungian ego is defined by Edward Edinger (1972) as “the seat of subjective identity” in *Ego and Archetype.*
This language is almost synonymous with the ego in Vedanta, which, as the seat of the individual identity in the buddhi, takes on multiple roles, and functions in the mind acting as the overseer of the various functions of the mind and being the aspect of the mind in which all of the various parts are integrated. Therefore, in a generalized sense the Vedantic ego operating in the condition of bondage (samsāra), can be said to share the basic definition with the ego of western depth psychology as the concept of the central seat of individual identity in the psyche.

**Projection**

The phenomena of psychological projection is a central concept in Vedantic psychology. Although it doesn’t qualify as a structural component of the psyche, it is important to introduce and define the concept here as it plays a key role in the operation and functioning of the mind in Advaita Vedanta.

Projection is defined in Vedanta as a twofold process whereby an object of perception is covered (āvaraṇa) and then projected (vikṣepa) upon by the mind, thereby distorting the direct perception of the true nature of the object (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000). The object is perceived, however because its true nature is covered, the mind tries to identify the object by projecting an idea upon it. The result is that the mind perceives the projected reality and takes it to be real. Vedanta discusses projection both in the context of the intra-psychic dynamics of the mind, as well as in the context of the relationship between the individual and the world.

As we will see in the following chapter, projection is considered to be the psychological phenomena responsible for creating the condition bondage in the
mind. Due to inborn Self-ignorance, the Self is first covered (āvaraṇa) and second projected upon (vīkṣepa) by the mind. This is the how the mistaken identity of the individual is created through mutual superimposition (anyonyādhyāsa). The true nature of the Self is as though covered, and then projected onto, and falsely identified with the limitations of the mind-body-sense-complex (jīva). This intra-psychic process involving the phenomena of projection is unique to Advaita psychology, not to be found in any theory of Western psychology.

Projection is also discussed in Vedanta in the context of the dynamic relationship between the human individual (jīva) and the world. In this context the inner reality of the individual, which is colored by a state of being in Self-ignorance (jīvasṛṣṭi) is projected onto the outer world. The Sanskrit word sṛṣṭi, is translated as “creation.” Therefore, a projection is likened to an inner creation from the individual mind, which is projected out onto the world. The individual who manifested the projection, then relates to the outer world through the projection, taking it to be real. This type of projection is understood in Vedanta to take place in one’s relationships with others and with the world at large (Venugopal, 2012).

According to Vedanta, the projection of the individual onto the world (jīvasṛṣṭi) naturally arises out of primary projection that creates the mistaken identity of the Self (Rambachan, 2006). This original process of projection results in a slew of false conclusions in the mind about the identity of the individual. In turn, from this seat of primary distortion about the nature of the individual, he or
she experiences the world and interprets the meaning of one’s experience. Therefore, the secondary level of projection onto the world is a natural bi-product of the primary projection that distorts one’s perception of oneself.

While the process of intra-psychic projection of the mind-body-sense-complex onto the Self is unique to Vedanta, the secondary level involving the projection of the individual mind onto the world is similar to the way projection is generally defined in Western depth psychology. Depth psychology generally looks at the phenomena of projection in the context of the therapeutic relationship, as transference, as well as the client’s relationships with others. The idea of transference is that material from the unconscious based on past experiences is projected onto the present reality, distorting the person’s perception (Stolorow, J., Brandchaft, B., & Atwood, G., 2000). This is essentially the same idea of projection that has been described here in Vedanta as the secondary level, whereby the individual projects one’s subjective reality onto the objective world, and then perceives the projected reality. While Vedanta does not look into the psychodynamics of relationships, and the therapeutic processes involving the subtleties of projection, if we look at projection on a phenomenological level, the Vedantic definition is fundamentally the same as in Western theories of depth psychology.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a model for the structure and function of the human psyche based on the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. The two basic components of the human psyche, the Self and the jīva, were defined and
discussed at length. The Vedantic Self was defined through the traditional method of teaching that uses the Sanskrit text as a platform, revealing the meaning of the words using the Vedantic teaching methods of negation and positive assertion. The definition of the Self was presented by unfolding the meaning of the textual statement-\textit{satyam j\=n\=anam anantam brahma}-which is accepted in the tradition as a complete definition of the Self, or \textit{Brahman}. The Vedantic Self was then compared to comparable concepts from Western depth psychology.

The second part of the chapter defined the \textit{j\=iva} as the human individual, comprised of the mind-body-sense-complex. The component parts that make up the subtle body were defined, followed by an in depth discussion of the process by which sense perception takes place and its relationship with the Vedantic mind. Each of the four parts of the Vedantic mind were then defined as well as the functional processes of ego-identification and projection.

Chapters 2 and 3 have provided a foundation for Vedantic psychological theory, which has laid the groundwork to now turn toward addressing the main topic of this dissertation, the psychology of bondage and liberation. The next chapter will begin by introducing the core theoretical principles, which will support the discussion of bondage and liberation, the subject matter of focus in the remaining chapters. Following this introduction, the chapter will discuss the condition of bondage as a psychological state that is understood in Vedanta to be an existential psychological problem that is the root cause for human suffering.
Chapter 4: The Psychological Condition of Bondage

Introduction to Bondage and Liberation

The first three chapters have provided in-depth descriptions of the teaching tradition, epistemology, cosmology, and an outline of the structure and function of the human psyche according to Advaita Vedanta. The focus now turns toward the central topic under consideration in this study, namely to examine the nature of the psychological condition of bondage and explore the transformative process that leads a person to liberation from bondage. Before introducing the topic of this chapter on psychological condition of bondage, it is useful to spend some time introducing the basic theoretical principles that will be threaded throughout the forthcoming discussion on bondage and liberation in this and the following chapters.

In studying the teachings on bondage and liberation in Advaita Vedanta, it has become clear that the model of human psychology implied in the teaching rests upon the basic theoretical principle that the conclusion a person makes about his or her identity is the root from which the entire psyche springs forth, like a blooming flower (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 1984; Suddhabodhananda, 1996b). In other words, the implication in the teaching is that the “self-identity” of the individual is the primary organizing principle in the psyche, around which all other functions and content are structured. While this statement is not made explicitly in the texts, this psychological principle is implied in the Vedantic teachings on bondage and liberation, and therefore by deduction this conclusion
can be made. The textual support for this implication will be adequately shown throughout this and the following chapter.

The theoretical platform that will be developed in the forthcoming chapters is comprised of two related ideas both based upon the primary conclusion affirmed above. The first idea is that bondage and liberation are contrasting psychological states, or conditions, each based upon a certain conclusion formed in the psyche, about the identity of the individual self. The second is that the psychological transformation from the state of bondage to liberation, boils down to a change in the self-identity of the person.

In this and the following chapter I will use a magnifying lens to look into both the state of bondage and liberation as they are presented in the teachings of Vedanta. Based on the theoretical platform introduced above, the discussion of each state will focus on the specific conclusion about the nature of the human individual, and the corresponding psychological and emotional conditions that manifest accordingly. Ultimately I will show that, according to Vedanta, it is the mistaken identity of the individual that causes the condition of human bondage and the suffering associated with it. The resolution of that mistaken identity, and the medicine, which lights the way to liberation, is the gaining of correct knowledge about the nature of the individual self. This then resolves the mistaken identity and the associated sufferings (Vidyaranya, 1982).

**Introduction and Defining Condition of Bondage**

The focus of this chapter is to present the Vedantic teachings on bondage as a psychological condition. This discussion will explore the cause for the
condition of bondage to arise in the psyche and the psychological suffering that results from it. In a well-known prayer from the *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, the essential relationship between bondage and liberation is expressed in three metaphorical statements.

Lord, Lead me from the unreal to the Real
From darkness into Light
From death to immortality.
(Sankaracarya & Madhavananda, 1993, p. 60, v. 1.3.28)

This verse, written from the standpoint of a person living in a state of bondage, is an expression of the person’s awareness that they are not free and that they wish to be free. Bondage is associated with the unreal, darkness, and death in this verse; while liberation is associated with the real, light, and immortality.

The word bondage is derived from the Sanskrit “bandh,” which means, “to bind” (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997). A person who is living in a state of bondage is one that is bound with reference to one or more limiting factors. In the negative, the concept of bondage implies a lack of freedom for the person, and identification with limitation or imprisonment. If bondage is a condition in which one thing is bound to another, the question must arise here, “what is bound to what?” or “who is bound to whom?”.

According to Vedanta, the origin and cause for human bondage is ignorance (*avidyā*). Ignorance (*avidyā*) is said to have no beginning point within the creation, but to naturally arise along with the creation when it manifests. (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, 2004) The condition of bondage is, therefore, inherent to the human condition and every human being who is born into this world is naturally born into the state of bondage (Sankaracarya & Jagadananda,
2003). Due to the effects of ignorance on the human psyche, which will be discussed later in the chapter, the Self is not perceived in its nature as self-luminous, existent consciousness that is free from limitation. Instead, the Self is perceived as being bound together with the mind-body-sense-complex, or jīva. The identification, like a lasso, is the binding material (Sankaracarya & Jagadananda, 1989). Therefore, the answer to the question posed above, “what is bound to what?,” is that the Self is bound to the attributes and limitations of the human form.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the human individual, or jīva, is considered in Vedanta to be inherently separate from the Self, and of a different order of reality (mithyā) (Venugopal, 2012; Warne, 2000). The following verse summarizes the condition of bondage by saying that it is the result of the Self being identified with what is in reality “not the Self” (anātmā).

The sense of “I” in the anātmā, not-self, is the bondage for the person. This is gained due to ignorance and is the cause for falling into the afflictions of birth and death. Just as a silkworm lays a trap for itself with the threads, the jīva taking this changing body as real and as “I,” due to ignorance, nourishes it, anoints it and protects it. (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997, p. 123, v. 39)

In sum, bondage is defined here as a condition that manifests in the psyche as a result of the infinite Self being perceived as a reality that is bound together with the finite jīva.

**Living in the state of saṃsāra.**

The Sanskrit word saṃsāra represents the state of mind, or reality, for a person living in bondage. Thus, the state of saṃsāra and the state of bondage are
one and the same and will be used as interchangeable terms in the following
discussion. According to Vedanta, the *samsārī* , one who is living within *samsāra*,
is subject to various kinds of suffering by nature of one’s identification with the
human mind-body-sense-complex (*jīva*) (Tejomayananda, 1986). In the text
*Paṅcadaśī*, the following verses mention the types of suffering associated with the
gross, subtle, and causal bodies in the state of bondage.

There are innumerable diseases in the gross body arising from
disorders in the wind, bile, and phlegm. And it is exposed to other
defects such as bad odour, deformity, burns, fractures and the like.
(Vidyaranya, 1982, p. 248, v. 224)

The subtle body is affected on the one hand by desire, anger, and
so forth, and on the other by inner and outer control, tranquility of
the mind and serenity of the senses. The presence of the former
affections and the absence of the latter leads to misery.
(Vidyaranya, 1982, p. 248, v. 225)

In dreamless sleep, the state of the causal body, the *jīva* knows
neither himself nor others and appears as if dead. The causal body
is the seed of future births and their miseries. (Vidyaranya, 1982,
p. 248, v. 226)

The suffering of the *samsārī* can take many forms as these verses indicate.

Rambachan (2006) summarizes the process through which the Self comes to be
identified with the mind-body-sense-complex, and the suffering that results.

Ignorance of the specific nature of the Self causes one to fully and
incorrectly identify the self with the attributes of the body, senses, and
mind and to superimpose the finitude of these upon the self. The self is
then regarded as a limited entity that is bound by time and space and
subject to bodily characteristics such as birth, growth, change, decline, and
death. (p. 99)

The *samsārī*, by virtue of being identified with the physical body, is
subject to a basic level of suffering associated with the limitations of the body.
The body is limited in terms of what it can do and experience. It is limited in
terms of space and attribute. The body is limited in reference to time, and will inevitably go through a process of decay and death. In addition the body is subject to physical pain, which can be a source of great suffering. These limiting conditions that result from the identification with the physical body are cause for one level of existential suffering associated with human bondage.

In addition, the person living in the state of bondage suffers a great deal of mental and emotional pain as a result of being identified with the limited mind. The suffering on a mental-emotional level for the samsārī is attributed to two basic psychological problems, which one inherits as a result of being identified with the jīva. The first is that being identified with the limited mind, the person believes that they are fundamentally incomplete. This engenders a basic feeling of limitation and lack in the person, which brings about feelings of being incomplete, unfulfilled, and inadequate. The second problem is that the person believes that they are separate as an individual entity living in a world of duality in which all things are separate from each other. This is cause for fear, anxiety and many other psychological problems. These two problems and the psychological suffering which they give rise to will be discussed later in the chapter.

The limited person and cycles of desire.

According to Vedanta, the samsārī, who believes oneself to be limited, naturally and unconsciously suffers from an existential feeling that they are not whole and complete as they are (Vidyaranya, 1982). This feeling is one of discomfort, disease, or distress. Therefore, the person is compelled to take certain
actions he or she believes will resolve the discomfort and create a basic existential feeling of peace and happiness. If the samsārī was conscious of this process one might explain his or her predicament in the following way: “I am not okay as I am. I am not at peace. I am not happy. I am not whole, and complete. Therefore, I need to achieve x, y, and z in the outer world of form in order to become complete, whole, fulfilled, and happy. I have desires to achieve x, y, and z. I do this, that, or the other to achieve my goals. When I do fulfill them I experience happiness, joy, and fulfillment, however it is only temporary and at some point the feeling of being incomplete returns and gives birth to a new desire.” Like this the samsārī moves about in the world perpetually being motivated by different desires, which are attempts to resolve the existential suffering that is associated with the belief that one is fundamentally incomplete.

In a commentary from Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, Swami Dayananda (1997) elucidates the basic problem that manifests in the state of bondage:

The “I” sense in anātmā, the gross, subtle, and causal bodies, is the mistake which is the cause of all these problems. The anātmā is time-bound, finite, and subject to a variety of afflictions. All these problems are superimposed upon ātmā. Then you, the infinite as though become finite. Afterwards you try to become infinite by doing a variety of things. But that does not work. Whatever you do is finite and that cannot make you infinite. This bondage, which is in the form of self-confusion is the cause for samsāra, falling into and getting drowned into the afflictions in the form of birth, death, etc. (Sankaraçarya & Dayananda, 1997, p. 124)

Anantanand Rambachan (2006) also elucidates this basic condition of existential suffering associated with the person who is living within the state of bondage.

Ignorance of the limitless self is the original cause of the sense of want and inadequacy experienced by the human being. This leads to greed
(kāmā) or the multiplication of desires in an effort to assuage the condition of incompleteness. The realization of desires for objects other than the self results in a short-lived fulfillment that leaves the basic condition of human inadequacy, and the suffering that it engenders, unresolved. (Rambachan, 2006, p. 100)

The person living in the state of samaṣṭra is caught in the perpetual cycle of desiring, fulfilling one’s desires, and then not achieving the goal of lasting peace and wholeness that they are seeking. According to Vedanta, the underlying problem that keeps a person on the wheel of samaṣṭra is that he or she is seeking resolution of the problem in the wrong way. They are looking to the outside world to create the right conditions so that they will feel whole, but the world simply cannot give it to them. Vedanta claims that the nature of the problem resides in the mistaken identity of the Self. Therefore, according to Vedanta, the sense of peace and happiness that the samaṣṭri seeks is only to be found through clearing up the case of mistaken identity through gaining knowledge (Vidyaranya, 1982). All attempts to resolve the problem in another way are ultimately futile according to Vedanta, and are likened to trying to squeeze blood from a stone.

It is very difficult for the person living in the state of bondage to recognize what is happening, namely that they are operating out of a set of assumptions, and those assumptions are not true to reality. For a number of reasons, the underlying assumption that a person operates from regarding their self-identity and their relationship to the world does not come into question for the samaṣṭri. This discussion is beyond the scope of this study. The person is, in other words, unconscious that they even have an underlying assumption, and simply go about functioning and operating as if those assumptions were true.
The situation for the saṃsārī is compounded by two experiential factors, both of which support the set of assumptions that keep the person living in a state of bondage. The first is that when the person is successful in fulfilling a desire, they do in fact experience the sense of wholeness, happiness, and peace that they were looking for in fulfilling that desire. For example, for a businessman who is just starting out in his career, if he were to get the perfect job of his dreams, this would be an accomplishment which had taken years of hard work in business school, and then efforts put toward networking and meeting all the right people. The sense of fulfillment he would experience may be quite profound and perhaps even last a number of years.

According to Vedanta, the fact that people experience a sense of peace and wholeness upon fulfilling these types of desires is attributed to the relaxation of the mind that takes place when the desired object or circumstance is achieved (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000). When a person has a desire for something, which they truly believe will bring them a sense of lasting happiness, the fulfillment of that desire does in fact give them the exact experience that they were looking for. This, in turn, reinforces the belief that the way to solve the problem of feeling a sense of existential lack is through the fulfilling these types of desires. The fact that the sense of peace and happiness is fleeting, does not deter the person because as soon as the sense of fulfillment starts to fade, a new desire dawns, which then holds the promise for fulfillment, thus leading the person into another cycle. In the following verse from Pañcadaśī the cycle of
perpetual desire is mentioned as the source that propels a person on the cyclical
wheel of *samsāra* from birth to birth.

Men perform actions in order to experience joy, and having enjoyed, again
have recourse to action. Bereft of the supreme bliss, without attaining
personal release, they go from birth to birth, as a worm that has slipped
into a stream is swept from one whirlpool to another. (Vidyaranya, 1982,
p. 11, v. 1.30)

The second factor that serves to confirm the *samsārī*’s assumptions about
reality is that, unless the person is born into a rare situation, one is generally
living among others who are also living in a state of bondage. As already
mentioned, bondage is inherent to the human condition and therefore everyone is
living in that state unless they have been liberated through gaining Self-
knowledge. The *samsārī* is therefore surrounded by people who are also living in
the state of *samsāra*, and operating from the same set of conclusions about reality.
This serves to further confirm that the person’s conclusions, and the behaviors
that are based upon them, are appropriate and aligned with reality. The following
verses, from the *Munḍaka Upaniṣad*, emphasize the fact that those who are living
within the state of bondage not only are all living in a deluded state, but on top of
it they appear as if they know what’s going on, and this perpetuates the sense of
delusion for all.

Steeped in ignorance and error, and thinking themselves to be learned and
knower’s of the self, these deluded people are constantly afflicted and they
wander endlessly, like the blind being led by the blind. (Dayananda, 2006,
p. 133, v. 1.2.8)

Steeped in ignorance and error with many notions, these immature people
think, “we are well-informed.” Because they do not know the self due to
their longing for worldly ends, they are constantly afflicted and fall from
heaven when their *puṇya* is exhausted. (Dayananda, 2006, p. 141, v. 1.2.9)
In sum, the state of bondage is affirmed here as a psychological condition rooted in Self-ignorance, which impacts the fundamental way that a person perceives themselves and the world. Within this reality the person operates out of a set of conclusions about oneself and the world, which are firmly and unconsciously locked into place and never brought into question. Furthermore, certain experiences within this reality give the person good reason to continue to believe it, live within it, and never question it. The next section will go deeper into the nature of Self-ignorance, and the dynamic process that takes place in the psyche to create the mistaken identity of the individual self.

**Self-Ignorance in the Human Psyche**

According to Vedanta, Self-ignorance is said to be the primary cause for the state of bondage to arise in the human psyche (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003). Understanding the nature and function of Self-ignorance is, therefore, key to understanding the state of bondage and how a person is released from this state through gaining knowledge. On the most basic level Self-ignorance can be defined as a lack of knowledge of the Self, or ignorance of the Self. While this definition is true, it only captures one element of the meaning of Self-ignorance as it is defined in the Advaita tradition. The Vedantic understanding of Self-ignorance (avidyā) expands this basic definition in a number of ways.

Self-ignorance is affirmed in Vedanta, as being a natural phenomenon that comes along with the manifestation of the creation into existence. Accordingly, every human being who is born into the creation is naturally born into a
psychological condition in which the mind is colored by ignorance (avidyā) (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, 2004). Ignorance (avidyā) is likened in the Advaita teachings to being a positive substance because it has a tangible and dynamic impact on the mind.

This inexplicable something (ignorance), as long as one lives in the absence of enquiry, does appear. It is like the thick mist in the Space-of-Consciousness that lasts till the rise of the Sun of Knowledge born of enquiry. (Laksmidhara & Tejomayananda, 1986, p. 29, v. 17)

Ignorance is described as something positive though intangible… (Sadananda & Nikhilananda, 2000, p. 22, v. 34)

According to Vedanta, ignorance (avidyā) is understood as having a two-fold effect, or two-fold power (śakti), namely that of covering (āvaraṇa) and projection (vikṣepa). Due to these effects, the Self, which is self-luminous consciousness, comes to be mistakenly identified with the mind-body-sense-complex, or jīva. As the following verse indicates, ignorance, and the misidentification of the Self is affirmed as the root cause responsible for the condition of bondage to manifest in the psyche.

This bondage has come about for the person due to these two powers alone, deluded by which the person wanders about taking the body as ātmā. (Sanlaracarya & Dayananda, 1997, p. 134, v. 42)

Let us turn now to take a detailed look at the dynamic process that occurs in the psyche as a result of in born ignorance. The following verse uses the powerful metaphor of an eclipse to express the way that the first power of ignorance acts as a covering (āvaraṇa) of the nature of the Self (ātmā).

This māyā’s power of veiling, which consists predominantly of tamas, covers this ātmā that is shining with the power of the indivisible non-dual awareness without beginning and end, as even Rāhu (the moon) covers the disc of the sun. (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997, p. 130, v. 40)
The metaphor of a solar eclipse works well to represent the phenomena of ignorance covering the Self. This is because in an eclipse of the sun by the moon, the nature of the sun remains completely untouched by the eclipse and it is only from the standpoint of viewing the Sun from Earth, that the sun appears to be covered. Furthermore, the existence of the sun is never threatened by the presence of the moon. In fact the “eclipse” itself is nothing more than a momentary perception based on viewing the sun from particular location in space and time.

The eclipse metaphor gives an example of the way ignorance impacts the Self as a covering that casts a dark shadow over the nature of the Self. Like the moon appears to cover the sun when viewed from the earth, ignorance appears to cover the Self when viewed from the standpoint of the mind. While the nature of the Self is covered by ignorance, the Self, like the sun, remains untouched and unchanged by the covering. The Self, being self-luminous consciousness shines continuously in spite of the effects of ignorance on the mind. This critical point is elucidated by Rambachan (2006):

It is the nature of the Self, and not its existence that is the subject of ignorance. The search is to know “what it is, not that it is.” Ignorance of the specific nature of the Self causes one to fully and incorrectly identify the self with the attributes of the body, sense, and mind and to superimpose the finitude of these upon the self. (p. 99)

In a commentary taken from Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, Swami Dayananda (1997) elaborates on this point, introducing a Sanskrit term that is used to explain how the Self can be covered by ignorance, and yet experientially present, at the same time.
Ātma is of the nature of awareness itself, without any impurity. There is neither veiling nor bondage in ātmā. Such an ātmā becomes tirobhūta, eclipsed due to āvaraṇa-śaktih (power of covering). Tirobhūta means it does not shine as it is but is evident enough for you to commit a mistake. Ātma does not lose any of its svarūpa (nature), but in your vision is covered. Just as the cloud does not cover the sun but covers only your vision, so also the āvaraṇa-śaktih does not cover ātmā but covers your vision of ātmā. (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, p.133)

According to Vedanta, the twofold effect of ignorance occurs simultaneously, however the second power of projection (vikṣepa) onto the Self can only occur if the nature of the Self is covered. Therefore, as the following verse suggests, the covering aspect is presented as being first in order of a two-fold process.

Ignorance and the obscuring of the Self precede superimposition. (Vidyaranya, 1982, p. 192, v. 7.38)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the contributions that Vedantic psychology has to offer is its unique and sophisticated understanding of the phenomena of projection (vikṣepa). In addition to discussing projection that takes place from the individual mind onto objects in the world, the Vedantic teachings introduce the concept of projection (vikṣepa), an intra-psychic process whereby the mind projects onto the Self as a result of ignorance.

The phenomenon of projection (vikṣepa) is understood in Vedanta as being the result of two elements being simultaneously present (Vidyaranya, 1982). First, there must be a reasonable locus (adhiṣṭhāna) for a projection to land upon, one that closely resembles the image being projected. Second, the true nature of the object must be covered in order for the projection to be possible. If the true nature of the object is perceived, it is not possible to project a different
image onto it and believe it is real. In sum, the object, which forms the locus for a projection must resemble the projection, be available for perception, and be covered at the same time. The process of projection is defined in the following verse from *Vedāntasāra*, using the famous example of a snake being projected onto a rope.

*Adhyāropa* (projection) is the superimposition of the unreal on the real, like the false projection of a snake on a rope, which is not a snake. (Sadananda & Nikhilananda, 2002, p. 20, v. 32)

The rope-snake example is quoted throughout various texts as well as in the oral teaching tradition to show how the Self comes to be mistaken for the human mind-body-sense-complex through the phenomena of projection. The story is that a boy and his friend are walking along a dirt path at dusk. The boy sees what he believes to be a snake on the path. He screams and jumps back in fear of being bitten. His friend looks at the object in a different light and sees that in fact the object is a rope lying on the path with three bends that mimics the shape of a snake. The friend says, “Don’t worry, look it’s just a rope!” At first the boy doesn’t believe his friend and is hesitant to move toward the object to take another look. But the friend calmly convinces the boy to walk back to the object to take a closer look. This time indeed the boy sees the reality that the object is a harmless rope, and breathes a deep sigh of relief.

In the case of the intra-psychic process of projection onto the Self, the process is somewhat different from projection onto an object in the creation because the Self is a subjective reality. Due to the first power of ignorance (*āvarana-śaktiḥ*), the nature of the Self is covered in the mind. At the same time
the Self, which is self-luminous consciousness, is experientially present. Therefore, the perfect conditions are in place for projection to take place from the mind onto the Self. The result of this process is that, like the rope comes to be experienced as a snake by the boy walking along the path at dusk, the Self comes to be experienced as one with the mind. The mind is essentially projected onto the Self and taken to be one with it. In a commentary taken from *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, Swami Dayananda (1997) explains this process.

This vikṣepa-śaktiḥ (power of projection) creates the mistaken notion about ātmā. Because ātmā is self-evident you have the knowledge “I am.” Once you say, “I am”, you have to conclude what this “I” is. Either you have to take “I” as what it is or you have to take it for what it is not. Here, because of the āvarana-śaktiḥ (power of covering), ātmā (Self) is not known as what it is and because of the vikṣepa- śaktiḥ one recognizes ātmā (Self) to be the body. (p. 133)

When Dayananda (1997) uses the word “body” at the end of this passage, he is referring to the body-mind-sense-complex, jīva. He explains how the two-fold power of ignorance is understood in Vedanta as being responsible for creating the mistaken identity of the Self. Because of ignorance, the Self is taken to be one with the human mind-body-sense-complex in the same way that the snake is taken to be one with the rope.

**Mutual superimposition.**

Mutual superimposition (*anyonyādhyāsa*) is a concept introduced in the Advaita teachings to elucidate the psychological process, which leads to the mistaken identity of the Self (Sadananda & Nikhilananda, 2002). Mutual superimposition (*anyonyādhyāsa*) is the process whereby the mind is
superimposed on the Self and the Self is superimposed on it so that the two come to be experienced as if they were one entity. The example often referenced for mutual superimposition is a red-hot-iron ball where the qualities of fire and an iron ball blend together as one (Sadananda & Nikhilananda, 2002, p. 36, v. 50).

The result of mutual superimposition between the Self and the mind is that mind takes on the qualities of the Self as pure existent consciousness, and the Self takes on the qualities and functional processes of the mind.

The mutual superimposition between the Self and the mind results in the formation of an identity between the Self, which is self-luminous consciousness, and the human mind-body-sense-complex, or jīva. In order to understand the psychological dynamics involved in the formation of this identity, the process of mutual superimposition is broken down in the teachings into a two-step process. First the Self and the mind form an identity as one, and second, by default the Self comes to be identified with the individual jīva as a whole, or the mind-body-sense-complex. The second level of identification happens automatically like a domino effect of the first, because the mind is inherently connected to the entire mind-body-sense-complex. They come together as a package. The following verse references this two-step process and the red-hot-iron-ball example for the process.

In the opinion of the wise, the identity of the reflection (of Consciousness) and of ego is like the identity of the fire and the (heated) iron ball. The body having been identified with the ego (which had already identified with the reflection of Consciousness) passes for a conscious entity. (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, 1998, p. 9, v. 7)
In this verse the idea of the “reflection of consciousness” is mentioned. This concept is used in the teaching to express the experience of the person in the state of bondage where the Self, which is consciousness, is superimposed on the mind and creates the appearance as if the mind where conscious itself. The idea of consciousness being “reflected” in the mind can be misleading and create the perception that the reflection of consciousness in the mind is somehow separate from the Self, creating a third entity.

According to Vedanta, the concept “reflection of consciousness” is used to express the illusory experience of the person who is under the influence of ignorance and therefore is experiencing the Self and the mind as if they were one entity. Therefore, as the following verse says, the buddhi, which is the part of the mind where the mutual superimposition takes place, appears to gain consciousness, but does not in fact become conscious itself. The commentary to this verse goes into detail in clarifying this point, which is essential to understanding Vedantic psychology.

_Buddhi_ appears to possess luminosity on account of the reflection of Consciousness in it. (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, 1998, p. 7, v. 6)

Commentary: The Conscious Self, though self-luminous, has no manifestation, because of the absolute standpoint there is no other object, which can be manifested by Consciousness. But on account of the superimposition of ignorance a modification appears known as mind, which though insentient, appears as conscious on account of the association of Consciousness or Ātmān (Self) with it. The Ātmān (Self) appears as _Buddhi_ when associated with (the mind). The _Buddhi_, on account of its association with Consciousness, appears to be endowed with agency, will, etc. (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, 1998, p. 8)

The result of the process of mutual superimposition is the formation of an identity of the Self with the _jīva_. This process takes place in the _buddhi_, the part
of the mind in which the “I”-thought operates. The “I”-thought, or ego, is the part of the mind that performs the function of identifying, or labeling, the Self (Safaya, 1976). (I refer the reader to the previous chapter for an in depth discussion of the buddhi and the ego, or “I”-thought (ahaṅkāra), which functions as part of the buddhi.)

In the state of bondage, due to the effects of ignorance, the “I”-thought identifies the Self with the mind, and then with the mind-body-sense-complex, or jīva. The buddhi is also responsible for performing the functions of discrimination and determination in the mind, therefore, the nails are driven into the coffin of the mistaken identity of the Self when the buddhi makes the determination, “I am the jīva,” labeling the Self as being one with the jīva. In the text Pañcadasī, Sri Vidyaranya (1982) summarizes the process in a simple way.

Jīva, with Kutastha (the Self) as his real basis, appears to become an agent and tries to obtain the pleasures of heaven and earth. Jīvahood is due to superimposition. (p. 182, v. 7.6)

The complex process of ego-formation will be developed further in the following section to outline the operation and function of the psyche around self-identity in the state of bondage.

**Self-identity and ego-function in the state of bondage.**

As a means for introducing the process of ego-identification, we begin by considering the Vedantic teachings on the five sheaths. This model provides a useful structure for understanding how the ego (ahaṅkāra) functions in relationship to the complex landscape of the mind-body-sense-complex that is the
jīva. In the five-sheath model each of the sheaths defines and differentiates a different aspect, or layer of the mind-body-sense-complex. Each sheath is likened to a covering over the Self because each one is a potential point of misidentification for the Self (upādi), through the process of ego-identification. In fact, the sheaths are not understood as encasing the Self, covering it, or hiding it because the Self is self-luminous and can never be covered (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997).

The five sheaths start with the outermost gross level of the jīva, the physical body, and become subtler as they move toward the innermost realms of the mind. According to Vedanta, the food sheath (annamayakośa) is the gross, physical body. The vital sheath (prānamayakośa), belonging to the subtle body, is defined as the vital force, or the life energy (prana) that enlivens the physical body. The mind sheath (manomayakośa) and intellect sheath (vijñānamayakośa), also part of the subtle body, hold different parts of the mind. The mind sheath manomayakośa, houses the functioning of the manas and citta aspects of the mind. The intellect sheath, vijñānamayakośa, houses the functions of the buddhi and ahaṅkāra (ego). Finally, the bliss sheath (ānandamayakośa) is made of the causal body and is the part of the mind that reflects the bliss (ānanda) of the Self in the mind (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997)\(^3\). According to Vedanta, the function of ego-identification resides in the vijñānamayakośa, the intellect sheath,

\(^3\) See Satprakashananda’s (1977) *The Goal and the Way*, chap. 2 for more on the 5 sheaths and 3 bodies.
which houses the buddhi and the ego (ahaṅkāra) and performs the function of identifying the “I” with reference to the five sheaths as points of identification.

The buddhi with its thought modifications and the organs of perception is the vijñānamayakośa, which is of the nature of the doer and the cause of saṁsāra (bondage) for the person. The kośa known as vijñānamaya has the power of illumining due to the reflected consciousness, which has entered it; it is a modification of prakṛti (matter) having the function of knowledge and action and always identifies totally with the body, sense organs, etc. as “I”. (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997, pp. 169-172, vv. 52-3)

The Vedantic ego (ahaṅkāra) functions from the seat of the vijñānamayakośa to create the sense of identity for a person. The process of ego-identification in the state of bondage involves a primary and a secondary level.

The ego (ahaṅkāra), in its primary sense, functions as a thought that labels the Self and identifies it with the mind, giving the mind the sense of being a conscious existent entity. The “I”-thought is a thought in the mind which labels the self-luminous existent consciousness of the Self. According to Vedanta, the Self is the true content of the “I”-thought but because of ignorance the “I,” is identified with the mind giving the mind a sense of having individual agency. This primary identity of the ego gives the person the sense of being an entity that exists through time with a sense of constancy (Rambachan, 2006).

The primary identification of the ego described above is built upon in the secondary layer of process through which the ego identifies itself with reference to the mind-body-sense-complex, or jīva. According to Vedanta, the process of ego-identification is one that takes place in the moment-to-moment experience of the psyche (Rambachan, 2006). This process is one of labeling, or identifying the “I”-thought with reference to the content of the psyche at any given moment. The
content of the psyche include whatever combination of thoughts, sense impressions, and processes that may be taking place in the mind-body-sense-complex. For example, if I were to video-record the contents of a person’s psyche over the course of a moment in time, I would find a variety of different thoughts, sense impressions, and processes taking place simultaneously. The ego-function relates to all of it through the “I” thought, like the lens of a camera through which the content is being witnessed.

As mentioned already, in the state of bondage the Self is identified totally with the jīva through mutual superimposition. This superimposition takes place as an ongoing process whereby the Self is superimposed on every thought that the person experiences from the mind-body-sense-complex. Therefore, every thought form (vṛtti) that arises in the mind, whether it be a deliberation from the manas, a determination from the buddhi, a memory arising from the citta, or a sensory data coming through the sense organs, the thought is automatically identified with the Self through the labeling process of the ego, the “I”-thought. It is as if the “I-thought” is the base note and all content that arises in the mind is experienced on top of the base note. The base note is there in the background supporting all the other notes, but is undifferentiated from them. Thus, in the internal realm all contents of the psyche are labeled automatically by the ego as “my thought,” and in the external realm the “I”-thought labels a variety of people and situations as being identified with the Self. For example a person will identify the ego through one’s relationships such as “my wife” or “my son,” through material objects such
as “my car” or “my house,” and through roles they play in the world such as “my job.”

The ego identity is understood in Vedanta as a dynamic process that changes in the moment-to-moment experience based on whatever content the ego identifies with at a given moment including memories from the past and projected thoughts of the future. In an interview I conducted with Swami Dayananda (September 25th, 2005) he responded to a question about the ego-function in the state of bondage as follows:

The ego is defined from different standpoints. We always look at the ego through the mind, through the buddhi, through the citta, through the body, through the senses. Also, with reference to the external world you look at yourself and you say I am a son, daughter, husband, or wife. When you look at yourself from an external standpoint that is the ego.

According to Vedanta, the person living in a state of bondage looks at the individual self through the process of ego-identification, which labels the Self with the “I”-thought and then identifies the “I”-thought with the various aspects, attributes, and experiences of the mind-body-sense-complex. The result of this process of ego-identification is that the person experiences oneself as having a sense of constancy based on the consistency of the Self and the “I”-thought, which labels it affirming the identity of the individual. At the same time the person experiences their identity as being a self that is constantly being redefined based on the changing landscape of experiences dictated through the mind-body-sense-complex (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000). Based on this inner landscape of experience, the person living in the state of bondage concludes, “I am the jīva.” The identity of what the jīva is changes on a regular basis as the
psyche is constantly receiving, processing, and assimilating new information coming from the internal and external realms of experience.

In sum, the self-identity of the individual as the jīva takes place through the ongoing identification of the “I” thought with various aspects of one’s landscape of experience. The “I”-thought essentially attaches on to whatever the mind is doing and appears to take on different characters and roles in the psyche. Depending on what aspect of the mind-body-sense-complex it is identifying with at a given moment that is what the “I”-thought will identify with that. Most often, however, the “I”-thought is identified with the vijñānamaya, or the buddhi, which is the home of the ego-function in the psyche (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997).

In the next section the concept of core-beliefs will be introduced and threaded into the discussion on how the condition of bondage arises from the process of ego-identification outlined above.

**Identity and psychological state of bondage.**

This section introduces the concept of core-beliefs to further develop the Vedantic understanding of bondage as a psychological state rooted in the mistaken identity of the Self. Bringing this concept to light helps elucidate the implication in the Vedantic teachings expressed in the following verse linking the self-identity of the individual to different psychological states or conditions of mind.

Ignorance, obscuring and false projection reign when there is no sense of identity with the Absolute (Self). Freedom from grief, and unrestricted bliss are conditions associated with the sense of identity with the Absolute (Self). (Vidyaranya, 1982, p. 190, v. 7.33)
The implication in this verse is that the basic psychological condition that a person experiences is radically different depending upon one’s sense of self-identity. Based on this verse, we can conclude that the self-identity of the individual is understood in the teachings, to act as a central organizing principle in the psyche.

Vedanta does not use the term core-belief to explain how the identity of the individual is responsible as the cause for the condition of bondage. The teachings do not discuss the phenomenology of beliefs as functional psychic structures. Beliefs are discussed in the context of its epistemology only. Therefore, let it be clear that the concept of core-beliefs is being introduced here because it is familiar in the theoretical discourse of Western psychology, and is useful in elucidating an essential tenet of Vedantic psychology. In sum, the existence of core-beliefs, while not presented in a forthright manner in the texts, is precisely what the teachings on bondage and liberation imply.

As discussed in the previous section, the process of ego-identification that creates the mistaken identity of the Self is affirmed again and again in the texts as the cause for the condition of bondage to manifest in the psyche.

The buddhi with its thought modifications and the organs of perception is the vijñānamayakośa, which is of the nature of the doer and the cause of saṁsāra (bondage) for the person. (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, p. 169, v. 52)

**Defining core-beliefs.**

A belief is an established idea about what is true or real. Beliefs shape our basic perception of reality. A core-belief is a belief that exists at the core, the center, or the root of the psyche. It is a primary belief. A core-belief exists like
the foundation of a house, at the base of the psyche. It is a platform upon which the structures are built. Core-beliefs are the central topic of a book, *Prisoners of Belief* (1991) where McKay and Fanning define the concept:

> Your core beliefs are the basic concepts you live by. They form your picture of yourself, a portrait of your flaws and strengths, your abilities, your worth, and your relationship to the world. Your core beliefs are your identity. They define how you feel about yourself, the emotional tone of your life. They establish the limits of what you can achieve. They define what you can expect from life in the form of nourishment, satisfaction, and emotional well-being. (p. 7)

In his book, *The Spontaneous Healing of Belief*, author and scientist Gregg Braden (2008) elucidates the significance of our beliefs as that which dictate our basic experience of reality. He says:

> We live our lives based on what we believe…the beliefs that precede our actions are the foundation of all that we cherish, dream, become, and accomplish. From the morning rituals that we go through to greet the world each day, to the inventions that we use to make our lives better, our personal routines, community customs, religious ceremonies, and entire civilizations are based on our beliefs…our world is nothing more than a reflection of what we accept in our beliefs. We live our lives based on what we believe about our world, ourselves, our capabilities, and our limits. (pp. 1-2)

Both of these authors point to the functional aspect of beliefs as operative principles in the psyche, directly influencing a person’s basic sense of reality about oneself and the world as well as the actions one takes based upon that reality. In understanding the meaning of core-beliefs, I align myself with these authors, and define core-beliefs as structures in the psyche that act as patterns of meaning, or principles, which serve to organize the contents of the psyche. Thus, as information, in the form of thoughts and sensory input, flows in and through the psyche, a core-belief exists as a deep underlying impression or groove. It acts
like the gully of a river carved in the psychic landscape, that guides the flow in a particular shape or pattern. This shape or pattern naturally serves to organize the information according to the structure of the core-belief.

Core-beliefs, by definition, are understood as operating in the unconscious dimension of the human psyche. They remain unconscious until a person engages in self-inquiry, which will be explored in the next chapter. In considering the psychological landscape for the person living in the state of bondage it is important to note that the person is not conscious of their core-beliefs. They simply go about functioning and operating as if these core-beliefs are foregone conclusions about reality without questioning them. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Vedantic model of the mind, or psyche, includes an unconscious dimension, called the *citta*. The *citta* is defined as the storehouse of latent impressions and memory (Safaya, 1976). Therefore, according to the Vedantic model of the psyche, core-beliefs are placed in the *citta*, which houses the unconscious realm of the mind.

Keeping the definition of core-beliefs in mind, let us turn now to consider the way in which core-beliefs operate in the state of bondage. Based on the processes of mutual superimposition and ego-identification discussed earlier in the chapter, the identification of the Self with the *jīva*, in effect establishes a core-belief at the root of the psyche. This core-belief is one that affirms the self-identity of the person and can be summarized in the statement, “I am the mind-body-sense-complex,” or “I am the *jīva*.” For the sake of simplicity in the following discussion the
term \textit{jīva} will be used to represent the self-identity in the state of bondage. This term has been adequately developed in the previous chapter.

Drawing together the pieces that have been laid out so far, we can now see that the Vedantic teachings affirm the idea that due to the effects of ignorance, the core-belief, “I am the \textit{jīva},” is established in the state of bondage. This core-belief forms a deep groove at the root of the psyche, which acts as an organizing principle. In other words, the core-belief holds a pattern of meaning which serves to organize the content and dictate the functional processes in the psyche. The core-belief related to self-identity acts like a foundational structure in the psyche, which gives rise to an entire psychological reality, state, or condition known as bondage, or \textit{sāṃsāra}. Gregg Braden (2008) states that a belief is like a “program” that creates patterns in reality. (p. 31) Like this, the core-belief, “I am the \textit{jīva}” operates as a program that gives rise to a particular psychological reality, the condition of bondage, or \textit{sāṃsāra}.

**Emotional Suffering in the State of Bondage**

The teachings of Vedanta describe the condition of bondage as one of great suffering and darkness. As discussed at the beginning of the chapter, there are many different forms of suffering that arise as a result of the identification with the limited mind-body-sense-complex. We now turn our attention to consider the psychological and emotional suffering that arises in the psyche as a result of the primary identity of the Self with \textit{jīva}. 


Throughout the Vedantic texts, negative emotional states are posited as being a direct result of ignorance (*avidyā*) and its effects. The following verses are examples in which the three negative emotions of grief, fear, and anger are named in association with the psychological effects of ignorance.

False projection (*vikṣepa*) is said to consist in the gross and subtle bodies plus the reflection of consciousness therein. Its property, which is a source of bondage, is the totality of grief arising from the sense of agency and enjoyment. This grief we call “*saṃsāra.*” (Vidyaranya, 1982, p. 191, v. 7.37)

Ignorance brings about suffering by engendering feelings of inadequacy, fear, and anxiety. *Avidyā* (ignorance) is the original error and the first link in the causal chain (*avidyā-kāmā-karma*) leading to human suffering. It’s removal, therefore, is the sin-qua-non for human well-being. (Rambachan, 2006, p. 100)

When *ātmā*, which is of the nature of pure awareness free from any impurity, is eclipsed, the person considers the *anātmā*, body as *ātmā*. Then the strong power of rajas, known as *vikṣepa*, afflicts him much with the binding qualities of desire, anger, and the like. (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997, p. 132, v. 41)

Another important reference that comes straight from the *Upaniṣads* themselves is presented in a book entitled *Freedom from Fear*, by Swami Dayananda (2000). This verse from the *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* implies that the perception of duality alone is cause for fear. It reads: “It is a second thing that causes fear” (Sankaracarya & Madhavananda, 1993, p. 66, v. 1.4.2).

In the state of bondage a person lives in a state of duality all the time, by virtue of identifying oneself with the human mind-body-sense-complex. Therefore, according to this verse, the state of bondage is pervaded by an underlying sense of fear at all times. According to Vedanta, a person living in the state of bondage suffers from the emotional pain of fear, anxiety, grief, sorrow,
and anger. As the verses presented above indicate, negative emotions are understood to arise as a direct result of the identity of the individual with the human mind-body-sense-complex, the jīva. Therefore, the conclusion here is that Advaita psychology affirms the emotional suffering in the state of bondage as a phenomena that naturally arises out of the core-belief expressed in the statement, “I am the jīva.”

**Primary and Secondary Core-Beliefs**

Let us turn to explore the psychological landscape that arises in the state if bondage and the specific type of emotional suffering that is associated with it. As discussed already, in the state of bondage, the primary core-belief is established at the foundation in the psyche, “I am the jīva.” This belief is planted at the root of the psyche, and informs the person’s basic sense of reality about oneself and the world. Out of the primary core-belief, “I am the jīva,” arises a network of many other core-beliefs that I am calling secondary core-beliefs.

The secondary core-beliefs are logically deduced from the primary core-belief, arising directly from it. Many core-beliefs can be deduced from the primary identification with the mind-body-sense-complex, jīva. For example, “I am a man,” or “I am a woman” are secondary core-beliefs, which arise out of the identification with the biological sex of the physical body. In keeping with the topic at hand, this discussion will focus only on two secondary core-beliefs, which are directly linked with the emotional suffering in the state of bondage. The secondary core-beliefs “I am lacking,” and “I am separate” have already been
shown as conclusions in the psyche that arise from the identification with the limited mind-body-sense-complex.

Let us now turn to consider the way in which each of these core-beliefs creates emotional pain and psychological suffering for a person living in the state of bondage. The belief “I am lacking” arises out of the identification with the limited mind-body-sense-complex. The experience of this limitation translates unconsciously in the psyche to a feeling of being inherently lacking. The psychological impact of the core-belief, “I am lacking,” is that the person feels they are not whole, not complete, and not okay as they are. At the beginning of the chapter this core-belief was discussed as the motivating factor that propels a person into a continuous cycle of fulfilling desires as a means of filling the sense of lack. From a psychological perspective, this core-belief can be seen as responsible for creating low self-worth, inadequacy, and the sense of being inherently flawed. This can manifest in subsequent beliefs or notions about oneself such as “I am not good enough,” “I am bad,” and general feelings of self-criticism or negativity towards oneself.

A person’s sense of self-worth is an essential element that dictates a person’s overall sense of mental-emotional health and well-being. Therefore, it can be concluded that the secondary core-belief “I am lacking,” creates an organizing principle in the psyche that is rooted in a negative sense of self. This belief, which arises out of the primary core-belief, ultimately is cause for the negative emotions such as grief, fear, sorrow, and anger, which are named in the teachings as resulting from the effects of ignorance.
The conclusion, “I am separate,” is another secondary core-belief that has significant negative emotional consequences in the state of bondage. This core-belief arises directly out of the identification with the physical body. The body exists within the third-dimensional world of duality. Because the person is identified with the body, he or she knows oneself as being separate from all objects that are perceived as existing beyond the boundary of the physical body. The core-belief, “I am separate,” therefore, arises automatically in the state of bondage, and engenders basic feelings of isolation, abandonment, and fear for one’s survival. From a psychological perspective, the degree of severity, to which a person experiences these negative emotions, will vary depending on the specific relational and cultural environment in which a person lives. However, according to Vedanta, even in the best of circumstances, as long as the person is living in the state of bondage, they will suffer from a basic sense of feeling separate as an individual, and this itself is cause for a fair degree of existential fear and emotional suffering to be present (Dayananda, 2000, p. 1). Thus, the secondary core-belief, “I am separate,” which is a derived from the primary core-belief, “I am the jīva,” is concluded here as creating an organizing principle in the psyche, which generates a significant amount of fear and emotional distress in the state of bondage.

In sum, we can better understand how emotional suffering arises in the state of bondage, by introducing the idea of secondary core-beliefs. This concept helps bring to light the way in which negative emotional states such as grief, sorrow, fear, and anger are directly linked in the teachings to the identification of
the Self with the jīva. In viewing the state of bondage through the lens of core-beliefs, we begin to get a sense of the kind of psychological environment that is experienced by the person. In considering the two core-beliefs, “I am lacking,” and “I am separate” as organizing principles, which dictate the person’s basic sense of reality, it is easy to sense the grim conditions that the person is faced with in the state of bondage.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a comprehensive account of the state of bondage in Advaita Vedanta as a psychological condition. It colors a person’s basic sense of self-identity and in turn their perception of the world. Self-ignorance was affirmed as the primary cause, which, through a series of interlinking processes in the psyche, is responsible for giving rise to the condition of bondage. The following verse from Vivekacūḍāmaṇi summarizes the psychological landscape in the state of bondage that has been explored in this chapter.

For the tree of saṃsāra, ignorance is indeed the seed; the sense of “I” in the physical body is the sprout; the desires are the foliage; the actions are the waters; the body is the trunk; the prānas are the branches; the aggregate of the sense organs and organs of action are the twigs; the sense objects are the flowers; the fruits are different types of sorrow born of varieties of actions. Here the jīva is the enjoying bird. (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997, pp.136-7, v. 43)

In conclusion, the state of bondage can be viewed as complex psychological condition, which, from a Vedantic standpoint, can be likened to an existential pathology innate to the human population. The word pathology can be used to describe the condition of bondage if we define the word in the general
sense of being a condition of disease or disorder that causes a person to distort reality, or be out of touch with reality. As we have seen in this chapter, according to Vedanta, this definition of pathology is a fitting description for the psychological condition of bondage that manifests in the psyche as a result of inborn ignorance.
Chapter 5: The Psychology of Liberation in Advaita Vedanta

Introduction

Liberation (mokṣa), freedom from bondage, is the stated goal of the spiritual aspirant in Advaita Vedanta (Balasubramanian, 1994). According to the teachings, from the standpoint of the Self, there is no bondage (samsāra) or liberation (mokṣa). The Self exists in a limitless and free state by nature and, therefore, does not need to be set free.

There is no dissolution, no origination, none in bondage, none striving or aspiring for salvation, and none liberated. This is the highest truth. (Sankaacarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 251, v. 2.32)

Liberation can only apply to that which is in a state of bondage. Therefore, as an introduction to the Vedantic concept of liberation (mokṣa), let it be clear that the concept is given definition in the teachings as an address to the one who is suffering from the condition of bondage, specifically the mind of the jīva (Rambachan, 1991).

According to Vedanta, liberation (mokṣa) takes place through the process of gaining Self-knowledge (Deussen, 1998; Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003). The root cause for the condition of bondage to manifest in the psyche was shown in the previous chapter to be ignorance (avidyā) of the Self. This ignorance (avidyā) and its effects were shown to be the source of bondage (samsāra) and its associated suffering. Logically speaking, if the source of a problem is ignorance, its resolution can only be achieved through gaining knowledge, which removes the ignorance. Accordingly, in the case of resolving the condition of bondage (samsāra), Vedanta affirms the only possible solution as
one that takes place through gaining correct knowledge of the Self. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003)

This chapter presents an in depth discussion of the processes involved in gaining Self-knowledge and the transformative impact it has on the psyche. According to Vedanta, when a person gains Self-knowledge one realizes that the nature of the individual jīva is the Self, and that Self is Brahman, the Self of the entire creation. Thus, gaining Self-knowledge establishes a non-dual identity between the individual jīva and the entire creation by revealing the fact that they are both manifestations of one non-dual Self, or Brahman (Laksmidhara & Tejomayananda, 1986).

This chapter explores the nature of gaining Self-knowledge as two distinct, yet interconnected realizations. The first part is the realization that the true nature of the individual is the Self. The second part reveals that Self to be Brahman, the Self of the entire creation, or Īśvara. The forthcoming discussion will consider these two aspects of Self-knowledge separately. I will explore the processes that lead a person to gain each realization, and the specific way that the psyche is healed and transformed by each one. Finally, I will conclude by looking at the process of assimilating and integrating Self-knowledge in the human psyche, a transformative process, which involves the dismantling of the paradigm of reality rooted in bondage and the creation of an entirely new one rooted in Self-knowledge.
Knowledge of the Self as the Nature of the Ģīva

The first part of gaining Self-knowledge, according to Vedanta, is the recognition that the true nature of the individual Ģīva is the Self. Gaining this knowledge, removes the ignorance that had caused the mistaken identity of the individual to be created in the first place, and catalyzes a profound transformation in the psyche (Venugopal, 2012). According to Vedanta, gaining knowledge of the Self as the true nature of the Ģīva, according to the tradition, takes place as a result of a person’s exposing oneself to the Vedantic teaching methodology using words as a means of knowledge (śabda-pramāṇa) (Datta, 1960; Satprakashananda, 1974). This method is employed in the context of a class setting where the student sits and listens to the teacher unfold the meaning of the verses from a given text (śravaṇam). While sitting and listening the student allows their mind to be absorbed in the flow of the words spoken by the teacher. The goal of this method is to create an environment, which supports and guides the student to gain a direct cognition of the Self, which is already present as the nature of the student.

This method of teaching is based on the Advaitic epistemological claim that words as a means of knowledge (śabda-pramāṇa), can lead a person to gain direct knowledge (aparokṣa-jñānam) of an object when the object is available in one’s immediate scope of experience (Rambachan, 1995). The Self, being the nature of the human individual, is naturally available to be known through the means of direct knowledge (aparokṣa-jñānam). According to Vedanta, gaining direct knowledge (aparokṣa-jñānam) of the Self is required to remove the
ignorance and the mistaken identity of the Self, the root cause for the condition of bondage. A verse from the text *Pañcadaśī*, makes this claim.

The knowledge arising from enquiry and reflection is of two kinds, indirect and direct. Enquiry ends on the achievement of direct knowledge of the Self. . . . The indirect knowledge is "Brahman (the Self) is"; the direct knowledge is "I am Brahman (the Self)." (Vidyaranya, 1982, p. 97, vv. 6:15-6)

The process of gaining direct knowledge (*aparokṣa jñānam*) of the Self is unique in comparison to that of gaining direct knowledge of any other object in the creation (Balasubramanian, 1994). In order to address this unique circumstance Advaita Vedanta establishes an epistemological category known as "self-revealing" knowledge that only applies to the process of gaining direct knowledge of the Self. The Self cannot be known through the same means as other objects of knowledge because it cannot be perceived in the same way.

(The Self) is not grasped by the eyes, not by words nor by other sense organs, not by religious disciplines or rituals. A person of pure mind enquiring into the partless Brahman (the Self) gains it through (direct) knowledge. (Dayananda, 2006, p.169, v. 8)

The process involved in gaining knowledge of objects in the creation involves the direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) of the object through the sense organs (Sinha, 1985). For example, gaining direct knowledge of a tree that is in my field of experience, involves the perception of the tree through my sense organs (the eyes), which then forms a thought form (*vṛtti*) of the tree in the mind, and the tree is then known through direct cognition (*pratyakṣa*). This step-by-step process is the same for all objects that have name and form in the creation. Even internal sensations in the body are perceived through the sense organs and cognized through the mind (Atreya, 1985).
According to Vedanta, the nature of the Self is consciousness, which illumines the objects of consciousness and creates knowledge of the objects through direct perception.

This Consciousness (the Self) does neither rise nor set. It does not increase; nor does it suffer decay. Being self-luminous, it illumines everything else without any other aid. (Sankaracarya & Tejomayananda, 1994, p. 6, v. 5)

In the case of gaining direct knowledge (pratyakṣa) of objects in the creation, there is a subject-object relationship established between the “knower” and the “known.” However, in the case of gaining direct knowledge of the Self, this “knower-known” relationship breaks down. In this unique circumstance the object of knowledge, the Self, is the very nature of the knower and the object to be known at once. Hence, the subject-object relationship between the knower and the known collapses. Because the Self is the nature of consciousness itself, gaining direct knowledge of the Self is said in the teachings to be a “self-revealing” process (Datta, 1960). The following verse from the Kaṭha Upaniṣad affirms the nature of this knowledge as knowledge that, in the end, is “revealed.”

This Self cannot be known through much study, nor through the intellect, nor through much hearing. It can be known through the Self alone that the aspirant prays to; this Self of that seeker reveals its true nature. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 157, v. 1.2.23)

According to Vedanta, knowledge of the Self is self-revealing because the Self is self-luminous (svataprakāśa), which means that it shines by its own light, consciousness. It needs no outside involvement in order to be revealed, or “known.” Therefore, as the verse suggests, in the moment that this knowledge takes place, the Self simply “reveals its true nature.”
Vedantic teaching methodologies: discrimination, negation, and positive assertion.

The person who is seeking liberation is doing so from the within the state of bondage. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Self is experientially present in the state of bondage and is, in fact already known in a general sense (sāmānyā jñāna), as the conscious existent being that the person identifies as “myself.” The problem is that, due to ignorance (avidyā) and mutual superimposition (anyonyādhyāsa), the Self is completely identified with the mind-body-sense-complex, or jīva. Therefore, the Self is situated in a unique position in the landscape of the person’s psyche. It is already known as an embedded part of the person’s experience, however it has been falsely identified with that which it is not (anātmā) (Rambachan, 1991).

Due to the unique circumstances surrounding the Self as an object of knowledge, the teaching methods of discrimination, negation, and positive assertion are employed in the class setting (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, 1998). The method of discrimination serves to leverage the Self out of its embedded state with the mind-body-sense-complex. A verse found in Vivekacūḍāmani, provides an example for the delicate and subtle nature of the process of discrimination (vīveka) and the knowledge, which results from it.

He is free, who separating the unassociated innermost self, the subject-who is actionless-from the whole host of objects as even separating the inside stalk from the muñjā grass and resolving everything there in that ātmā stays, by knowledge, as that very ātmā. (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, p. 151, v. 45)
Once the Self has been successfully differentiated through discriminating wisdom, the false conclusions about the nature of the Self can then be negated (Balasubramanian, 1994). The negation of false notions about the Self is an organic process that happens when the true nature of the Self is revealed to be an independent reality that is free from association with the mind-body-sense-complex. Finally, through the teaching method of positive assertion the true nature of the Self is pointed to. When these methods are successful, this gives the person specific knowledge (viśeṣa-jñāna) of the Self, which had previously only been known in a general way (Rambachan, 1991). In sum, the three methods outlined here are used in the teaching to guide the student through a process of inquiry that involves breaking down the mistaken identity of the Self so that the true nature can be revealed.

The process of inquiry known as “seer-seen-differentiation” (dṛg-drśya-viveka) is one of the most commonly used methods employed by the teacher to help the person differentiate between the Self and the layers of the mind-body-sense-complex. The student is directed to bring his or her attention on the physical body and the various aspects of the mind, noticing the fact that each layer of the mind-body-sense-complex is actually an object of experience that comes and goes. The simple logic given here is that if a thing can come into awareness and go out of awareness, then it cannot be inherently connected or attached to the subject, the one perceiving the thing. Through this analysis, the body and the mind, including the “I”-thought, are differentiated from the subject, and
established categorically as objects of experience (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000).

In the end of the analysis what remains in the realm of the subject, is the pure awareness or pure consciousness of the Self. In this moment the student experiences the Self, standing alone and naked, and sees that the Self is fundamentally separate from all the dresses that it usually wears, namely the mind-body-sense-complex, jīva (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, 1998). The following verse from Aparokshānubhuti, affirms the knowledge that is revealed through the process of discrimination.

Ātmān (the Self), in itself is alone permanent, the seen is opposed to it (i.e. transient)-such a settled conviction is truly known as discrimination. (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000, p. 4, v. 5)

In the text Advaita Makaranda, Sri Lakshmidhara Kavi presents a series of verses all in the first person, speaking from the standpoint of the Self and negating the various aspects that are established as being separate from the Self through discriminating knowledge. (vīveka-jñānam).

I am not the body, not the sense organs, not the Pranas (vital force), not the mind, and not the intellect because these are all objects of the “my”-thought or of the “this”-thought. (Laksmidhari & Tejomayananda, 1986, p. 17, v. 8)

I am the Witness, all-pervading and dear, and not the ego (ahaṅkāra) ever, which has the calamitous associations with modifications, limitations, and afflictions. (Laksmidhari & Tejomayananda, 1986, p. 18, v. 9)

Once the false identities have been differentiated and negated as not being inherently connected to the Self, the method of positive assertion comes into play. Positive assertion uses words with specific care and intention to point the mind toward the nature of the Self, so that it may gain a direct cognition of the Self.
The words spoken by the teacher as positive assertion are meant to act like a mirror for the Self, so that when the student hears the words, the meaning resolves into the Self, which is an experiential reality (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, 2002). In other words, like the meaning of the word “tree” resolves into the experiential reality of the tree itself, the words used to describe the Self-- such as consciousness, existence, limitless, unchanging, infinite, non-dual, or self-luminous-- resolve into the experiential reality of the Self.

**Moment of realization: A close up look.**

Generally speaking, gaining Self-knowledge is looked at as a process that unfolds over time, however within that process there is a particular event that takes place that is significant and worthy of special focus. That is the moment in which the student experiences the direct recognition the Self for the first time, and direct knowledge of the Self takes place. This moment is of great significance because when the true nature of the Self is recognized directly, the ignorance (avidyā), which is responsible for the condition of bondage, is removed at the roots of the psyche (Sadananda & Nikhilananda, 2002). This single event, which amounts to a profound moment of insight for the mind, catalyzes the beginning of a process of transformation in the psyche from the state of bondage to the state of liberation. For this reason, the Advaita teachings detail the dynamics that are involved in the mind when this critical moment of insight takes place.

The moment when this knowledge takes place is presented in the texts as a two-fold dynamic process. First, being guided by the words of the teacher, the mind directly perceives the Self through a thought form, which is true to the Self
(akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti). Second the mind goes into a state of quietude as if it is transparent, and the Self reveals itself. This two-fold process is well summarized in the following verse from the *Munḍaka Upaniṣad*.

This subtle self has to be understood by the mind alone that is located in this (body) wherein the prāna has entered in a five-fold way. The entire mind of the people, along with their sense organs, is pervaded by consciousness. When this (mind) is rendered pure, this self reveals itself. (Dayananda, 2006, p. 175, v. 3.1.9)

Gaining a direct perception of the Self is only possible through the mind, and as this verse from the *Katha Upaniṣad* suggests, specifically through the buddhi.

His form (the Self) does not exist within the range of vision; nobody sees Him with the eye. When this Self is revealed through deliberation, It is realized by the intellect (buddhi), the ruler of the mind, that resides in the heart. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 222, v. 2.3.8)

According to Vedanta, the mind will generally gain a direct cognition of the Self (akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti) when the person is sitting and listening to the teaching (śravaṇam), however, this can also take place during the practices of reflection (mananam) or contemplation (nididhyāsanam) (Rambachan, 1991). In the moment when the mind gains the thought form that reflects the nature of the Self (akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti), the mind becomes completely silent and inactive so that it is not contributing anything experientially. It is totally absorbed in the Self. A verse from *Advaita-Prakaraṇa* says:

When following the instruction of the scriptures and the teacher, the mind ceases to think as a realization of the Truth that is the Self, then the mind attains the state of not being the mind; in the absence of things to be perceived, it becomes a non-perceiver. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 304, v. 3.31)
When the mind goes totally quiet all that is left experientially is the Self, shining by its own light and revealing itself. According to Vedanta, in this moment of realization, which takes place in the buddhi, the ignorance (avidyā), which had existed there, is instantaneously removed along with its immediate effects.

Then, just as a cloth is burnt when the threads composing it are burnt, so all the effects of ignorance are destroyed, when their cause, viz ignorance, is destroyed. (Sadananda & Nikhilananda, 2002, p. 100, v. 172)

The famous Vedantic story of a snake being projected into a rope was presented already to show the way in which ignorance operates in the psyche to create the mutual superimposition between the Self and the mind-body-sense-complex. This story can also be referenced to exemplify the impact that Self-knowledge has in removing ignorance and its effects. In the rope-snake story a moment arises when the friend of the boy, who had seen the rope, takes the boy to have a closer look at it. In this moment the boy sees the rope and gains direct knowledge of it. In turn, without any effort, the snake disappears, as if in a poof of smoke, and the boy breathes a sign of relief. This example shows us how the reality of the snake, an effect of ignorance, disappears instantaneously when knowledge of the rope takes place.

The rope-snake example illustrates exactly what takes place when the mind gains a direct perception of the Self for the first time. In that moment the Self is perceived as an independent reality that is the true nature of the human individual, the ignorance is immediately removed along with its immediate effects of creating the mutual superimposition between the mind and the Self.
When the obscuring principle is destroyed, both the idea of the jīva, a mere superimposition, and the grief caused by the engagement in worldly concerns are also destroyed. (Vidyaranya, 1982, p. 194, v. 7.46)

When the ignorance is removed from the buddhi, the experience from the standpoint of the mind is like a powerful spell being lifted. The mind sees itself and the Self as being separate from each other for the first time, and the identity of the individual with the jīva is broken. The mind, having gained this knowledge, sees the way in which it had mistakenly identified itself with what is, in reality, the Self. This initial moment of realization has a lasting impact on the psyche in the sense that the mind has recognized a truth that can never be taken away (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000).

The process of psychological transformation: A basic shift in identity.

When a person gains a direct cognition of the Self as the true nature of the individual, the knowledge delivers a powerful blow to the ignorance in the mind. This knowledge directly addresses the problem of bondage at its root, where the mistaken identity of the individual had been created. Therefore, the initial moment of realization is the cornerstone to the entire process of gaining Self-knowledge (Balasubramanian, 1994).

Although the impact of gaining direct knowledge of the nature of the Self is very powerful, it’s overall effect on the psyche as a means of solving the problem of bondage is also limited (Lipner, 1997). As discussed in the previous chapter, in the state of bondage the entire structure of the psyche is resting upon the primary core-belief, “I am the jīva”, rooted in ignorance. Therefore, when a person gains the direct cognition of the Self that knowledge enters into a psychic
landscape that is pervaded by the condition of bondage. The organizing principles in the form of core-beliefs are deeply rooted in the unconscious mind and therefore do not simply disappear in a poof of smoke like the snake. In sum, what is required in order to resolve and heal the condition of bondage is a process of assimilating the knowledge and allowing the psyche to transform over time in light of knowledge.

The transformation that takes place as a result of assimilating this knowledge involves the establishment of a new set of organizing principles at the root of the psyche that are based on the primary core-belief, “I am the Self” (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997). The new identity of the individual is established in the psyche by way of the “I”-thought (ahaṅkāra), the part of the mind that holds the function of identifying the Self, affirming the conclusion in the buddhi “I am the Self.” In the context of this dissertation, the term core-belief has been defined as an organizing principle that exists as a deep underlying impression or groove, like the gully of a river carved in the psychic landscape. As such a core-belief is a pattern that is inherently imbued with meaning and naturally serves an organizing function for the contents of the psyche. It is important to note that according to Vedanta, the conclusion “I am the Self” is an expression of individual identity based on correct knowledge. Hence, from an epistemological standpoint it is potentially misleading to use the term core-belief here. According to Vedanta, the conclusion, “I am the Self,” is an expression of knowledge that is true to reality, not a belief. Therefore, let it be clear that the
use of the term core-belief is being defined explicitly as an organizing principle in the psyche, and should not be taken otherwise.

When this knowledge takes place and the condition of bondage begins to be dismantled, the new primary core-belief, “I am the Self” takes root and gives rise to a set of secondary core-beliefs that are implied by the nature of the Self being what it is. Over time an entire new psychological network begins to grow and gives birth to what I am calling the “state of liberation,” which is a psychological state based on correct knowledge of the Self.

**The nature of the Self as limitless.**

In order to build an understanding of the psychological paradigm that is born from the knowledge, “I am the Self,” let us consider again the nature of the Self, according to Vedanta. The Vedantic scriptures use many different words that describe the nature of the Self. The formal definition, discussed at length in chapter three, is expressed in three Sanskrit words put together, *satyam* (existence)-*jñanam* (consciousness)-*anantam* (limitless) (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 304, v. 2.1.1). Although, three words are given in the scriptures to define the nature of the Self, it is critical to understand that the words are pointing to one undivided reality that is unified and whole in nature (Laksmidari & Tejomayananda, 1986).

In the context of exploring the psychological impact of gaining Self-knowledge in Advaita Vedanta, we are looking at the nature of the Self from a particular standpoint. The inquiry at hand is to understand how the establishment of the Self as the identity of the individual gives rise to a new paradigm of reality
in the psyche, one that is psychologically healing. Therefore, we will explore the nature of the Self through the Sanskrit term *anantam*. *Anantam* expresses the nature of the Self as limitless, and whole, (Suddhabodhananda, 1996a) which has implications for the mind that are rich with psychological meaning.

The Sanskrit word *anantam* is translated as “without end” or “limitless.” The Self is said to be limitless in reference to all dimensions of the creation including time, space, and form (Deussen, 1998). According to Vedanta, being limitless implies that there is nothing other than the Self, which is undivided, and unchanging (Sivananda, 1997). If it were not all of these things it would not be limitless. The following verse, speaks in the first person from the standpoint of the Self, and affirms its limitless nature.

That Effulgent Consciousness am I which is Self-established, all full, without beginning and end, and in which, the illusory ideas of the world and individual, the disciple and teacher and God are extinct. (Laksmidhari & Tejomayananda, 1986, p. 46, v. 27)

The Sanskrit ānanda, derived from *anantam* (limitlessness) is generally translated in the Vedantic texts into English as “bliss.” This translation, if not properly understood, can be the cause for a fatal misunderstanding of what the Advaita texts are trying to convey about the nature of the Self. The problem is that, for native English speakers, the meaning of the word “bliss” is generally associated with a positive mental-emotional state of happiness, pleasure, or joy. According to Vedanta, the word ānanda is given to define the nature of the Self, which exists independently from the various states of mind that come and go (Sankaracarya & Dayananada, 1997).
In order to understand what is meant by the use of the word ānanda as it applies to the nature of the Self, we must begin by negating the notion of bliss in relationship to a mental-emotional state of happiness, pleasure, or joy that comes and goes (Rambachan, 2006). By negating this notion we clear away any potential confusion about the way the word is being used as a translation for ānanda, and create space for a new understanding of the meaning of the word bliss as it is refers to the nature of the Self.

The Sanskrit word ānanda, is intended in Vedanta to convey the nature of the Self as limitless, which has an experiential quality of fullness (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003). Let it be clear again, that the experience of ānanda is affirmed in Vedanta as a constant variable in the psyche because the Self is constant and unchanging. Therefore the ānanda of the Self does not come and go, or change in anyway. To the contrary, the ānanda of the Self, which is better translated as “fullness,” “wholeness,” or “love” is pervasive and changelessly present in all states of mind. As defined in chapter three, the Self is affirmed in Vedanta as the changeless baseline reality in the psyche, in which the changing states of mind come and go. Therefore, because the nature of the Self is ānanda, the fullness of the Self is always present as a constant reality in the psyche. A verse from the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* reads:

> By knowing the Self the discriminative people clearly recognize that immortal *Brahman* which is of the nature of ānanda and shines always. (Dayananda, 2006, p. 93, v. 2.2.8)

The Vedantic texts express the limitless nature of the Self through many different words, each of which point to this nature in a slightly different way. As
we attempt to grasp the limitless nature of the Self, and the impact this has on the individual psyche from a psychological standpoint, it is useful to consider some of the other ways that ānanda is defined in the teachings of Vedanta.

One of the concepts presented in the teachings to describe the limitless nature of the Self is pūrṇam (wholeness). The word pūrṇam is translated as limitlessness, completeness, absolute fullness, or wholeness (Dayananda, 2001). The Self is said to be whole because there is nothing to divide it into parts. It is therefore one undivided whole, or non-dual. The example for understanding the meaning of wholeness and fullness expressed in the word purnam is the full moon (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997).

Another key concept to be highlighted regarding the Vedantic Self is that it is by nature unchanging, or immutable. According to Vedanta, the Self does not undergo any mutation in its nature at anytime. It remains in the same homogenous state as a stable and constant reality. A verse from Advaita Prakaraṇa reads:

The Self is free of all sense organs, and is above all internal organs. It is supremely tranquil, eternal effulgence, divine absorption, immutable, and fearless. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 311, v. 3.38)

Being immutable, means that no change takes place in the Self, and therefore no action or movement is present. For this reason in the verse above the Self is said to be supremely tranquil. In other instances words such as supreme peace or quietude are presented, capturing the same idea of the Self as a reality which is completely still (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003).
Finally, according to Vedanta, the nature of the Self is immortal, or eternal. Immortality is implied from the limitless nature of the Self because it has no beginning and no end. In other words it exists outside of time. The teachings affirm the Self to be an ever-present reality in which the ideas of birth and death do not apply (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003). From a logical standpoint there can be no birth or death for a reality that is changeless because these concepts imply a change from one state to another. If it is accepted that the Self is changeless, then it cannot be born to begin with because to be born would constitute a change in its nature. If the Self is not born, then it also cannot die. Therefore, it is concluded in Vedanta that the Self exists beyond time, is eternal, and maintains its undivided nature permanently amidst all the changing states of the individual, including death of the physical body. This nature of the Self is affirmed as such in a verse found in the *Katha Upanisad*.

The intelligent Self is neither born nor does it die. It did not originate from anything, nor did anything originate from it. It is birthless, eternal, undecaying, and ancient. It is not injured even when the body is killed. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 151, v. 1.2.18)

In a commentary by Sri Sankaracarya (2003) he draws another implication of the immutable nature of the Self. He says, “It is acala, immutable; and therefore, fearless, since there is no mutation” (p. 152). Sankara’s association of the word fearless with the Self, is another way of saying that the Self is safe. The Self is not to be feared because, unlike the mind-sense-complex and the entire creation, it does not change.

In sum, the nature of the Self is affirmed in the teachings of Advaita Vedanta as being *anantam*, which I have defined through the words--
limitlessness, bliss, wholeness, fullness, unchanging, peace, immortal, and safe.

With this definition of the Self in mind, we turn again to consider the paradigm of reality that is developed in the psyche for the person who recognizes the Self to be one’s true nature.

**Healing the wounds of bondage: A new paradigm of reality.**

According to Vedanta, when the identity of the individual begins to take root in the Self, this has a profoundly positive effect on the person’s psyche (Suddhabodhananda, 1996b). The nature of the Self, as discussed above, is inherently whole, benign, stable, and free from limitation of any kind. Therefore, when the mind recognizes the Self and begins to reorient itself in light of gaining this knowledge, a process of healing transformation begins to unfold in the psyche (Prabhavananda & Manchester, 1957; Satprakashananda, 1977; Sankaracarya & Chinmayananda, 2001).

To understand how this knowledge offers a cure to the problem of bondage, let us consider again the basic psychological landscape for the person who is living in that condition. In the state of bondage the organization of the psyche is built upon the primary identity of the individual with the mind-body-sense-complex, expressed in the statement, “I am the ṛ̐iṣva.” The ṛ̐iṣva is limited by nature, and therefore, when the individual is identified with the ṛ̐iṣva, the person naturally feels that he or she is limited (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, 2000).

The primary identification with the limited nature of the ṛ̐iṣva, implies what I have called a secondary core-belief, “I am lacking.” This fundamental
conclusion leads a person to feelings of being incomplete, inadequate, and unworthy. The underlying sense of lack, or being incomplete, manifests in the psyche as a baseline of existential anxiety because the person does not feel okay as they are. In an attempt to soothe this uncomfortable feeling, the person is compelled to seek a sense of wholeness and peace through the fulfillment of desires, which only provide temporary relief at best (Lipner, 1997). In sum, the identification of the individual with the limited jīva, leads one to feel fundamentally flawed at one’s core, which is the source of deeply rooted pain and suffering in the psyche. That suffering manifests through many different forms of emotional pain such as fear, anger, and grief.

When a person gains this knowledge, the new primary core-belief, “I am the Self,” gives rise to several secondary core-beliefs, each of which reflect the nature of the Self. Using the words that have been given to define the Self, some examples of the secondary core-beliefs are, “I am whole,” “I am complete,” “I am full,” “I am unchanging,” “I am love,” and “I am peace.” Thus, the transformation of identity for the individual, from the jīva, to the Self, is summarized here as a radical shift in identifying oneself with a basic sense of lack, inadequacy, and incompleteness to one of being whole, complete, and the nature of love (Dayananda, 2004).

When the Self is recognized to be the true nature of the individual, the mind, goes through a major process of restructuring and realignment. The mind, which had been totally identified with the Self as one entity due to the phenomenon of mutual superimposition, now settles into a new relationship with
the Self (Venugopal, 2012). According to Vedanta, the Self is always present and pervasive to the mind, and through gaining this knowledge it is recognized as a reality that is limitless, whole, unchanging, and inherently at peace. Thus, when the mind assimilates the reality of the Self, the identity of the individual in the psyche comes to be rooted in a basic sense of being okay as I am.

The Self is experienced by the person as inherently meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile. Therefore, when the personality comes to be rooted in the Self the person identifies with a basic sense of positivity, self-worth, and self-acceptance. This creates an inner environment of emotional well being in the psyche characterized in the teachings as fullness, or happiness (ānanda) (Suddhabodhananda, 1996b). Thus, for the person who has assimilated this knowledge, the world is experienced from this existential baseline in the psyche.

The integration of this knowledge also addresses the underlying fear of death for the individual. When the Self is identified with the jīva, in the state of bondage, the identification with the physical body (dehātmābuddhi) is very strong. The physical body is subject to pain, disease, and ultimately death. The jīva may or may not suffer from physical pain or disease during their lifetime, but at the very least the knowledge that the physical body will eventually die is inescapable. Due to the strong identification with the body in the state of bondage, the person believes “I am the body,” and therefore the person believes “I am going to die.” This secondary core-belief creates an existential fear of death for the individual in the state of bondage (Sri Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003).
Due to the limitless nature of the Self, when a person gains this knowledge and integrates the identity of the individual with the Self, he or she is relieved of the fear of death (Sankaracarya & Chinmayananda, 2001). The person has differentiated the Self and the physical body as two related, yet fundamentally different, realities. Therefore, the person recognizes that who they really are, the Self, exists outside the realm of birth and death, and will survive the death of the physical body. The following verse from the Kaṭha Upaniṣad captures and summarizes this essential piece of Vedantic psychology.

One becomes freed from the jaws of death by knowing That (Self) which is soundless, touchless, colourless, undiminishing, and also tasteless, eternal, odourless, without beginning and without end, distinct from Mahat, and ever constant. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 176, v. 1.3.15)

In sum, according to the teachings of Vedanta, when a person integrates the knowledge, “I am the Self,” a profoundly healing transformation takes place that addresses several core issues that had been the cause for great suffering in the state of bondage. The person is healed and liberated from the feelings of inherent lack, inadequacy, and worthlessness, as well as the existential anxiety associated with this lack, and finally the fear of death. The integration of the knowledge, “I am the Self” takes place through a process of psychological transformation which takes more or less time depending on the level of emotional maturity of the person. The nature of this transformative process will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

Knowledge of Identity With the Creation as Īśvara
The second part of gaining Self-knowledge is the realization that the Self (ātmā), the true nature of the individual jīva, is in fact the Self of the entire creation, or Brahman. In the teachings of Vedanta Self-knowledge is not separated into two distinct parts. It is understood as one realization that has two parts to it. However, as mentioned earlier, for the purpose of this study expounding on the psychological dimension of the process, it is useful to deconstruct the process and isolate two distinct parts of the realization. This allows the complex nature of this profound psychological process to be revealed in depth and detail.

Because the teachings do not break the process into two parts, they also do not explicitly address the question of whether one part comes before the other, or whether both parts arise simultaneously. However, as the following discussion will make clear, it can be deduced that the second part of the Self-knowledge realization, is dependent on the first part having been gained. The mutual superimposition between the Self and the jīva must broken, and the true nature of the Self revealed before the “I-thought” begins to correctly label the Self. Once this has taken place, the possibility is there for the person to gain the second part of the vision, namely that the Self (ātmā) is one with Brahman, the Self of the entire creation.

A verse from the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad reads:

When one sees one’s self as effulgent like the sun, as the Lord who is the creator and the cause of even Brahmaji, then that person gives up punya-pāpa. Having become free from impurities, he attains oneness with Brahman. (Dayananda, 2006, p. 143, v. 3.1.3)

Gaining this knowledge, establishes the non-dual identity between the jīva and the whole creation as one undivided reality (Deussen, 1998; Laksmidhari &
Tattvavidananda, 2009). This realization, like the first part of the knowledge, has a profound impact on the identity of the individual at the core of the psyche. It also has spiritual implications for the relationship between the individual and the whole creation, or Īśvara (Satprakashananda, 1977). The forthcoming discussion will look into the way this realization takes place according to Vedantic epistemology and teaching methodology. Then we will consider the Vedantic vision of the creation as a conscious cosmic being, Īśvara. Finally, the psychological healing and transformation that results from gaining this knowledge will be explored.

The process that leads a person to gain the second part of Self-knowledge is similar to the first. It takes place in the tradition through the use of words as a means of knowledge (śabda-pramāṇa) according to the Vedantic teaching methodology (Balasubramanian, 1994). However, knowledge of the creation as a whole, and the relationship between the Self and the creation, is not available through the means of direct knowledge as is the Self. The capacity of the individual to perceive the creation is limited in scope to the capacity of the sense organs and the mind. Thus, that which can be known through direct knowledge is limited accordingly (Sinha, 1986).

According to Vedanta, knowledge of the creation is gained through indirect knowledge from the words given in the scriptures (sruti), and unfolded by the teacher in the context of a class setting (Datta, 1960). From an epistemological standpoint, the claims made in the Upaniṣads, are accepted in the tradition as valid knowledge based on their acceptance of the Vedas as “revealed knowledge.”
Thus, what the scriptures have to say about the nature of the creation and the relationship between the jīva, the Self and the creation, is considered to be valid knowledge based upon the acceptance of the Upaniṣads as revealed knowledge (Satprakashananda, 1995).

According to Vedanta, the claims made in the Upaniṣads about the nature of the creation are not simply accepted by the student on blind faith (Datta, 1960). It is not as if the student hears what the scriptures say and simply accepts it as revealed knowledge. To the contrary, the teaching methodology employed by the teacher uses examples and illustrations to point the student to see the truth of these claims as they apply to one’s direct experience. In other words, the student is guided to apply what is being said about the whole creation to one’s immediate experience of the creation, albeit limited in scope. Through the idea of infinite extension the student can posit that what is true about one’s immediate experience of the creation is true throughout the creation as a whole (Sinha, 1986). In the following discussion I will point out some examples of the illustrations and methods used in the oral tradition to unfold the ontological vision of the creation.

According to Vedantic epistemology, if the knowledge revealed in the scriptures regarding the nature of the creation is valid, it is true to reality. The theory, discussed in a previous chapter, is that if this knowledge is valid, the direct experience of the individual will naturally be aligned with and support what the scriptural claims about the nature of the creation. Therefore, while knowledge of the creation ultimately comes from an indirect source, the method used to impart this knowledge through the use of words (śabda-pramāṇa), considers the
direct experience of the student as an integral part of the process. The student should be able to understand the phenomenology through the illustrations given, and look to one’s direct experience of the creation to see directly what is being said. Therefore, the student’s active participation in listening to the ideas that are presented by the teacher, and engaging one’s own faculty of discernment (buddhi) to determine the truth, are required in order for the means of knowledge to work. The fact that the scriptures are accepted as revealed knowledge supports the process in the sense that it provides an attitude of open-mindedness and trust in the validity of the teaching. However, according to Vedanta, in the end the knowledge is something that the student has to arrive at conclusively in one’s own buddhi (intellect) (Balasubramanian, 1994).

**Vision of the whole: Self, creation, and the individual.**

In Chapter 2 an account was presented of the Vedantic ontological vision. In this section I will build on that vision to bring to life, and animate the Vedantic understanding of the creation as a conscious cosmic being. This supports the aim of this section to explicate the second part of gaining Self-knowledge, where the individual realizes one’s identity with the creation as a whole.

According to Vedanta, the creation is born from Brahman through an innate creative power called Māyā (Deussen, 1998; Werner, 1998). Through this capacity, the creation is said to come into manifestation from Brahman, is sustained by Brahman, and eventually resolves back into an un-manifest condition in Brahman. In the following verse from the Bhagavādgīta, Lord Krishna speaks of this process from the standpoint of Brahman.
*Bharāta* (Arjuna!) My Maya is the primordial cause out of which (everything) grows and which sustains (everything). That I impregnate. From that occurs the manifestation of all beings. (Dayananda, 2007, p. 183, v. 14.3)

One example that is given in the *Mundaka Upaniṣad* for the manifestation of the creation from *Brahman* is that of a spider who spins its web out of a material that it inherently contains in its own body (Dayananda, 2006, p. 84, v. 1.1.7). In just this way, the creation including the material it is made of is manifested from *Brahman*. Therefore, according to Vedanta, the creation is not separate from *Brahman* (Atreya, 1985). *Brahman* is limitless existent consciousness (*sat-cit-ānanda*) that the creation is projected from and withdrawn into in a cyclical manner.

According to Vedanta, the ontological relationship between *Brahman* and the creation is that of oneness, or non-duality (Deussen, 1998; Rambachan, 2006). Even though we can separate them and talk about them from within duality as two things, *Brahman* and the creation, they are understood in Vedanta to be fundamentally inseparable. The example often given in the teaching for this kind of relationship is a pot that is made of clay. The pot is formed out of clay like the creation is formed out of *Brahman*’s material. The form of the pot is perceivable and it has a function within the creation. But when you consider what the pot is made of, the substance of the object, you see that it is really just clay that has been formed into a particular shape. If you take away the clay, the pot disappears. Thus, the relationship between the pot and clay is non-dual in the sense that the pot is the clay.
Just as there ever exists the relation of cause and effect between earth and a jar, so does the same relation exist between Brahman and the phenomenal world; this has been established here on the strength of the scriptural texts and reasoning. Just as the (consciousness of) earth forces itself upon our mind while thinking of a jar, so also does (the idea of) ever-shining Brahman flash on us while contemplating on the phenomenal world. (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000, pp. 37-38, vv. 66-7)

According to Vedanta, Brahman is the only thing that is real on the absolute level. The creation is considered to belong to an order of reality called “mithyā.” Mithyā is defined as an apparent, or dependent, reality (Venugopal, 2012). The creation appears to exist although its existence is dependent in the sense that, like the pot cannot exist without the clay, the creation cannot exist without Brahman. In that sense Brahman is the substance, like the clay, that gives reality to the creation. Therefore, the creation is affirmed as having reality, but this reality is qualified by the category of mithyā, as being dependent, and therefore not real in the absolute sense (Lakmidhari & Tattvavidananda, 2009).

The category of mithyā as a separate order of reality serves to help explain how, Brahman and the creation can have a non-dual relationship while accounting for the creation, which is perceived as being dualistic in nature (Venugopal, 2012). As such, concept of mithyā plays an important role in Advaita epistemology and ontological theory. However, its important to note that, according to Vedanta, this concept is only relevant when discussing the nature of reality from the standpoint of within duality. As a concept, it serves a particular purpose, like a mystical poem, to help the mind see through the veils of duality to grasp a non-dual reality. Ultimately, Advaita concludes there is but one reality, which is Brahman, and Brahman manifests its nature as the creation. Mithyā is
not separate from *Brahman*, it is differentiated as a separate order of reality to explain the phenomenological relationship between *Brahman* and the creation (Rambachan, 2006; Laksmidhari & Tattvavidananda, 2009).

**The creation as Īśvara: A universal cosmic being.**

To further build on the ontological vision outlined above, the creation is looked at in Vedanta as a cosmic conscious being, generically equivalent to the idea of “God.” The term that is used to denote this cosmic being in Vedanta is “Īśvara” (Prabhavananda & Manchester, 1957; Tattvavidananda, 2011). In the *Māṇḍūkya* and *Śvetaśvatāra Upaniṣads*, Īśvara is likened to as a universal, or cosmic, person. The Self of the cosmic person is *Brahman*, limitless existent consciousness (*sat-cit-ānanda*), and the form of the person is the creation. From this standpoint the creation is seen as the body and mind of Īśvara, which operates according to a natural order in the same way as the body-mind-sense-complex operates according to a natural order of the ātman.

According to Vedanta, nothing exists outside of Īśvara. Īśvara is the creator, the creation, the Self of the creation, and Lord of the creation at once (Deussen, 1998). In the *Śvetaśvatāra Upaniṣad* a number of verses are given which breathe life into the Vedantic vision of Īśvara as the universal whole.

He is the creator of the universe, the knower of the universe, the Self and the Source, the knower and maker of time, the possessor of attributes, omniscient, the protector of the Unmanifested and the individual soul, and the Cause of transmigration, Liberation, existence and bondage. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 1995, p. 196, v. 6.16)

He is the Self of the universe, immortal, fully established as the Lord, the Knower, omnipresent and the protector of the universe, who eternally rules this world. There is no other agent for ruling this world. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 1995, p. 197, v. 6.17)

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The same Diety remains hidden in all beings, and is all-pervasive and the
indwelling Self of all beings. He is the supervisor of actions, lives in all
beings, (He is) the Witness, the bestower of intelligence, the Absolute and
devoid of the (three) gunas. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 1995, p.
190, v. 6.11)

According to Vedanta, the creation is said to operate like clockwork,
where the wheels are turning around by way of interlinking notches that fit
seamlessly together. Every part of the creation is interrelated and interdependent
with every other part, and all the parts work together according to an intelligent
order (Laksmidhari & Tattvidananda, 2009). The creation is said to be like a
multilayered fabric of interconnected parts that are woven together according to a
given set of laws and principles. These laws and principles form an intelligent
order according to Īśvara’s nature. In the following statement, Swami Dayananda
(2001) says that order is understood in Vedanta to be Īśvara.

All that is here is one intelligent order, which is Īśvara. The jagat
(creation) is Īśvara. All that is here is one order and that order is a
manifestation of Īśvara’s knowledge. We are never away from the
physical order. We are sitting with a physical body because there is a
physical order. If it were not for the law of gravity we would be levitating.
We are never away from the biological order, the physiological order, the
psychological order, or the cognitive order. We are never away from that
one intelligent order. (p. 48)

Being a reality whose body is the entire creation, Īśvara relates to the
individual beings in the creation both sentient and insentient, as parts of the whole
cosmic person similar to the way the individual relates to parts of the mind-body-
sense-complex (Dayananda, 2007). That relationship is naturally one of love and
care because the creation and all beings are Īśvara’s body. The parts are not
separate from the whole. For example, if a person experiences injury to part of the
physical body there is a feeling of love, care, and concern for the injured body part. The person has a natural value for all parts of the mind-body-sense-complex whether there is injury or not, as the parts cannot be separated from the whole person, or jīva. Similarly, as the cosmic person, Īśvara is understood in Vedanta as having a natural relationship of love and care for all the individual beings that exist in the creation. Each being exists in the context of Īśvara’s order and is naturally cared for and valued as an integral part of the whole (Dayananda, 2001).

According to Vedanta, the relationship between Īśvara and each individual being in the creation is non-dual (Dayananda, 2006). The non-dual relationship here has already been explained ontologically in the relationship between Brahman and the creation. When we look at the vision from the standpoint of Īśvara, we are viewing the same non-dual reality from a different standpoint, namely the standpoint of the manifest creation. From this standpoint, Īśvara is Brahman, manifested in the form of the creation. Therefore it follows that the relationship between Īśvara, the creation as a whole, and the individual beings in the creation, is non-dual because the whole and the parts are one undivided fabric, which has Brahman as its nature (Laksmidari & Tejomayananda, 1986). You cannot pluck the individual part out of the fabric, because everything that exists is part of that fabric from the standpoint of the whole. In the following verse from the Bhagavadgītā, Krishna expresses this relationship speaking from the standpoint of Īśvara and says:
Gudākēsa (Arjuna)! I am the self, who resides in the hearts of all beings and I am the cause of the creation, sustenance, and resolution of all beings/things. (Dayananda, 2007, p. 135, v. 10.21)

A common example used in the teachings to illustrate the non-dual relationship between Īśvara and the individual beings is the relationship between the ocean and the waves (Adiswarananda, 2004). The relationship is such that the ocean is made of water, which forms itself into many different waves according to the natural influence of the tides and other variables. The entire ocean is made of water and the individual wave is also made of water. If someone were to ask the wave or the ocean the question, “Who are you?” they would have to answer the same, “I am water.” From the standpoint of the water, there is therefore no separation between the individual wave and the entire ocean. In fact we can say that there is only water, because without the water there would be no ocean or waves. This is how the non-dual relationship is established between Īśvara and the individual jīva. Just as the water of the ocean and the water of the wave are both water, the Self of the individual jīva and the Self of Īśvara are established as one limitless Self. A similar example is given to illustrate this relationship in the following verse from the Katha Upaniṣad.

Just as fire, though one, having entered the world, assumes separate forms in respect of different shapes, similarly, the Self inside all Beings, as though one, assumes a form in respect of each shape; (and yet) it is outside. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 204, v. 2.2.9)

This example suggests that a non-dual relationship exists between Īśvara and the individual jīva, in the sense that they are each expressions of the same non-dual reality, represented by the fire. The forms are different, however the actual substance, or reality, of both is the same. Thus, the non-dual relationship
between Īśvara and the jīva exists on two levels. From the relative standpoint of their respective forms, the individual jīva and Īśvara are separate and related as part of Īśvara’s order. Like the wave to the ocean, or flame to the fire, the jīva is related to Īśvara as a part to the whole. From the absolute standpoint of Brahman, the jīva and Īśvara are one. This conclusion is affirmed based on the understanding of Brahman as the undivided limitless Self of both (Tattvavidananda, 2011). When a person gains knowledge of the non-duality between the jīva and Īśvara, it has a profound transformative effect on the person’s identity on two levels, which is further expanded on in the next section.

**Impact on the psyche: Psychological healing.**

As discussed in previous sections, the second part of gaining Self-knowledge is the realization of the non-dual relationship between the individual and Īśvara, the whole creation. This conclusion is arrived at through the Vedantic teaching methodology and affirms the Self of the individual to be Brahman, the Self of the creation. When a person gains this knowledge, the identity of the individual with Īśvara, the whole creation, is seen and affirmed in the buddhi (Balasubramanian, 1994; Rambachan, 2006). As a result, a new primary core-belief regarding the identity of the individual is established in the psyche, “I am Īśvara.” The conclusion, “I am Īśvara, “ is formulated in the mind by way of the “I-thought” correctly labeling the Self and then identifying the Self with Īśvara (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997).
It is important to note that, according to Vedanta, the establishment of the identity of the individual with Īśvara is only possible if the Self has already been differentiated and recognized as the true nature of the individual (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000). If the spell that creates the mutual superimposition between the Self and the ātman has not been broken, then the mind will still be operating under the influence of ignorance and thus the “I-thought” (ahaṅkāra) will label the Self as being one with the ātman. If the mind is still in this mode of operation, then forming the conclusion “I am Īśvara” based on knowledge is impossible. The only possible conclusion in that mode of operation is “I am the ātman” because of the effects of ignorance (Sadananda & Nikhilananda, 2002). Therefore, in order for the second part of Self-knowledge to be affirmed in the psyche and the new primary core-belief, “I am Īśvara” to be established, the person must have at least gained the initial realization of the Self as one’s true nature. Once the mutual superimposition between the Self and the ātman is broken, the “I-thought” begins to correctly label the Self, and the possibility is there for the person to gain the second part of the vision. Therefore, it is concluded here that the second part of the realization is dependent on the first being realized, however the possibility also exists that both parts of the realization may arise simultaneously.

When the new primary core-belief, “I am Īśvara,” takes root in the psyche it establishes a new platform of meaning which has a number of different psychological implications that are liberating and healing for the individual (Suddhabodhananda, 1966b). The new core-belief, “I am Īśvara,” operates as an
organizing principle at the root of the psyche, which naturally gives rise to a number of secondary-core beliefs that are implied within it. In this fashion, the knowledge gives birth to a entire network of operational structures in the psyche that serve to reframe the person’s entire experience of oneself and the creation in a positive way (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997; Sankaracarya & Tattvavidananda, 2009).

When a person gains the knowledge, “I am Īśvara” the relationship between the individual and the creation is established as being non-dual on two levels. On the relative level, the jīva is shown to be one with the creation in the sense that the jīva is part of the creation and cannot be separated out from the interconnected fabric of the creation. On the absolute level the relationship between the Self and the creation is also affirmed as being non-dual. The knowledge reveals the Self of the individual as Brahman, a reality that is one with the creation. Thus, the Self is revealed as being one with creation as a whole. In sum, according to this knowledge the individual, comprised of the jīva and the Self, is shown to be non-separate, or one with the creation on both levels (Venugopal, 2012). The establishment of a non-dual identity between the individual and the whole is profoundly healing for the human psyche in that it address the basic sense of separation which was is the cause for a great deal of suffering in the state of bondage.

First, when a person gains this knowledge, the jīva, including all aspects of the mind-body-sense-complex, is recognized as being an integral part of Īśvara creation. Every aspect of the jīva’s experience both internal and external is, thus,
reframed within the context of being part of an interconnected whole that contains its own inherent meaning in the form of Īśvara’s order. According to Vedanta, that order is called empirical reality (vyāvahārika) and is accepted as being benign in nature (Satprakashananda, 1977). The creation is an objective reality that operates according to a given set of laws and principles that apply equally to all beings throughout the creation (Dayananda, 2001).

When the individual gains knowledge of the creation as Īśvara, the jīva is recognized as belonging to an interconnected order that pervades the entire creation. Within the order, the jīva is indeed separate from other objects in the creation delineated by the boundary of the physical body. However, as discussed above, from the standpoint of Īśvara, there is no separation between the parts and the creation as a whole. The creation is one undivided fabric, which has Brahman as its reality (Deussen, 1998; Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003). Therefore, when this knowledge takes place, it is expressed from the standpoint of the jīva, is “I am a part of Īśvara.” The conclusion “I am separate,” based in ignorance is, therefore, replaced with a new secondary core-belief “I belong.” In light of this knowledge the core-belief, “I belong,” takes root as a new organizing principle at the root of the psyche and the feelings of fear, abandonment, and isolation that had been caused by the sense of separation begin to heal (Dayananda, 2000).

The shift in the psyche from the secondary core-belief “I am separate” to “I belong” fundamentally transforms the belief system that the jīva operates under in reference to the creation. The conclusion, “I belong” gives rise in the psyche to a basic feeling of safety and security which allows the person to relax and heal.
from the underlying sense of fear that had pervaded the psyche in the state of bondage (Suddhabodhananda, 1996a; Venugopal, 2012). The person recognizes that as an individual jīva, one’s life is being held and taken care of within a meaningful and benign order. As the jīva assimilates this knowledge, through the domino effect the entire psyche is impacted and transformed because this understanding reframes the person’s entire life in a new context of meaning. All experience is recognized as being a manifestation of Īśvara’s intelligent order including the internal landscape of the mind-body-sense-complex, jīva, and the external world of people, places, and situations that unfold on a moment-to-moment basis (Dayananda, 2001). When this understanding is integrated and rooted as an organizing principle in the psyche, all experience in the creation is assimilated and given meaning according to this principle.

The basic feeling of safety and security is present because the person trusts Īśvara’s order. This in turn allows the person to develop an attitude of surrender in one’s life. This is not a surrender based on blind faith, but on a sense of basic trust that naturally arises as a result of assimilating the knowledge (Dayananda, 2007). The jīva recognizes that there is a conscious cosmic being whose is holding the big picture and that, on every level, one’s life is a part of that big picture. Based on this understanding, the attitude of surrender becomes natural for the jīva (Dayananda, 2007).

Another point to be noted here is that, according to Vedanta, the feelings of trust and surrender being discussed in this context do not imply non-participation or idleness on the part of the jīva. Everything about the jīva,
including the process of using free will to operate in the creation is included as part of Īśvara’s order. The mind processes information, has desires, deliberates, and uses the buddhi to make decisions and take action (Dayananda, 2007). Therefore, the ātman who has assimilated this knowledge does not sit around all day simply marveling at Īśvara’s divine order. One continues to live life as an individual who has desires, makes choices, and acts in the moment-to-moment experience of the creation (Vidyaranya, 1982). The big difference is that the ātman who has integrated this knowledge relates to the creation with an underlying sense of trust and surrender, which changes the way that he or she attributes meaning to their experiences and how one responds to the circumstances that manifest in one’s life. This is healing for the ātman at a fundamental level, because in reference to the creation many circumstances impact the person that are out of one’s scope of influence. Therefore, in light of this knowledge instead of feeling victim to these circumstances, one can accept the circumstances and maintain a basic feeling of peace and wholeness even in the face of painful or unfavorable conditions (Suddhabodhananda, 1996a). Ultimately the psyche of the ātman rests in the trust of Īśvara’s order, and the person meets the experience of the creation from this existential baseline.

Another area of suffering that is addressed and healed as a result of gaining this knowledge is the self-blame, self-criticism, and self-judgment that are associated with the sense of being inherently flawed in the state of bondage (Rambachan, 2006). As discussed in the previous chapter, the ātman experiences great suffering and darkness when living in the state of bondage due to the effects
of ignorance. In addition to experiencing the various forms of emotional pain and suffering, the person doesn’t know the cause for one’s suffering, nor the way to heal it. Based on the experience of this phenomenon, the person naturally feels that “there must be something wrong with me” and this forms the secondary core-belief “I am flawed” (Rambachan, 2006). This conclusion, I argued in the previous chapter, is a logical deduction that takes place unconsciously based on the fact the person experiences suffering, and doesn’t know how to heal it.

When the individual gains this knowledge and recognizes that the creation on every level is an expression of Īśvara’s intelligent order, the entire experience of the jīva both internally and externally is validated and reframed in a positive and benign context. The person recognizes that the pain and suffering they have experienced is a result of the condition of bondage, that the existence of this condition is a natural phenomenon as part of Īśvara’s creation. Regardless of the specific ways that the person’s condition of suffering has manifested in one’s psyche in the form of dysfunctional behavior patterns, the recognition is the same. Namely, that the entire psychological network that is the cause for one’s suffering is rooted in the condition of bondage and is an unavoidable phenomenon inherent to being born as a human being (Dayananda, 2001).

The realization is that things could not have been any other way, and that bondage and the associated negative emotions are all exactly as they should be. The person now can recognize the greater context of their life from an objective standpoint and not see it as a weakness on their part that they are suffering from painful emotions and neurotic behavior patterns. As a result of this understanding,
a new secondary core-belief is established in the psyche, “I am in order.” This replaces the old belief “I am flawed” and begins the process of healing from the negative attitudes of blame, criticism, and judgment towards oneself for one’s suffering. The new core-belief affirms a positive sense of self and gives rise to attitudes of compassion, love, and acceptance toward one’s experiences of suffering (Venugopal, 2012).

The establishment of the secondary core-belief “I am in order” has a transformative and healing effect on the psyche in that it cultivates the development of a loving and compassionate attitude in the mind toward every aspect of the individual. Over time this integrated belief cultivates an inner environment in the mind of the jīva, which is accepting and unafraid of every thought and feeling that arises in the mind. As the person integrates the understanding that “I am in order” there is no longer any reason to judge, criticize, or feel negativity toward any part of the mind-body-sense-complex because the whole package is accepted as a part of Īśvara’s order (Tattvavidananda, 2011).

Gaining this knowledge has another level of impact on the psyche when the person begins to integrate the non-dual identity between the Self and the creation as a whole. The person recognizes that the relationship between one’s own nature, the Self, and all beings in the creation is that of oneness, or non-separation.

When duality appears through ignorance, one sees another; but when everything becomes identified with the Atman (Self), one doesn’t perceive another in the least. (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000, p. 31, v. 53)
The recognition that the Self of the individual is the Self of all beings has the effect of healing all fear that had been based in the perception of duality. (Venugopal, 2012) The primary core belief “I am Īśvara,” or “I am the whole,” addresses and transforms the feelings of separation and isolation on another level in the psyche. The recognition is that from the standpoint of the Self there is no duality. Therefore, the conclusion “I am separate” is proven untrue and replaced with “I am the whole.” The person recognizes that all beings in the creation are an expression of one undivided Self (Dayananda, 2006).

As this knowledge becomes integrated in the psyche it reframes the relationship between the individual and all beings and cultivates feelings of fearlessness, intimacy, love, and connection (Suddhabodhananda, 1996b). The person comes to relate to all beings in the creation as oneself, because the relationship of oneness has been established and assimilated in the psyche. The following two verses from the *Īśa Upaniṣad* point to the transformative healing that results from assimilating a non-dual reality.

He who sees all beings in the Self itself, and the Self in all beings, feels no hatred by virtue of the realization. (Sankaracrya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 13, v. 6)

When to the man of realization all beings become the very Self, then what delusion and what sorrow can there be for that Seer of oneness. (Sankaracrya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 13, v. 7)

These verses express the emotional sentiment of love and intimacy that a person feels with the entire creation and all beings in it based on the realization that they are one and the same. One way to understand the positive emotions of love and connectedness that are generated toward all beings in the creation is to
consider the way that the individual jīva naturally feels toward the body-mind-sense-complex in the state of bondage. According to Vedanta, when the Self is totally identified with the jīva, because of mutual superimposition, there is a natural feeling of non-separation between the Self and the mind-body-sense-complex. (dehātmābuddhi) They are simply taken to be one (Suddhabodhananda, 1994). Though a person suffers because of the complete identity with the jīva, the sense of non-separation, or oneness between the Self and the jīva brings with it an inherent feeling of intimacy, love, and connectedness with the mind-body-sense-complex. When the person gains and assimilates the knowledge that the Self is one with the creation and all beings, the same feelings that were naturally present in the state of bondage toward the individual jīva are simply extended to the entire creation and all beings in the creation (Tattvavidananda, 2011).

According to Vedanta, the feelings of love and connectedness in both cases are generated by the Self because its limitless nature is experienced in the mind as love, or bliss (ānanda) (Venugopal, 2012). Therefore, the phenomenon that is responsible for the feelings of love and intimacy is the same. The difference is that in the state of bondage the person is unconscious of the whole dynamic and the feeling of love is only extended to the boundary of the physical body, while in the state of liberation the person is conscious of the source of love, the Self, and the feeling is extended to the entire creation.

**Transformative Process in the Psyche From Bondage to Liberation**

Gaining Self-knowledge is affirmed in Advaita Vedanta as the solution to the problematic condition of bondage which every human being is born into.
According to Vedanta, the process is complete once a person has realized both parts of the non-dual vision of reality, presented together in a famous verse from the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*.

Om! The knower of *Brahman* attains the highest. *Brahman* is truth, knowledge, infinite. He who knows that *Brahman* existing in the intellect which is lodged in the supreme space in the heart, enjoys, in identification with the all-knowing *Brahman*, all desirable things simultaneously. (Sankaracrya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 304, v. 2.1.1)

The goal of this study is to present the teachings on bondage and liberation from a psychological standpoint. Therefore, in concluding this chapter I will summarize the process of gaining liberation from the state of bondage as a process of psychological transformation that amounts to a paradigm shift in the psyche from one psychological state to another.

In the *Munḍaka Upaniṣad* the image of two birds sitting in a tree is presented where one bird represents the identity with the limited *jīva* in the state of bondage, and the other is the identity with the Self in a liberated state. The verse below describes a shift in emotional states that correlates to the identification with one bird or the other. A verse from the *Munḍaka Upaniṣad* reads:

Being deluded and lost in the very same tree (bondage), the person comes to grief due to helplessness. When one recognizes the other (gains Self-knowledge), which is worshipful, which is the Lord of all, and knows (‘all this’ as) his glory, one becomes free from grief (liberation). (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 137, v. 3.1.2)

This verse affirms the theoretical platform that has been developed throughout this discussion, namely that the shift from the state of bondage to liberation rests upon a shift in the identity of the individual at the root of the
psyche. The principle that has been threaded through this discussion is that the primary-core belief related to the identity of the individual operates as an organizing principle at the root of the psyche. The conclusion in the state of bondage is “I am the jīva,” and in the state of liberation “I am Īśvara.” This foundational structure gives rise to a set of secondary core-beliefs, which are directly implied by the primary core-belief.

Based on the establishment of these core-beliefs, or “belief system,” an entire psychological network of thought patterns, feelings, and corresponding behaviors are manifested. This psychological network then operates in the psyche like a software program on a computer, and creates what I have so far called the psychological condition that a person is living in. Let it be clear that the psychological concepts outlined here are not explicitly presented in the teachings of Vedanta, but I have argued they are implicitly present and the evidence for this has been supported by throughout this discussion.

Let us turn now to consider how the process of transformation takes place in the psyche, which takes a person from the position of living in the state of bondage to the final destination point of living in the liberated state. Based upon the theoretical framework outlined above, the transformation from the state of bondage to liberation is nothing short of a complete overhaul of the human psyche from a structural standpoint. This transformation amounts to a shift in the paradigm of reality that the psyche is operating under involving the dismantling of the operating system in the state of bondage, and the building of a new system from the ground up based upon Self-knowledge.
The psychological journey from living in the condition of bondage to liberation can be looked at in three stages. In the first stage, prior to gaining Self-knowledge, the entire psyche is operating under the condition of bondage. The core-belief “I am the jīva,” is firmly rooted as the primary organizing principle, giving rise to the secondary core-beliefs, “I am lacking,” “I am flawed,” and “I am separate.” This belief system based on the effects of ignorance gives rise to a paradigm of reality in the psyche that is rooted in fear, anxiety, and emotional distress (samsāra).

When a person gains Self-knowledge, this initiates the second phase of transformation. When Self-knowledge is gained the mutual superimposition between the Self and the jīva is broken, destabilizing the primary structure in the psyche, which the condition of bondage is resting on, “I am the jīva.” This event initiates a process that takes place over a period of time, of dismantling the old paradigm in the psyche based on ignorance, and building a new paradigm based on knowledge.

During the transformative phase the psyche is operating in both psychological states simultaneously. The structures in the form of core-beliefs rooted in bondage are still in effect dictating the paradigm of reality that has been in operation for so long based on ignorance. At the same time part of the psyche is operating under the influence of the knowledge gained, “I am Īśvara,” and the core-beliefs that have been established accordingly. The best way to understand this is by imagining a pie chart. At the beginning of the transformative phase, the portion of the pie operating in the liberated state is very small, like a tiny sliver,
while the bondage portion is almost the whole pie. As the knowledge becomes more deeply rooted and solid (niṣṭhā) over time the portion of the psyche operating based on knowledge grows, the liberated portion of the pie gets larger. As the liberated portion gets larger, the bondage portion gets smaller until finally it is just a sliver.

An example to describe the process of integrating and assimilating Self-knowledge is the process of lighting a bonfire. If a person wants to create a bonfire one first builds a mountain of wood, which symbolizes the psychic structures rooted in ignorance. When the woodpile is first lit with a match, symbolizing the birth of knowledge, the portion of the woodpile that is lit is very small and it takes great effort to keep the fire from going out. The fire, therefore, must be protected from the wind and constantly tended in order to keep it stable and growing. As the fire gains in strength, it begins to burn more of the wood, and have more power as an elemental force. Eventually the fire takes off and consumes the entirety of the wood in a roaring blaze. Like the bonfire, as the portion of the psyche that is operating under the new paradigm rooted in knowledge grows, it transforms the structural networks that had been operating in the condition of bondage. When the knowledge is unwavering and clear it will trump the effects of ignorance overtime and become a more powerful force in the psyche. As this process unfolds the psychological trauma and wounding that had been caused by the effects of bondage are healed.

The process of dismantling the condition of bondage and healing the associated wounds can unfold in many different ways depending on a person’s
unique psychological structure. The way this process unfolds and the length of
time it takes will depend on the level of psychological and emotional maturity a
person has at the time Self-knowledge takes place (Vidyaranya, 1982). (This will
be discussed in more depth in the following chapter) The challenge to this process
of assimilating Self-knowledge is that core-beliefs that have been operating under
the condition of bondage are rooted in the unconscious part of the psyche.
Therefore it takes time and effort to root out the psychic contents from the
unconscious and have them transformed and healed in the light of knowledge. As
long as these psychic content’s remain unconscious they will continue to
influence the person’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Therefore, in order for
the content’s of the psyche rooted in bondage to be transformed, it requires
conscious effort of working with one’s psyche on a moment-to-moment bases
until the mode of operation, or paradigm of reality that the person is actually
living from comes to be completely established in the liberated state (Venugopal,
2012).

In the third and final phase, the psyche is completely rooted in and
pervaded by the liberated state based on Self-knowledge. Living in this paradigm
of reality the primary conclusion based on the knowledge “I am the Self and “I
am Īśvara” are deeply rooted and integrated as the primary organizing principle of
meaning in the psyche (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997). This core identity of
the individual gives rise to the secondary core-beliefs, “I am whole,” “I am
peace,” “I belong,” “I am in order,” and “I am the whole.” In turn the new belief
system based in knowledge gives rise to a new paradigm of reality that is positive, safe, desirable, and rooted in love (Suddhabodhananda, 1996b).

One final point to be noted is that once the person is rooted in the “liberated state,” the psyche is healed at a core level. However, the vision in Vedanta is that as long as a person is living in a body in the creation, the person still is naturally subject to physical and emotional pain and suffering from a variety of causes (Vidyaranya, 1982). Therefore, the person living in the liberated state does experience human suffering, however it does not threaten the person’s underlying sense of wellbeing and security. The suffering is held by the underlying state of fullness and peace, which has been integrated at the deepest level in the psyche.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has presented a thorough account of the processes involved in gaining Self-knowledge and the transformative impact it has on the psyche: to liberate a person from the condition of bondage according to the teaching of Advaita Vedanta. Gaining Self-knowledge was defined as the realization that the nature of the individual ķīva is the Self, and that Self is Brahman, the Self of the entire cosmic creation. We explored the two parts of gaining Self-knowledge separately examining both the process through which the realization takes place as well as the profoundly healing impact that each part has on the psyche when assimilated. In the next chapter we turn to explore the Vedantic definition of emotional maturity and the interconnected relationship between developing emotional maturity and gaining Self-knowledge.
Chapter 6: Developing Emotional Maturity in Advaita Vedanta

Introduction

According to Vedanta, a person needs to have developed a certain level of emotional maturity before the mind is prepared and available to gain Self-knowledge (Venugopal, 2012). The teachings define emotional maturity within this context and discuss the need for a person to engage in practices to develop emotional maturity as a means (sādhana) for gaining Self-knowledge. The topic of emotional maturity is also addressed in Vedantic psychology from the standpoint of how a person’s mind is impacted when a he or she gains Self-knowledge. As discussed in the previous chapter, gaining Self-knowledge is the catalyst for a profound transformation of the psyche from the ground up. This psychological transformation, according to Vedanta, has direct implications for a person’s continued process of developing emotional maturity, which is seen as a process that continues after one gains Self-knowledge and throughout one’s life (Dayananda, 1993).

This chapter presents a definition of emotional maturity as it is directly implied in the primary texts of the tradition. The specific mental capacities and attitudes which define a mind that is more or less emotionally mature according to Vedanta will be outlined. The fourfold qualification (sādhana-catuṣṭaya) laid down in the scriptures outlining the mental and emotional dispositions required for a person to be considered a qualified student for studying Vedanta will be presented. Then the means put forth in Vedanta for gaining an emotionally mature
mind will be discussed, emphasizing the practice of following the moral order of Dharma. Finally, the impact of gaining Self-knowledge on a person’s process of developing emotional maturity will be explored, building on the foundation laid down in the previous chapter.

**Defining Emotional Maturity**

The concept of emotional maturity is captured in the teachings of Vedanta, in the Sanskrit term, *antaḥkaraṇaśuddhi*, which is most often translated as “purity of mind” (Rambachan, 2006; Satprakashananda 1997). When we consider the translation of *antaḥkaraṇaśuddhi* as “purity of mind,” the word “mind” should be understood to include the emotions within it because, as discussed in a previous chapter, the Vedantic model of the mind includes emotions as part of the *manas*.

The Vedantic idea of “purity of mind” can be easily misunderstood if the meaning of the word “purity” is associated with moral judgment. This association is often made in common use of the word. Purity can therefore, be misunderstood to convey an air of judgment, which places one person higher or lower on a spectrum of moral “goodness.” Let it be clear that, while the Vedantic definition of “purity of mind” is related to moral conduct, as we will see in the following discussion, the word is meant to describe a state of mental-emotional maturity.

**Drawing from the Scriptures**

The *Katha Upaniṣad* and *Bhagavadgīta* both offer keen descriptions of a mature mind verses an immature mind, emphasizing the fact that a relatively mature mind is required in order for a person to gain Self-knowledge. The two
opposing states of mind are described in the *Katha Upaniṣad*. The following two verses present a metaphor for the mind-body-sense-complex (*jīva*), as a horse drawn chariot, where the charioteer represents the *buddhi*, and the horses the *manas*.

The organs of that intellect (*buddhi*), which, being ever associated with an uncontrolled mind, becomes devoid of discrimination, are unruly like the vicious horses of the charioteer. But if that (intellect) which being ever associated with a restrained mind, is endowed with discrimination, the organs are controllable like the good horses of the charioteer. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, pp. 164-6, vv. 1.3.5-6)

This verse affirms the idea that when the *buddhi* is mature and capable of successfully performing its function of discrimination, the mind operates in an intentional, cohesive, and orderly manner. In a mature mind the horses are under control of the free will of the charioteer, taking him exactly where he wants to go. On the other hand, a weak *buddhi* is depicted here as one that is unable to perform the function of discrimination very well, leading to a condition of mind that lacks intentionality, order, and cohesion. The immature mind is likened to a chariot that is lead by horses that are running wild and are out of the control of the charioteer.

The same concept is presented in the *Bhagavādgita*, where *Krishna* discusses the “mastery of the mind” as being essential to the process of developing the maturity required to gain Self-knowledge.

Śri Bhagavān said: No doubt, *Arjuna*, the mighty armed! The mind is agitated and difficult to master. But, *Kaunteya* (*Arjuna*)! It is mastered by practice and objectivity. Yoga (Self-knowledge) is difficult to gain for the one by whom the mind is not mastered. This is My vision. Whereas it can be gained by the one whose mind is mastered, who makes effort with the proper means (i.e. practice and objectivity). (Dayananda, 2007, pp. 93-94, 6.35-6)
The ideas put forth in the verses presented above from the *Katha Upanisad* and the *Bhagavadgita*, provide a basic definition of what constitutes an emotionally mature mind according to Vedanta. Both sets of verses present the idea that a mature mind is one that has been brought under control, or mastered, by a mature buddhi. Thus, the primary conclusion to be drawn here is that, according to Vedanta, a person’s level of emotional maturity is defined by how well-developed, or mature, is the buddhi function of the mind.

**Defining a mature Buddhi.**

What does it means to have a more or less developed buddhi, according to Vedanta? As discussed in previous chapters, the functioning processes that take place in the buddhi are complex. In the context of defining emotional maturity, we turn to explore and define the functional role that the buddhi plays in the mind of discrimination and determination. The buddhi is defined in Vedanta as the part of the mind that performs the act of discrimination within the landscape of the mind (Sankaracarya & Jagadananda, 1989; Sinha, 1986). The mind, according to Vedanta, is comprised in any given moment of a variety of thought forms (*vṛttis*) in the form of sense perceptions, thoughts, and emotions from the manas and citta. A healthy or mature buddhi is described as one that is successfully able to discriminate amongst the variety of thought forms that arise from moment to moment in the mind. It then applies discriminating knowledge to the situations to determine what actions to willfully take as one navigates through the field of experience (Safaya, 1976).
Based on the research into the Vedantic understanding of the *buddhi* it is evident that the Vedantic texts do not elaborate on the dynamic process in the mind required to successfully perform the function of discrimination. However, in building a definition of emotional maturity from a psychological perspective, it is important to note that the concept that the *buddhi* performs the function of discrimination in the mind, is based upon the assumption that the *buddhi* has the ability to relate to the contents of the mind objectively. In other words, the ability of the *buddhi* to discriminate amongst the various objects of experience, and apply free will to make decisions assumes a pre-requisite ability of the *buddhi* to differentiate itself as a part of the mind that is separate from the thought forms that come and go. In his commentary on a verse from the text *Dṛg-Dṛśya-Viveka*, Swami Nikhilananda (1998) describes the ability of the *buddhi* to identify with the pure consciousness of the Self, thus becoming the “perceiver” or witness of the mind in the following statement.

*Buddhi*, or intelligence is the internal organ, which is subject to various modifications. The modification, which makes it endowed with agency etc., is known as *Ahankhara* or egoism. But its appearance as subject, object, and the means of perception is possible on account of the reflection of Consciousness in it. This reflection endows Buddhī with the power of perceiving objects. When Consciousness is reflected in Buddhī it undergoes two main modifications. These are the ego and the mind. The ego implies a subject, as well as its mind. (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, p. 8)

The ability to form a subject-object relationship with the thought forms (*vṛttis*) is described here as a capacity that the *buddhi* has as a function of the mind. This function is one that is logically necessary in order for the *buddhi* to successfully perform its executive function in the mind of surveying the landscape.
and making informed choices about how to navigate through the field of experience. The point of emphasizing this prerequisite function of the buddhi to form a subject-object relationship with the mind (antahkarana), is to name this ability of the buddhi as an independent element of what constitutes the Vedantic definition of an emotionally mature mind.

Based on the discussion above I affirm the notion that, according to Vedanta, the definition of a well-developed buddhi is one that is first capable of forming a subject-object relationship with the various thought forms (vrttis) in the mind. The well-developed buddhi is not simply being identified with the thought forms with no objectivity. This function is similar to what is generally accepted in Western psychology as an “observing ego.” Only when there is “inner space” or objectivity present is the buddhi able to discriminate amongst the various objects of experience and determine what action to take with conscious intention. In sum, a mature mind is defined as a mind in which the buddhi has first developed the capacity to relate with objectivity to the contents of the manas in the mind, in the form of sense perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and memories.

The capacity to discriminate (viveka) and apply one’s knowledge with conscious intention is, thus, affirmed as the second element that constitutes a well-developed buddhi, and a mature mind according to Vedanta. As the verses quoted from the Katha Upanisad and the Bhagavadgita state, when the buddhi performs these interrelated functions successfully, the mind is brought into a condition of peace, order, and harmony. This is what is meant by the use of the word purity as a definition of an emotionally mature mind in Advaita Vedanta. A
mature mind can be described as being “pure” in the sense that the *buddhi* operates with clarity and precision, allowing the person to face difficult situations gracefully (Rambachan, 2006).

On the other hand, an immature mind is characterized in the texts as one in which the *buddhi*, to varying degrees, is weak and unable to successfully perform its function of discrimination and determination. According to Vedanta, when the *buddhi* is not as developed, it is more identified with the contents of the mind, and therefore lacks the “inner space” or objectivity in reference to the thoughts and emotions that arise (Balasubrmanian, 1994). Not having the objectivity, the *buddhi* is unable to discriminate between the various objects of experience and apply discriminating wisdom in determining what action to take. The person is, therefore, more likely to respond to his or her environment and make decisions in an automatic, reactive, or unconscious manner. In other words, the ability to assert one’s free will is also limited in a mind that is less mature.

Naturally, as a result of having a less developed *buddhi*, the processes that the *buddhi* is in charge of are not as successful in performing their functions and the mind operates in a more chaotic and disorganized fashion. The mind lacks the resource of inner space and objectivity that is required to effectively deliberate and apply wisdom to make good choices. Thus, the immature mind is characterized in Vedanta as having the qualities of confusion, agitation, and disharmony (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003). This type of mind could also be characterized as lacking “purity” in the sense that the mind is unable to
use the sword of discrimination effectively to clear away confusion, pain, and negativity.

**Following dharma and emotional maturity.**

Another factor that plays a large role in defining emotional maturity is a person’s ability to make choices that are in alignment with the basic moral order of dharma. The Vedantic definition of dharma and the practice of following dharma will be discussed in greater depth later in the chapter. It is important to mention here, however, as an essential element to be included in the Vedantic definition of emotional maturity.

According to Vedanta, a person’s ability to make dharmic choices is another measure for the level of emotional maturity that the mind has developed. When a person has a well-developed buddhi, he or she has more inner space in the mind to consider what action is aligned with the dharmic order in different situations (Atreya, 1985). The more a person has the inner space to deliberate and then choose to assert their free will, the better chance there is that the person will be able to determine what the dharmic response is and then choose to act accordingly. On the other hand, an immature mind has little or no inner space in the mind to consider what the dharmic action is and choose to act in accordance with dharma. This person is more likely to react to situations automatically without thinking, which is more likely to produce an adharmic response than a dharmic one.

In Vedantic psychology a person’s ability to follow dharma is understood to have a profound impact on the mind because, according to Vedanta, following
Dharma brings a feeling of wholeness, peace, and well-being to the mind, while not following dharma creates pain, conflict and agitation in the mind (Dayananda, 1993). One’s ability to follow dharma, therefore, has an immediate and direct impact on the mental-emotional well being of the mind. Namely, the choice to follow dharma or not will yield a peaceful and happy mind, or a mind that is riddled with inner conflict and pain. For this reason, one’s ability to follow dharma is included in a description in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad, which describes the state of an immature mind, which will be unable to gain Self-knowledge.

One who has not abstained from evil conduct, whose senses are not controlled and whose mind is not concentrated and calm cannot gain the Self through knowledge. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 158, v. 1.2.24)

In sum, the Vedantic definition of emotional maturity, or “purity of mind,” is marked by three related factors. The first is the developmental level of the buddhi, defined by the ability to cultivate the “inner space” to relate objectively with the objects of the mental-emotional field of the mind (manas). The second is the ability of the buddhi to discriminate amongst the inner objects of the mind, and apply discriminating wisdom in asserting one’s free will to navigate through the field of experience. Finally, emotional maturity is defined in Vedanta in reference to a person’s understanding the moral order of dharma to being able to determine what action is aligned with the moral order of dharma in given situations and to then to choose to act accordingly. The following section will expand on the Vedantic definition of emotional maturity by looking into the level of maturity deemed necessary in Advaita Vedanta in order for a person to be considered a qualified student (adhikāri) for gaining Self-knowledge.
The Qualified Student and Fourfold Qualification (*sādhanacatuṣṭaya*)

To that student who approaches in the proper manner, whose mind is calm and who is endowed with self-control, the wise teacher should fully impart the knowledge of *Brahman*, through which one knows the true and imperishable Person. (Dayananda, 2006, p. 177, v. 1.2.13)

Adi Sankaracarya, who was the most prolific and well-known commentator on Advaita Vedanta, compiled a description known as the “fourfold qualification” (*sādhanacatuṣṭaya*), which formally outlines the disposition of a “qualified student” (*adhiṣṭīri*) for study (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997; Deussen, 1998). The set of four defining qualifications, which Adi Sankaracarya put together, are taken directly from statements made in the primary source texts of the tradition. Let us look at each one of the four qualifications that define an emotionally mature student who has the purity of mind (*antaḥkaraṇahśuddhi*) deemed necessary to gain Self-knowledge. Presenting the forthcoming description of a qualified student serves a guidepost clarifying the level of emotional maturity that a person must have developed in order to be prepared to gain Self-knowledge. This serves the purpose of this chapter by further expanding the Vedantic understanding of the relationship between gaining Self-knowledge and developing emotional maturity.

**Discrimination between time-bound and timeless (*viveka*).**

The first of the four requirements in Sanskrit is called “*viveka,*” which translates into English as discrimination. In this context the word refers to a specific kind of discrimination, namely between that which is time-bound (*nītya*)
and that which is timeless (anitya). A definition of viveka is presented in Vivekacūḍāmaṇi in the section discussing the qualified student.

Ascertainment in this form that Brahman is eternal and the world is time-bound is presented as discriminative understanding (viveka) between nitya (time-bound) and anitya (timeless). (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997, p. 44, v. 10)

This definition implies that the person, who has viveka, has ascertained the fact that Brahman is eternal, while the world is time-bound. However, knowledge of Brahman has yet to be gained by the student who is coming to the teaching for the first time. Therefore, this statement can be misleading if not properly understood. In Swami Dayananda’s commentary (1997) on this verse he further refines the definition, explaining that a person need not have discovered the eternal Brahman that opposed to the time-bound world, but one has to have recognized the time-bound nature of all objects and experiences in the creation. Thus, for a person to have viveka means that, through discriminating analysis of personal experience in the world, he or she has noticed the fact the sense of completeness that one gains through fulfilling desires in the creation comes to an end, or is bound by time. The existence of the circumstances in the world in the form of people, places, and possessions that had once created a feeling of fulfillment are all recognized as being time-limited. In addition the person’s desire for experiencing a given set of circumstances is also seen to be time-limited. In sum, the recognition for the person who has gained this viveka is that the entire landscape of his or her internal and external world is in a constant state of change, and therefore by nature it cannot provide a sense of fulfillment that is lasting.
The recognition that the world cannot provide the sense of fulfillment that a person seeks is a huge awakening for a person and implies what could be called a “crisis of meaning” for the psyche. According to Vedanta, until a person has recognized that the world cannot provide a sense of fulfillment, the entire focus of a person’s life is absorbed in the realm of the world of objects in the form of people, places, and possessions. When a person is living in the state of bondage (samsāra) one’s passion and drive is entirely interwoven with worldly pursuits of one kind or another (Venugopal, 2012). Although, from a Vedantic perspective these pursuits are ultimately unfulfilling and the mind suffers from existential anxiety as a result, the hope of fulfillment is alive for the person giving their life a sense of meaning. Therefore, when the person gains the discriminative understanding of viveka, it catalyzes a “crisis of meaning” in the sense that the entire paradigm of reality that had given meaning to a person’s life is dismantled. This step in the process is seen as pivotal in creating the conditions for a person to turn to the teachings of Vedanta for some answers (Rambachan, 2006).

**Dispassion for worldly things (vairāgya).**

*Vairāgya* is the Sanskrit word that means having dispassion for the world and worldly desires (Deussen, 1998; Safya, 1976). When a person gains viveka, and recognizes that fulfilling worldly desires will never give one the sense of lasting completeness he or she seeks, dispassion toward the world is a natural response. The word dispassion here does not refer to complete disengagement with the world, but a lack of passionate interest. The relationship between viveka and vairāgya is referred to in the following *Mundaka Upaniṣad* verse.
Examining the experiences gained by doing actions and meditation, may the discriminative person discover dispassion (vairāgya). *Mokṣa*, which is not created, cannot be gained through action. Therefore, to gain the knowledge of *Brahman*, he must go with sacrificial twigs to the teacher who is well-versed in scriptures and who has clear knowledge about *Brahman*. (Dayananda, 2006, p. 155, v. 1.2.12)

For a person to be interested in pursuing the study of Vedanta, the mind must have a sincere interest and passion for gaining the knowledge that it offers. Until a person has gained the insight of *viveka* and experienced the sincere loss of interest in worldly pursuits, *vairāgya*, the mind will still be convinced that the solution to the problem of being lacking and incomplete is solvable through the fulfillment of desires in the world. Therefore, the person’s passion will be alive within the realm of the situations and pursuits in play in one’s life. If such a person were to try to listen to Vedanta, the knowledge would be landing in a mind that is not available to receive it. According to Vedanta, the mind must have a sincere passion for gaining Self-knowledge in order to be ready to engage in study, which is only possible if the person’s drive and passion has been disentangled from the process of seeking fulfillment in the world.

**Desire for liberation (mumukṣutvam).**

Typically *mumukṣutvam*, the desire for liberation (*mokṣa*), is presented in the fourth position in the fourfold requirement. However, I have chosen to present it in the third position here. This order serves to highlight the interconnected meaning of *viveka*, *vairagya*, and *mumukṣutvam*. Gaining *mumukṣutvam*, the desire for liberation (*mokṣa*), naturally follows for a person who has integrated the discriminating realization of *viveka*, and therefore developed *vairāgya*, dispassion for seeking fulfillment in the world.
The Vedantic definition of *mumukṣutvam*, emphasizes this as a “passionate” or “intense” desire for liberation (*mokṣa*) (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000). As mentioned above, when a person has recognized the futility of their efforts for seeking a sense of wholeness through worldly pursuits, he or she experiences a “crisis of meaning,” or disillusionment, because the container of meaning which had provided a framework for moving through the world falls apart. For such a person the existential problem of feeling a sense of lack, inadequacy, and separation is still a burning issue because they do not have Self-knowledge, and yet that which had previously been believed to be a solution has been proven ineffective. Therefore, the person in this position experiences what I have called a “crisis of meaning” or “existential crisis” characterized by an intense desire to discover a new paradigm of meaning that offers a solution to the problem.

The attitude of a *mumukṣu*, one who has the desire for liberation, is likened in the teaching to a person who has their hair on fire and is running toward a pool of water to put it out (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003). The energy, passion, and drive with which one commits to and seeks to gain the knowledge is extreme. In sum, in order to be a qualified student of Vedanta, one must have a burning desire to gain liberation (*mokṣa*), and therefore commit oneself to the pursuit of studying Vedanta as the number one priority (Sadananda & Nikhilananda, 2002).
Wealth of the six disciplines (śamādiśatkasampatti).

The fourth requirement is the attainment of a set of mental qualities and attitudes, known as the wealth of the six disciplines (śamādiśatkasampatti). These characteristics, namely śāma (restraint of the mind), dama (restraint of the organs of action), uparati (renunciation), titikṣā (equanimity), śraddhā (trust), samādhāna (concentration) are listed in a verse in the Brhadāranyaka Upanisad (Sankaracarya & Madhavananda, 1993, p. 531, v. 4.4.23) describing the state of mind of a person who has gained knowledge of Brahman (the Self). The character of a person who is already liberated is used as a guidepost for how a student of the teaching should strive to be (Deussen, 1998).

As we now consider the mental-emotional disposition outlined in the śamādiśatkasampatti, it is important to keep in mind that the qualified student is not expected to have fully embodied each of the qualities, but must have gained at least a relative measure of each (Rambachan, 2006). Therefore, these mental qualities are also seen as qualities that a student of Vedanta would work on cultivating as part of the means for gaining emotional maturity.

The first two qualities of mind are śāma and dama, which describe the capacity of the buddhi to exercise restraint or control over the thoughts and emotions in the mind as well as the actions that a person takes in the form of speech and behavior. Śāma and dama are critical mental capacities that relate to a person’s ability to respond to the world in a way that is aligned with the moral order of dharma. Śāma, is translated as “restraint or control over the thoughts in the mind” (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997). One who has śāma, has a well
developed *buddhi*, which can assert one’s free will to successfully avoid dwelling on thoughts and emotions that are painful, negative, or “impure” in the sense of not being aligned with *dharma*.

*Dama*, translated as “restraint or control over the organs of action” (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000) is the ability to restrain from speaking or behaving from the thoughts and emotions that are negative, painful, or “impure.” The thoughts in the mind are recognized as being very difficult to control just by asserting the will of the *buddhi*. Therefore, in the cases where a certain negative thoughts and emotion get a hold in the mind, having the mental capacity of *dama*, contains the potential harm or hurt that may be caused if the emotion were to be expressed through the person’s speech or behavior.

*Uparati* is often translated as “renunciation” (Deussen, 1998; Rambachan, 2006), however the meaning of the Sanskrit word that is given by Dayananda is: “to revel in the nearest” (personal interview, September 25, 2005). Formally speaking the word *uparati* refers to a person’s ability to fully commit to the pursuit of gaining and integrating Self-knowledge, which requires an inner focus on the Self. The Self is the nearest, and the object to be known. If a person has their attention focused outwardly on the world, it is very difficult if not impossible to notice the innermost reality of the Self. Renunciation is used as a translation because a person who has *uparati* renounces his or her focus on worldly pursuits, possessions, and duties in the world in order to commit the main focus on the pursuit of gaining Self-knowledge.
Titiksa translates as “equanimity” and represents the ability of a person to remain undisturbed in the face of both the positive and negative spectrum of experience. Generally speaking, the mind’s nature is to move toward the positive and pleasant experiences and away from the negative and painful experiences. Having titiksa does not change the natural preference of the mind for the pleasant experiences, but implies the ability to handle the uncomfortable and painful experiences with equanimity of mind (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000).

Sraddha is difficult to translate into English as there is no equivalent word that captures the Sanskrit meaning. Here I will use is the translation of “trust” from Venugopal (2012). Sraddha is an attitude of open mindedness and trust toward the teaching and the teacher of Vedanta. In order to gain the vision of reality that is presented through the Vedantic teaching methodology, the student must have enough trust to keep their mind and heart open to receiving the teaching. The student is encouraged to use his or her own discrimination (buddhi) to contemplate and reflect on the teaching to come to their own conclusion about its truth. However, in order for the understanding to be gained about what is being said, the person must have a relative degree of trust, open-mindedness, and receptivity.

The last quality in the set of six is samadhana, which translates as “mental concentration.” Samadhana is defined as the ability of the mind to concentrate and have a one-pointed focus (Venugopal, 2012). This quality of mind is deemed necessary for the qualified student of Vedanta because the mind needs to be able to become absorbed in the teaching as the teacher is unfolding the verses in the
class setting. If the student’s mind is distracted and not able to focus, he or she will not be able to follow along with the line of thinking of the teacher, and therefore, will not be able to benefit from the teaching.

The mental-emotional disposition that is outlined in Sankara’s “fourfold qualification” (sādhanacatuṣṭaya) characterizes the kind of person who is prepared to gain Self-knowledge. However, according to Vedanta, a person may become interested in studying Vedanta without having fully attained and integrated all of these qualities. Being a “qualified student” (adhiṣṭarī) means that the person has attained at least a relative measure of the qualities outlined above. Doing practices to develop emotional maturity is the secondary means (sādhana) for gaining Self-knowledge. The “fourfold qualification” offers a clear guidepost for the student, outlining the mental-emotional disposition that a person needs to work towards in order to prepare the mind to gain liberation (mokṣa). In the following section we turn to consider the primary means prescribed in Advaita Vedanta for gaining emotional maturity, the practice of following the basic moral order of dharma.

The Dharmic Order

In Advaita Vedanta the practice of following dharma is considered to be the primary means for developing emotional maturity in one’s life (Satprakashananda, 1977). What is dharma and the dharmic order? The topic of dharma is the subject matter of a large portion of the Vedas, known as the karmakānda, and includes a scope and breadth of knowledge that is far beyond the limits of this study. To stay in keeping with our focus, I will limit the
definition of dharma here to that which is known as samānya-dharma, the universal moral order that applies equally to all people (Pramananda Saraswati, 2001). In using the terms dharma or dharmic order in the forthcoming discussion, let it be clear that I am referring to samānya-dharma only, without association with the other areas of Hindu dharma discussed in the Vedic literature, which is beyond the scope of this study.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Vedantic vision of the creation is that of one undivided reality that is Īśvāra. According to Vedanta, the creation is governed by a given set of universal laws that form Īśvāra’s order (Laksmidhari & Tattvavidananda, 2009). The governing laws can be likened to organizing principles of Īśvāra, which hold together an intelligent order of meaning in the creation. This universal order governs the experiences of all beings living within the creation on the physical level as well as the subtle level of the mind. Samānya-dharma, is best introduced within this context, as one of the fundamental organizing principles of Īśvāra’s order.

To “follow dharma,” according to Vedanta, is to make choices in one’s moment-to-moment experience that are aligned with the basic moral order of Īśvāra. The moral order of dharma is defined in the most general terms as living in such a way that a person would naturally who has gained Self-knowledge. Therefore, to live a moral or dharmic life, is to live in such a way that a person naturally would who has recognized the non-dual relationship between oneself, all beings in the creation, and the creation as a whole. Swami Satprakashanda (1977) makes this connection in the following statement.
Basically, morality is the attunement of the individual self to the Self of the universe. While a spiritual person practices this knowingly, a moral man practices the same unknowingly. Moral life is the closest to the spiritual life. Unselfishness is the prime moral virtue. It is the attunement of the individual self to the Self of the universe, the Soul of all souls. (p. 42)

When a person recognizes that the Self is one’s own nature and is also the nature of all beings in the creation, he or she naturally wants to treat others with the same love, respect, and care as they treat themselves. In recognizing the non-separation between oneself and others, it naturally follows that a person would want to live in peace and harmony with the others and not cause disturbance or harm to any living being. This is the principle that dictates the dharmic order.

The basic principle of sāmanya-dharma is “do to others what you wish others to do to you, and do not do to others as you do not want others to do to you” (Pramananda, 2001; Viswam, 2000).

In the teachings of the Vedas, the value of non-harmfulness, or non-injury (āhiṁsa) is accepted as the most fundamental human value. The entire order of dharma and the values that arise from that order are rooted in the basic human desire for not being hurt or harmed in any way. In his book The Value of Values, Swami Dayananda (1993) defines the Sanskrit concept of āhiṁsa, non-injury.

Āhiṁsā comes from the Sanskrit verb hiṁs, which means ‘to hurt, injure, or cause harm.’ Āhiṁsā, which means ‘non-injury or non-harmfulness,’ reflects my inherent desire to live free of any hurt or pain or threat of any sort. Even thoughts can cause pain. If I know someone holds hurtful thoughts about me, although these thoughts are not expressed in deeds or words, I am hurt. Āhiṁsa means not causing harm by any means: by deeds (kāyena); by words (vāca); or by thoughts (manasā). (p. 31)

The moral order of dharma is outlined in the teachings through a number of articulated values such as truthfulness, non-stealing, etc., all of which arise out
of the basic dharmic value of non-injury (āhiṁsa). Therefore, according to Vedanta, in order to figure out whether a given action is in alignment with dharma, one need not go any further than to ask oneself the question, if someone were to do it to me, would it cause me any harm? The answer to this question reveals the moral order of sāmanya-dharma (Viswam, 2000).

Dharma and binding desires (kama).

According to Vedanta, the value for following dharma is something that is inherently built into the structure of the human psyche and does not have to be learned (Tattvidananda, 2011). It is no different than the commonly known idea of having a “conscience,” an innate intelligence that understands there is a moral order to be followed. Thus, the value for following dharma is considered to be a given part of the creation, and inherent in the psyche. At the same time, due to the condition of bondage, Vedanta understands there to be another set of values are present in the human psyche, which can sometimes create difficulty and confusion surrounding a person’s ability to live a dharmic life.

As discussed already, in the state of bondage a person is operating in a psychological environment that is rooted in the existential feeling of lack. The feeling of lack is a source of fear because the person feels that “I am not okay as I am.” According to Vedanta, when a person is living in the condition of bondage, certain desires will naturally arise out of the sense of being a lacking entity, which the person believes will give them a sense of wholeness if fulfilled. The goal in fulfilling such desires is to soothe the anxiety associated with being a lacking person and gain a basic feeling of wholeness.
In the teachings of Vedanta, desires that arise out of the sense of lack are called “binding desires” (kama) which manifest in the form of likes and dislikes (rāga-dveṣa) toward certain objects or situations in the world. Binding desires (kama) are differentiated from other kinds of human desires that do not arise from a sense of lack. For example the desire to help someone or to drink a glass of water would not be considered binding desires. Swamini Pramananda Saraswati (2001) discusses binding desires and the impact they have in the mind in her book, *Talks on Vedic Dharma and Culture*. She says: “Out of ignorance, are born the binding likes and dislikes, which are obstacles of the mind,…that inhibit objectivity” (p. 38).

The *Bhagavadgita* also addresses this topic. In the following verses *Krishna* addresses *Arjuna*, and emphasizes the powerful nature of the binding desires to take over the mind and dominate the inner landscape.

*Vārṣneya (Krṣṇa)!* Impelled by what, does a person commit sin, as though pushed by some force even though not desiring to? (Dayananda, 2007, p. 56, v. 3.36)

*Sri Bhagavān* said: This desire, this anger, born of the guṇa rajas, is a glutton and a great sinner. Know that to be the enemy here in this world. Just as fire is covered by clouds of smoke, just as a mirror us covered by dust, and just as a foetus is covered by the womb, so too, knowledge is covered by (binding) desire. Knowledge is covered by the insatiable fire of desire, the constant enemy of the wise, *Kaunteya (Arjuna)!* (Dayananda, 2007, pp. 56-57, vv. 3.37-9)

These verses each imply that the likes and dislikes associated with binding desires can have the effect of taking hold of the mind and obscuring a person’s ability to relate to the world objectively and access their “knowledge.” The implication here is that binding desires, if not brought under control of the *buddhi*,...
are so powerful that they can lead a person to make *adharmic* choices in certain situations.

The existence of binding desires in the state of bondage create what is best described in psychological terms as an inner-conflict between competing values or needs that the person has. The inner-conflict that arises in this instance is between the need to feel whole and the need to follow *dharma*. According to Vedanta, as long as the core-belief that “I am inherently lacking” is in place the person will have a passionate need to fulfill binding desires that can take any number of forms. At the same time the teaching affirms that the human value for *dharma* is inborn and cannot be gotten rid of. Therefore, as long as a person is operating in the state of bondage, there are bound be situations that arise where the need to fulfill binding desires will come into conflict with the need to follow *dharma*.

The degree to which the person is aware of the conflict and has inner resources to help will determine the degree to which a person is able to make *dharmic* choices. Based on this context of understanding, the Vedantic perspective is one that compassionately understands the difficulty that a person faces in trying to follow *dharma* (Dayananda, 1993). The understanding is that, while all beings have a value for *dharma*, people are not always capable of making *dharmic* choices due to the powerful and empassioned nature of binding desires, which can overpower the desire to follow *dharma*.
**Following dharma as a means of developing emotional maturity.**

Cultivating a conscious value for following *dharma* is the central practice prescribed in Advaita Vedanta for developing emotional maturity and for gaining Self-knowledge (Venugopal, 2012). As the discussion above has indicated, when a person is living in the state of bondage the mind naturally suffers from the inner-conflict and confusion created by the presence of binding desires and the likes and dislikes (*rāga-dveṣa*) connected to them. This phenomena is seen as a primary cause for creating a state of mind that lacks a sense of well-being or “purity of mind” (*antahkaraṇahśuddhi*). The questions surrounding a person’s ability to live in alignment with *dharma* or not, are thus seen as central to a person’s psychological and emotional development. Hence, the teachings of Vedanta emphasize the necessity for a person to cultivate awareness about what actions are *dharmic* or not. This practice brings attention to one’s process of decision making in the moment-to-moment experience of functioning in the world.

Two factors are emphasized in the teachings of Vedanta, which further explain the central role it plays in a person’s psychological development. The first is that whether a person follows *dharma* or not has a powerful effect on a person’s state of emotional well-being or purity of mind (*antahkaraṇahśuddhi*). The impact of one’s choices to follow *dharma*, or not, is understood to have both an immediate and a long-term effect that is either positive or negative respectively. The immediate effect when a person chooses the *dharmic* action is that it creates a feeling of emotional well-being, wholeness, and peace in the
mind. Alternatively, choosing an action that goes against the *dharmic* order, creates an immediate sense of agitation, disharmony, and fragmentation in the mind (Pramananada, 2001).

According to Vedanta, while the value for following *dharma* can be temporarily eclipsed by an overpowering binding desire, this value remains as a fixed and immovable principle in the psyche (Venugopal, 2012). Therefore, while part of the mind may feel soothed and satisfied by choosing to commit *adharma* in order to fulfill a binding desire, another part of the mind will naturally feel hurt and disturbed by the act of committing *adharma* regardless of what may have been attained in the process. For example, a person has a binding desire to gain a particular job as an executive at given firm. The person feels such a sense of urgency about needing this job that he or she lies and exploits others in the process of positioning oneself favorably. If the person is to succeed in being offered the job, part of the mind will be glowing with satisfaction. However, on the other side the part of the mind that values *dharma* will be wrought with feelings of guilt and shame at the trail of hurt caused by the *adharma* committed in the process. Even though the part of the mind that values *dharma* may be unconscious for the person, the psyche cannot escape it. In his book *The Value of Values*, Swami Dayananda (1993) discusses this phenomenon.

Guilt comes because I have a half-value for truth (*dharma*), which, when I ignore it, it is sufficient to create a problem for me. Split comes because I know I am obliged to tell the truth, and I am doing something else. Once I have guilt—once I am split, I cannot have a comfortable self. (p. 16)

Based on the Vedantic vision of non-dual reality, to go against *dharma* is like sticking your hand in fire. It directly hurts oneself (Satprakashananda, 1977).
If the Self is an undivided and limitless reality that is the nature of all beings, then it naturally follows that doing an action that hurts another person is no different than hurting oneself. This is the explanation given in Vedanta for why a person feels the direct impact of pain on a subtle level when they commit *adharma*, and hurt another person or group of people. According to the law of *karma* and its connection to *dharma*, a person who commits *adharma* will also incur a long-term negative consequence, which will manifest in the form of some difficult, unpleasant, or negative situation in the future (Deussen, 1998).

Based on the negative results that stem from committing *adharma*, we can see that in a very practical sense a person’s choice to follow *dharma*, or not, has a direct and immediate result of contributing to the level of emotional well-being and peace that the mind experiences. Doing *adharma* has the effect of creating pain, fragmentation, and lack of well being, while choosing the *dharmic* action creates a mind that is clear, harmonious, and at peace. Therefore a person’s choice to follow *dharma* or not in the way he or she moves through one’s daily life, has a direct impact in dictating a person’s baseline sense of emotional well-being or “purity of mind” (*antaḥkaraṇahśuddhi*).

In addition, a person who becomes a student of Vedanta comes to see that behaving in accordance with *dharma* is to respond to the world as a person would who has gained Self-knowledge and realized his or her non-dual relationship with the creation. The notion of living a *dharmic* life is, thus, given greater depth and meaning in light of the vision presented in the teachings. To follow *dharma* is
understood to be a way of living that is in harmony with Īśvāra (Pramamanda, 2001).

Accordingly, when a person becomes a student of Vedanta, his or her value for following dharma is further supported by this new context of meaning for the moral order of dharma as an organizing principle of Īśvāra. When the Vedantic vision of Īśvāra is understood the person is, therefore, encouraged to follow dharma, not only because it brings about peace of mind, but because a person recognizes that to follow dharma is to live in the world in harmony with the truth of oneself. Therefore, the practice of cultivating dharmic attitudes and striving to behave as a person would who has gained Self-knowledge is seen as the secondary means or practice (sādhana) for gaining Self-knowledge. This is in addition to the primary means of listening to the oral teaching (śravaṇam). The following verses emphasize the central role that the practice of following dharma plays in developing emotional maturity (antahkaraṇahśuddhi) and preparing the mind for gaining Self-knowledge.

For the one whose mind is committed to the śruti as a means of knowledge, a commitment to one’s own dharma is there. By that commitment alone purification of his mind follows. For the one whose mind is purified, recognition of the limitless self takes place. By that recognition the destruction of samsāra along with its cause, i.e. ignorance results. (Dayanada, 1997, p. 141, v. 44)

The self is definitely gained by always speaking the truth, constant religious discipline, mastery over the senses and clear knowledge. Indeed those who are of right effort and who are free from impurity know the self, which is free from ignorance, which is of the nature of light and which is within the body. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 152, v. 3.1.5)

In sum, the teachings of Vedanta affirm the practice of cultivating a life of
dharma as the central pillar in a person’s process of developing emotional
maturity. A person is, therefore, encouraged to cultivate a practice of self-inquiry to raise awareness and bring attention to one’s own psychological processes that surround one’s choices as he or she moves through the world each moment. Through gaining awareness of the mental-emotional landscape related to one’s choices from moment-to-moment, a person can bring inner-conflicts to light that may arise from binding desires.

When the inner-conflict is brought into the field of awareness in the mind, the person then has the opportunity to see where parts of the psyche are operating out of the core-beliefs rooted in the state of bondage. This is the insight necessary in order to transform those parts of the psyche in light of one’s value for dharma and one’s knowledge. Thus, having a personal practice of self-inquiry serves as a place where a student of Vedanta can observe where “the rubber meets the road,” so to speak in his or her direct field of experience. The moment when one becomes aware of a choice made that was not in alignment with dharma becomes an opportunity. This opens the door to gain insight into parts of the mind that otherwise remain unconscious. Awareness is necessary in order for those parts of the mind to be transformed. Therefore, cultivating a personal practice of self-reflection related to dharma, serves as a tool to bring to consciousness the parts of the mind that need to be transformed.

**Impact of Gaining Self-Knowledge on Developing Emotional Maturity**

According to Vedanta, when a person gains Self-knowledge, his or her process of developing emotional maturity is transformed, but does not come to an end. Instead of being centered on preparing the mind to gain Self-knowledge, the
process of comes to be centered on the integration of the knowledge gained (Satprakashananda, 1977). As discussed in the previous chapter, gaining Self-knowledge catalyzes a fundamental transformation in the psyche. Over time the psyche shifts from being rooted in an identity with the mind-body-sense-complex that is limited, changing, and bound, to an identity rooted in the Self that is limitless, stable, and free. This transformative process has a profoundly positive impact on a person’s overall psychological and emotional health, which can be summarized with two basic ideas.

First, the identity of the individual is transformed from a person who believes he or she is inherently lacking to a person that knows that they are whole. This alone creates an exponential leap in establishing positive self-worth, well-being, and mental-emotional health. Second, when the buddhi is transformed in light of Self-knowledge, it develops an authentic attitude of loving compassion and acceptance towards the parts of the mind in pain and needing to mature. This naturally serves to cultivate an environment in the mind that is conducive to emotional growth. In turn, a person’s process of healing, growth, and integration is expedited.

As discussed in the previous chapter on “Liberation,” a specific moment occurs in the process of gaining Self-knowledge when the buddhi is successful in using discrimination (viveka) to differentiate the Self from the mind. Both of the following verses reference the delicate and subtle nature of this moment of discrimination.

He is free, who separating the unassociated innermost self, the subject—which is actionless—from the whole host of objects as even separating the
inside stalk from the muñjā grass and resolving everything there in that ātma stays, by knowledge, as that very ātma. (Dayananda, 1997, p. 151, v. 45)

The Purusa, the indwelling Self, of the size of a thumb, is ever seated in the hearts of men. One should unerringly separate Him from one’s body like a stalk from the Muñjā grass. Him one should know as pure and immortal. (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003, p. 252, v. 17)

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Self-knowledge takes place in the buddhi, when the direct cognition of the Self arises in the mind in the form of a thought (akhanḍākāra-vṛtti). In the moment this thought arises, the Self is recognized by the buddhi as being a self-evident reality, independent from the mind. This recognition has a number of different impacts on the way the mind functions, each of which have a positive effect on a person’s psychological and emotional development. Below I will discuss a number of them.

Objectivity as an inner resource.

First, the ability of the buddhi to relate to the mind with objectivity was identified at the beginning of this chapter, as a primary capacity that must be developed in order for the buddhi to mature and successfully perform its executive function in the mind. It was explained that all of the functions that the buddhi is responsible for, namely to discriminate amongst the objects of experience, and apply knowledge to make intelligent decisions, are dependent upon the primary ability of the buddhi to cultivate a subject-object relationship with the various thought forms (vṛttis) in the mind. It was concluded that the primary ability to develop objectivity in relationship to the contents of the mind is implied in Vedanta to be a critical resource that the mind needs in order to function with a relative degree of cohesion and order.

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When Self-knowledge is gained, the recognition takes place in the *buddhi* that the mind is inherently separate from the Self. In turn, a subject-object relationship with the contents of the mind is established on a whole new level, than was possible in the state of bondage (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, 1998). As discussed earlier, prior to gaining Self-knowledge, the *buddhi* is capable of identifying with the consciousness of the Self to become a perceiver of the mind. Thus objectivity can be established in reference to the mind. However, as long as the *buddhi* is operating in the condition of bondage, the “I”-thought will identify the Self with the *buddhi* (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997). The degree of objectivity that can be cultivated with reference to the thought forms in the mind is, therefore, limited because the identity of the subject remains confined to the limitations of the *buddhi* as part of the mind.

According to Vedanta, when Self-knowledge is gained, the recognition takes place in the *buddhi*, that the Self illumines the entire mind, including the *buddhi* itself. The “I-thought,” or function of identifying the subject, is no longer superimposed on the *buddhi*, but correctly identifies the Self, as the innermost subject. As a result of this transformation in the *buddhi*, the subject-object relationship between the Self and the entire mind is firmly established, as the “I-thought” is rooted in the Self (Sankaracarya & Gambhirananda, 2003). Therefore, the experience in the psyche for a person who has gained Self-knowledge is that the entire mind is an object of experience, including not just the *manas* and *citta*, but also the *buddhi* (Sankaracarya & Nikhilananda, 1998). In sum, as a result of
gaining Self-knowledge, the degree of objectivity, or “inner space” is increased exponentially as a positive resource for the healthy functioning of the mind.

**Relaxation and healing of the mind.**

Secondly, when Self-knowledge takes place, the Self that is revealed as the true nature of the individual is an emotionally positive reality. As the following verse from the *Mundaka Upanishad* states, the Vedantic Self is defined as being of the nature of wholeness, or love (*ānanda*).

(“The self) is the basis for the *buddhi*, and abides in the physical body. By knowing that self, the discriminating people clearly recognize that immortal *Brahman* which is of the nature of *ānanda* and which shines always. (Dayananda, 2007, p. 93, v. 2.2.8)

As discussed in the previous chapter, the process of assimilating the Self as the true nature of the individual is a profoundly healing experience for the mind. The mind gains a basic sense of wholeness and well-being when the recognition takes place in the *buddhi* that the problem of being a lacking individual has been solved. With the Self established as the true identity of the person, a tremendous pressure is released in the mind, which no longer has to solve the problem of being a limited and lacking being (Sankaracarya & Vimuktananda, 2000). The liberated *buddhi* is, therefore, no longer burdened by the intense pressure from the binding desires demanding to be fulfilled at any cost, and causing painful inner-conflicts. In addition, the emotional pain associated with the belief of being lacking, inadequate, and unworthy is released (Rambachan, 2006).

According to Vedanta, while the pressure to fulfill binding desires is relieved in light of Self-knowledge, out of habit they will have a tendency to arise in the mind until a person has thoroughly transformed the part of the mind rooted
in the condition of bondage. However, once Self-knowledge has been established, the *buddhi* has more capacity to cultivate a subject-object relationship with the binding desires when they do arise. When these desires are perceived as objects of experience (*vr̥tti*) in the mind the *buddhi* can apply discriminating wisdom and pause for reflection, instead of simply acting them out (Vidyaranya, 1982). In a moment of reflection, the *buddhi* can apply the integrated knowledge that the Self is the true locus of happiness and well-being and allow the binding desire to be resolved in light of this understanding.

As the *buddhi* strengthens the capacity to become aware of binding desires and avoid acting them out in the world, the potential for committing *adharmic* action is also reduced. Having increased awareness, the *buddhi* is more often able to see when a binding desire is in direct conflict with the desire to follow *dharma*, and therefore, is more likely to make the *dharmic* choice. The increased ability to make *dharmic* choices is another benefit in a person’s emotional development that results from gaining Self-knowledge (Pramananda, 2001).

**Cultivating compassion toward the mind.**

Finally, as the *buddhi* assimilates Self-knowledge including both the understanding, “I am the Self,” and, “I am Īśvāra,” an attitude of loving compassion and acceptance for oneself and others naturally arises in the mind (Dayananda, 2007). This is yet another way that gaining Self-knowledge impacts the processes of developing emotional maturity in a profound and beautiful way. When the “I-thought” is firmly established in the Self and the mind is experienced as being an object of awareness, the *buddhi* is able to cultivate a loving and
accepting attitude in relation to the content’s of the entire mind. Therefore, while in the state of bondage certain aspects of the mind were experienced as scary or threatening to the sense of well-being and cohesion of the mind, in light of Self-knowledge they are not a threat because the sense of wholeness and cohesion is given as the very nature of the Self. In turn, the buddhi, which holds the knowledge, recognizes that there is no problem created in allowing the mind to be as it is. It, therefore, gives up its agenda to avoid or micromanage the difficult and painful aspects of the mind when they arise. Thus, the attitude of the buddhi, which is imbued with Self-knowledge, is that all emotions are welcome including the positive and negative (Dayananda, 2004).

According to Vedanta, the positive emotions such as love, compassion, joy, gratitude, and empathy are considered to be various expressions of the nature of the Self in the mind. Therefore, when these emotions arise there is nothing that needs to be processed. The mind is experienced as being harmonious with the Self. On the other hand, the negative emotions such as fear, anger, hatred, and jealousy are understood as being rooted in the part of the mind that has been hurt due to the effects of ignorance and the condition of bondage. When these emotions arise they create a feeling of discomfort and dissonance in the mind, because they are not harmonious with the nature of the Self (Pramananda, 2001). Thus, according to Vedanta, when negative emotions arise in the mind, the buddhi that has Self-knowledge, naturally responds with an attitude of compassion because it understands that the negative emotion is stemming from a deep seated hurt in the psyche.
The Vedantic understanding of Īśvāra further serves to support an attitude of loving compassion and acceptance towards the hurt parts of the mind. As discussed in the previous chapter, everything that exists in the creation is understood in Vedanta to be a part of Īśvāra’s order. This includes the psychological order, and the fact that we are born into the condition of bondage that has the result of creating deep-seated hurt and pain in the mind. In addition we are born to parents and others who are also suffering from their own hurt, which adds further pain and psychological suffering for the mind (Sankaracarya & Dayananda, 1997). Thus, in light of the understanding of Īśvāra, the buddhi does not fault the mind for having hurt, confusion, and pain, but relates to it with compassion and understanding. The hurt, confusion, and pain itself is understood as being as it should be according to Īśvāra’s order. Therefore, when the buddhi is imbued with Self-knowledge, a culture of love and acceptance is established in the mind.

According to Vedanta, the negative emotions are not only welcomed by the liberated buddhi, but the natural response of the buddhi is to want to resolve the pain because it is dissonant with the nature of the Self (Laksmidhari & Tattvavidananda, 2009). This is no different than the desire to resolve physical pain or injury to the body. It is a natural response of the human organism. Therefore, when a part of the mind expresses itself as being in pain, the natural response of a liberated buddhi is to turn toward the part of the mind that is in pain, try to understand the nature of the hurt, and then to apply discriminating wisdom to help resolve it. The teachings of Vedanta do not go into great detail in
discussing how to process and heal the hurt parts of the mind. However, as the following verse indicates, they do acknowledge the need to cultivate such a practice.

Because there is no regular course of discipline prescribed for one living liberated in life, he must repeatedly perform discrimination whenever superimposition arises as a man taking medicine applies it whenever need arises. (Vidyaranya, 1982, p. 254, v. 7.249)

**Releasing the knot of the heart (ḥṛdayagranthi).**

According to Vedanta, in the wake of gaining Self-knowledge there is an intense period of transformation and healing that takes place due to the powerful effect that it has on the psyche. The impact on the mind can be summarized as a profound relaxation and letting go of the buddhi, which had been living in a contracted state due to the pain and suffering in the state of bondage. This is referred to in a verse from the Munḍaka Upaniṣad as the releasing of the “knots of the heart” (ḥṛdayagranthi).

Indeed that person who knows that limitless Brahman, becomes Brahman itself. He or she crosses sorrow and the pāpas (negativity). Having been released from the knots of the heart, the person is no longer subject to death. (Dayananda, 2006, p. 226, v. 329)

When the knot of the heart is released in the wake of gaining Self-knowledge, the mind relaxes at a core level and this causes so much of the stored up pain to be released in the psyche and surface (Rambachan, 2006). As a result, there may be an intense period of time where a lot of psychological material is surfacing and a person may even experience an increased level of suffering for the mind because there has been so much stored up and now the pressure valve is
released. However, over time the process slows down as more of the psychic contents are healed in the light of a person’s knowledge.

According to Vedanta, the process never ends as long as a person is living in a body, with a mind, etc. and there may be remnants of old hurt that can surface now and again. But, when such material arises in a mind that is firmly rooted in the knowledge the person is not fundamentally shaken or disturbed by it (Vidyaranya, 1982).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has covered the topic of emotional maturity in Advaita Vedanta from a number of angles. First, I presented an objective definition of emotional maturity that is implied in the texts of Vedanta. In addition we looked at the “fourfold qualification” (*sādhanacatusṭaya*) of Sri Sankaracarya as the definition of the level of emotional maturity required for a person to be considered a qualified student for the study of Vedanta. I then discussed the topic of *samānya-dharma* and the practice of following *dharma* as the primary means prescribed in Advaita Vedanta for developing emotional maturity. Finally, I explored the impact that gaining Self-knowledge has on a person’s process of psychological and emotional development. I concluded that developing emotional maturity is seen in Vedanta as a process that is continuous throughout a person’s life, but is greatly boosted when Self-knowledge is gained and integrated within the mind.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

Introduction

This dissertation has taken up the task of looking at human psychology through the lens of the spiritual teachings of Advaita Vedanta. Using this approach in a theoretical study, I have presented a body of work that reflects the viewpoint that the teachings of Vedanta present to us on human psychology. In concluding this dissertation, four major tenets of Vedantic psychology will be affirmed, which have been established in the previous chapters. These four tenets together form the theoretical basis for a system of psychology based on the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. The four tenets include: a model for the structure and function of the human psyche, the root cause for human psychological suffering, the solution or cure to that problem, and the prescribed means for gaining the solution or cure. Finally, I will suggest three topics for further research that would expand on the foundation of theoretical knowledge that this work has established.

“The Psychology of Advaita Vedanta”: A System of Psychology

Structural model of the human psyche.

In Chapter 3 a conceptual model for the structure of the human psyche was presented according to the teachings of Vedanta. This model provided the Vedantic definition of the Self and the mind as two psychological elements, or factors, that make up the human psyche. The Self was defined through the Sanskrit words satyam, jñānam, and anantam, which translate as existence, consciousness, and limitlessness. I explored the meaning of each word carefully,
emphasizing the unique way that these words are understood in Vedanta as pointers (lakṣaṇa) meant to direct the mind to the innermost nature of the psyche to discover their meaning. Vedanta affirms the Self as a reality whose meaning can only be known directly as a person’s nature. The Vedantic Self was affirmed as the true nature of the individual, even though this fact is not properly understood until a person gains Self-knowledge.

The mind (antaḥkaraṇaḥ) was defined, according to Vedanta, as being comprised of thought forms (vṛttis), which fall into four different categories. The manas, includes deliberative thinking, the emotions, and sense perception. The citta, was defined as the memory bank and storehouse of the mind likened to the concept of the unconscious mind in Western psychological theories. The buddhi was defined as the executive function in the mind, which establishes knowledge, applies knowledge, and determines what action to take applying free will. In addition the buddhi was defined as the seat of the ahaṅkāra, which is the fourth component of the mind. The ahaṅkāra was defined as the “I-thought” or ego-function in the mind, which performs the function of creating the identity of the individual.

In addition to presenting a model of the human psyche, which defined the nature of the Self and the mind (antaḥkaraṇa), chapter three discussed the dynamic relationship between the two according to the Vedantic teachings. The dynamic functions of the buddhi and ahaṅkāra where explored, and the complex process of ego-identification in the state of bondage was discussed. In sum, a comprehensive model for the structure and function of the human psyche has been
presented in this study and is affirmed here as the first of four tenets that together form a model of human psychology based upon the teaching of Advaita Vedanta.

**Human problem of psychological suffering: Self-ignorance.**

In Chapter 4 the Vedantic teachings on the nature of human bondage (saṃsāra) were presented. This psychological condition was shown to have its root cause in the mistaken identity of the Self, created as a result of inborn ignorance (avidyā) in the mind. A thorough explanation was given to show how, according to Vedanta, the effects of inborn ignorance (avidyā), create a particular condition in the mind, which leads to the identification of the Self with the mind-body-sense-complex, jīva. This phenomenon was shown to be responsible for a primary core-belief to be rooted in the psyche identifying the Self with the jīva. This core-belief is expressed in the statement, “I am the jīva,” identifying the Self, the content of the word “I,” with the mind-body-sense complex, jīva.

This chapter developed a detailed discourse explaining how the identity of the Self with the jīva, “I am the jīva” operates in the psyche as the primary organizing principle upon which the entire contents of the psyche is built and operates. It was then shown how the primary core-belief, “I am the jīva,” gives rise to a two secondary core-beliefs, namely “I am inherently lacking” and “I am separate.” These core-beliefs were shown to be the source of deeply rooted emotional pain, negative self-judgment, and existential anxiety, which cause a great deal of suffering.

In presenting the Vedantic teachings on the nature of human bondage a theoretical platform was established, which supports the conclusion that the
condition of human bondage (samsāra) according to Vedanta, can be viewed as an existential human pathology that is the root cause for human psychological and emotional suffering. In using the word pathology here, I defined it generically as a mental condition that is rooted in a fundamental misperception of reality and causes mental-emotional suffering. According to Vedanta, the true identity of the mind-body-sense-complex, the jīva, is the Self. Therefore, the primary conclusion “I am the jīva,” which gives rise to the condition of bondage, is based on a fundamental misperception of reality. As discussed in the chapter, the fundamental misperception was shown to give rise to structures in the psyche, in the form of core-beliefs that lead to various forms of mental-emotional pain and suffering.

In sum, the second tenet of Vedantic psychology is that, all human beings are born into the condition of bondage (samsāra), a psychological state of suffering. This human problem, or pathology, is affirmed in Vedanta as a universal phenomenon, which no one is immune to by nature of born into this world. While the form of psychological disorder and dysfunction will naturally vary from one person to the next, fundamentally the Vedantic view is that all psychological problems can be traced back to the one root pathology. Thus, the condition of bondage is affirmed in Vedantic psychology as a universal psychological problem that needs to be addressed in order for a person to gain psychological wholeness and well-being. The theoretical ideas summarized above regarding the nature of human suffering in the psyche are unique and
innovative. It should be emphasized that these notions offer new and potentially ground breaking perspectives to be considered in the field of Western psychology.

**Solution to the problem: Gaining Self-knowledge.**

In chapter five, gaining Self-knowledge was affirmed as the solution prescribed in the teachings of Vedanta for the problem of human bondage (*samsāra*) and its associated suffering. Self-knowledge was defined as the realization that the nature of the individual *jīva* is the Self, and that Self is *Brahman*, the Self of the entire creation. In other words, gaining Self-knowledge was shown to reveal a non-dual identity between the individual *jīva* and the creation as they are both affirmed as manifestations of the same undivided Self. The process of gaining Self-knowledge was affirmed in this chapter as one that does not involve the gaining of any new knowledge, but the clearing up of the mistaken identity of the Self, which is already known.

In Chapter 5, Self-knowledge was discussed as a two-part realization. Each part of the realization was explored in great depth to show how the knowledge takes place, and what impact occurs in the psyche as a result. The first part of the realization was established as the recognition that the Self is the true nature of the mind-body-sense-complex (*jīva*). It was affirmed that when this knowledge takes place in the psyche, a new primary core-belief is established, namely “I am the Self.” The new primary core-belief was shown to effectively disprove and uproot the old primary core belief rooted in ignorance, “I am the *jīva*.”
The effects of the realization of the Self as the true nature of the individual were shown to have a profoundly healing effect on the psyche because the Vedantic Self is affirmed in the teachings to be an emotionally positive reality. The nature of the Self as ānanda, was discussed, highlighting the Self as being of the nature of wholeness, fullness, and love. Accordingly, it was shown that when the new primary core-belief, “I am the Self,” takes root in the psyche, it naturally gives rise to a number of secondary core-beliefs such as “I am whole,” “I am full,” and “I am love,” based on the nature of the Self as ānanda. These new organizing principles that reflect an essential feeling of wholeness and emotional wellbeing, were then shown to have a healing effect on the part of the psyche that had been suffering from the secondary core-belief, “I am inherently lacking,” rooted in the condition of bondage.

The second part of the Self-knowledge realization was affirmed as the recognition that the Vedantic Self, the nature of the individual jīva, is Brahman, the Self of the entire creation. This realization was shown to affirm a non-dual identity between the individual and the creation, as a whole. The Vedantic vision of the creation as a cosmic conscious being, given the name “Īśvara” was discussed. It was concluded that, according to Vedanta, when a person gains this knowledge new primary organizing principle is established in the psyche, which expresses the non-dual identity between the individual jīva and Īśvara, “I am Īśvara.” The “I” in this statement represents the Self, which has been established as the true nature of the jīva.
This chapter concluded with a discussion of the healing impact on the human psyche that results from the establishment of the knowledge, “I am Īśvara.” The statement of identity with Īśvara was shown to have a powerful healing effect of healing the pain associated with the secondary core-belief, “I am separate” rooted in bondage. First, on the relative level, it was shown that when a person gains this knowledge, the jīva, including all aspects of the mind-body-sense-complex, is recognized as being an integral part of Īśvara’s creation. Based on the understanding of the creation as an interconnected whole that is governed by a objective intelligent order, it was affirmed that two secondary core-beliefs emerge in the psyche from the standpoint of the jīva, namely “I belong” and “I am in order.” A detailed account was given expanding on the specific healing effects that each of these essentially positive core-beliefs have on the psyche.

Second, on the absolute level, it was affirmed that based on the knowledge “I am Īśvara,” a non-dual identity between the Self and the creation as a whole is established. In effect, the secondary core-belief that was shown to arise in the psyche from the standpoint of the Self was affirmed as, “I am the whole.” The establishment of this identity in the psyche was shown to cultivate a feeling of intimacy and love with the creation as a whole, and all beings in the creation as they are recognized as being non-separate from the Self. In other words, according to Vedanta, a non-dual relationship was shown to be established between the individual and all beings, as they are recognized as being expressions of one, non-dual Self. Thus, the integration of the knowledge, “I am Īśvara,” on the absolute level was shown to address the suffering and pain associated with the
feelings of separation on a deeper and more profound level in the psyche, creating the feeling of non-separation with all that exists.

Based on this summary of the material presented in Chapter 5, the third tenet of Vedantic psychology affirms that there is a solution, or cure, that solves the basic human problem of suffering from the condition of bondage (saṃsāra); and second, that cure is the gaining of Self-knowledge, which removes the cause for the condition of bondage at its root and heals the psychological pain associated with it.

**Therapeutic means prescribed for healing.**

To complete the model of Vedantic psychology, the fourth tenet addresses the practical question: If gaining and assimilating Self-knowledge is the cure to the universal human problem of psychological suffering, then what are the therapeutic means and practices to be applied as a cure? It has been described throughout this work, that gaining Self-knowledge is looked at in Vedanta as a process that unfolds over a period of time and one that is intertwined with a person’s process of developing emotional maturity. The teachings of Advaita Vedanta prescribe certain means and practices (sādhanas) for developing emotional maturity and others for gaining Self-knowledge. It is fitting, therefore, to affirm all of the means here in one categorical basket as the general means prescribed in the tradition for healing the condition of bondage.

First, in chapter six, which defined emotional maturity according to Vedanta, three specific areas of practice were affirmed as the Vedantic means for developing emotional maturity. The first is cultivating practices that support the
development of a mature and healthy functioning buddhi, capable of relating to the thoughts in the mind objectively and performing the functions of discrimination and determination effectively. The second is cultivating a value for following sāmānya-dharma and developing a personal practice of bringing more awareness to choices that one makes as one navigates the field of experience. The third practice discussed in this chapter was the cultivation of specific attitudes and capacities of mind, outlined in the “fourfold qualifications” (sādhanacatuṣṭaya), which describe the mental-emotional disposition required to be a qualified student (adhikāri) to gain Self-knowledge. Thus, three specific areas of practice are affirmed here as the prescribed means for cultivating emotional maturity in Vedanta.

Chapters 2 and 5 both addressed the topic of the means of knowledge prescribed in Advaita Vedanta for gaining Self-knowledge. According to Vedanta, the primary means (pramāṇa) affirmed for gaining Self-knowledge is the practice of listening to the oral teaching (śravaṇam), which takes place in a classroom setting. The process whereby the qualified teacher unfolds the meaning of the verses was described in depth to show how words are used as a means of knowledge (śabda-pramāṇa) to impart Self-knowledge. In addition the practices of reflecting on what was said in the oral teaching (mananam), and meditative contemplation (nididhyāsana) were also affirmed as part of the threefold primary means for gaining knowledge according to Vedanta. The practice of cultivating a value for following dharma has already been affirmed above as one of the Vedantic means for developing emotional maturity, but it is
also important to note that this practice is so highly valued in Vedanta, that it is also considered to be the secondary means for gaining Self-knowledge. Thus, the Vedantic means prescribed for gaining Self-knowledge are affirmed here, as exposing oneself to the Vedantic teaching methodology using words as a means of knowledge (śabda-pramāṇa), and cultivating a practice of following dharma.

In sum, the fourth tenet of Vedantic Psychology to be affirmed here is that there are a specific set of practices prescribed in Advaita Vedanta, outlined above, which serve as the therapeutic means to solve the universal human problem, rooted in ignorance, and healing the mental-emotional suffering associated with it.

**Suggested Topics for Further Research**

As outlined in the four tenets above, this dissertation establishes a theoretical foundation for a system of psychology based upon the teaching of Advaita Vedanta. This research presents a body of knowledge, which opens the door for further research to be done in a number of areas. I have identified three research topics that would serve to further build on the knowledge base established in this work and benefit the related fields of study.

The first topic of further research would be to look at each of the three areas of human psychology that were mentioned in chapter six as the areas that need to be developed in order to gain emotional maturity in Advaita Vedanta: the ability to form a subject-object relationship with the various thought forms (vṛttis) in the mind, the capacity to discriminate (viveka) and apply one’s knowledge with conscious intention, and the ability to make choices that are in alignment with the basic moral order of dharma. Each of these areas of psychological development
could be considered as a separate topic. The research would explore Western psychological theories to find whether there are well-established therapeutic practices that have been proven effective in helping a person develop in that particular area of developing emotional maturity.

For example, the Vedantic concept of developing the capacity of the buddhi to form a subject-object relationship with the various thought forms (vṛttis) in the mind is similar to the idea in Western psychology of developing an “observing ego.” Therefore, the research in this area would include an examination of what various theories of Western Psychology suggest as therapeutic practices for developing the function of an “observing ego.” This understanding could then be applied to and enrich the Vedantic model.

Research of this nature would serve two important purposes. One would be to strengthen, support, and enrich the theoretical knowledge established in this study for Vedantic Psychology in an area where the teachings do not go into detail. The second, and more practical benefit would be to help a student of Vedanta develop a toolbox of practices for working with their mind in support of developing emotional maturity and gaining Self-knowledge.

The other two areas that I propose for further research are both projects that would be based on the theoretical implications established in this dissertation. One such project would be to create a theoretical model of human development, and human relationships, based on the theoretical tenets of Advaita psychology established in this work. Related to that, the final, and perhaps most important area of research I propose is to create a model of clinical application in a
therapeutic setting based on the theoretical principles established in this dissertation. Such a clinical application could be directed towards work with individuals, couples, families, as well as communities and organizations.

**Conclusion**

As stated in the introduction, the goal of this study was to present a theoretical model of human psychology based on the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. This concluding chapter has summarized the material put forth in the chapters and presented four tenets of a system of psychology based on the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. This completes the goal of this dissertation. The system of psychology outlined in the four tenets addresses the Vedantic understanding of individual identity and the root cause human suffering. Defining these key concepts and their association to the psychology of bondage (samsāra) and liberation (mokṣa) in Advaita Vedanta has been shown to be the heart of this psychological model.

This dissertation makes a significant contribution to the academic discourse in the fields of East-West Psychology and Western Psychology. Generally speaking it makes the essential teachings of Advaita Vedanta on bondage and liberation accessible for a Western contemporary audience. Specifically it introduces a model of human psychology that has profound spiritual implications, and affirms the identity of the human individual to be a non-dual Self. Both of these elements open the door for new theoretical perspectives to be considered, as well as new clinical applications.
In conclusion, it is important to note that there are many clinical implications for Western psychology embedded in this dissertation as well as implications for further theoretical research. Clinically, there are implications for how to work in a therapeutic setting with individuals, couples, and families. In addition there are theoretical implications embedded in this work for how to understand the nature of most interpersonal conflicts in all relationships, but specifically in intimate relationships. Finally, the theoretical principles of Vedantic Psychology put forth in this study, also have embedded implications for a developmental model of human psychology. Exploring these clinical and theoretical implications are beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, it is my sincere hope that scholars will see the rich possibilities for further developing the ideas established in this work. This research could go in many directions and potentially serve to establish a new paradigm of psychological healing that is spiritual in nature.
References


