

LIVING IN THE ABSOLUTE

[Studies in Viśiṣṭādwaita Philosophy]

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INTRODUCTION

Viśiṣṭādwaita, a system of thought, nourished and propelled by Śrī Rāmānuja and the other acāryās, is not just a bundle of concepts about the cosmos, worlds, beings and other related matters. It has a philosophy useful to the human for better understanding of his nature and his role in the total scheme of things. That 'human' is not a mere material being and the imbedded spirit is always within to guide him and encourage him take on the endless journey of human progression and perfection and that his conduct day after day opens before him the highest vistas of life is very often stressed in this system of philosophy.

Human is not the mere body which dies down after a period of living but there is an immortal principle within constantly endeavouring to express itself in its full glory and splendour. A total expression becomes possible and speedier when the basic concepts of the philosophy are understood in their entirety rather than in isolation to one or two aspects of their relationship. There is abundant literature available to us in this direction but much time and energy is often availed in the peripheral discussions than getting at the core of one's being. The 'life' can reveal to us in full only when the 'internal dialogue' is set aside not by suppression but after a very careful understanding of its purpose. The philosophical concepts gradually enter into one's subjectivity and then they are no longer insipid or abstract.

In the set of articles presented in this book an attempt is made to bring out the essential teachings of the Viśiṣṭādwaita philosophy in so far as they correspond to the human activity in general. This philosophy basically puts before the human the thought that this world is real as an expression of the supreme reality and that a great amount of human exertion is needed in realizing this fact. Arthapancaka (The Five Bases of Wisdom) a treatise given by Śrī Pilla Lokacarya (13th century A.D.) is taken as base to explain the various understandings to which an aspirant can naturally

arrive. Then the Code of conduct enunciated by Śrī Rāmānujācārya, traditionally known as 'the Eighty two aphorisms' is made use of to clearly bring out that the teachings of the great Acārya have various layers of meaning. It is when the verbal understanding is transformed into practical understanding that the real results of the pursuit ensue.

The teachings of any philosopher are an expressive part of the Eternal Wisdom and a correct, unsullied and relevant understanding is needed to appreciate the points of view. The reality of the world, the essential identity of human to the core of Reality, the working within of the entire cosmology is a matter of more rational appeal to the modern mind. The human has to work with his nature, the nature around him and attain the ultimate in such an incessant endeavour. This system of philosophy directly points out this possibility and assures that right effort necessarily leads to right results.

Nothing stated in the book is claimed to be original. A sincere effort is made to cull the 'facts' from various sources and to present them in a cohesive manner. In fact, there can be no original thought inasmuch as the human endeavour is only to pick the thoughts from the Cosmic/Universal or World-Mind and thus shape and reshape that. A right-related understanding of what is already stated is aimed at.

The Divine Principle being an inherent knower, right from the manifestation of the Universe there is Wisdom embodied therein. From the time the human assumed the role of a thinker, that Wisdom is gradually revealed to him, depending upon his earnestness, need, utility and possible progress. In the process, various philosophies were built, very many schools of thought were constructed. But to the misery of man, these numerous schools were played one against the other but not one as complementary to the other. The whole purpose of philosophy is to make the human life intelligible and enjoyable to all living beings. Philosophy, as a view of life, has stressed this aspect but alas, the human-beings have lost sight of it. They stand aside to the light and murmur that all around is darkness. An eager intellect and an unbiassed mind are the prerequisites for coming into grips with the meaning and purport of any philosophical statement.

Let us hope that the body of philosophical thought which make the life around us real and more real as we work with it grow from strength to strength.

Sarvadēsa Dasā Kalē Avyāhata Parākrama

Rāmānujārya Divyājñā Varthatām Abhi Vardhatām.

It is hoped that the matter presented in this book will be of assistance to those who are interested in knowing the rudiments of what is discussed above. Of course, there are books and books on the subject and the earnest reader has access to them all. The whole purpose of this presentation is to interest the common reader in a speculative philosophy which can also be practically oriented.

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23-11-1983

SECTION I

THE ESSENTIAL TEACHINGS

The Term

‘Viśiṣṭādwaita’ is a term employed to indicate the philosophical system enunciated by preceptors Nāthamuni, Yāmunācārya and Rāmānuja. Peculiarly enough this term does not appear ‘as such’ in any of the treatises considered to have been written by them.

Research has revealed that this term was first used by Sudar-sana Sūri in his works ‘Srutapradīpika’ and ‘Tātparyadīpika’ which were his commentaries upon ‘Śrī Bhāṣya’ and the ‘Vedār-thasaṃgraha’ respectively. He belonged to the 14th Century A.D. According to him this word denotes ‘the concept of oneness’ and is based on ‘the causal relation and the qualified thing is only one existing in two conditions’. It is further stated that the term gained its prominence in use in the second half of 16th Century and came to be considered as ‘a name of the school’ which professes the system of philosophy. (Vide: Antiquity of the Term, Viśiṣ-ṭādwaita by Dr. Varadachari)

The Meaning

The meaning of the term is explained in two ways:

- (i) non-duality or oneness of Brahman, a Reality with qualities; and
- (ii) the One which is Brahman also becomes the cause of the world; It is both subtle and gross.

In common parlance, Viśiṣṭādwaita is a philosophy of a ‘personal God’; who the same time is related to the ‘nature’ and ‘individual Souls’.

The Philosophy

The philosophy of Viśiṣṭādwaita was epitomized by one Śrī-nivāsādāsa in his 'Yatīndramatadīpikā' as below:

'The purport of the Vedānta is that the non-dual Brahman qualified by the sentient and the non-sentient, is the only Reality Nārāyaṇa, the Supreme Vāsudeva—known by the name of Viṣṇu, expressed by the term 'Brahman' and qualified by the sentient and the non-sentient is the only Reality; that this is the philosophy of the adherents of Viśiṣṭādwaita——' (Vide: Yatīndramatadīpikā: Dasamovātāra-St. 22) (Translation rendered by Swamī Ādidēvānanda).

Considering the above, it becomes difficult to refute the idea that the Ultimate Reality is supreme Divine Principle which has many attributes but is not confined to a particular 'name' and 'form' in the very limited sense of the terms. The impersonality of the personal God becomes visible as we study Him through the various attributes. It is more a 'Divine Justice' or 'Divine Law' than a person executing the Justice or the Law.

Two Branches

In fact, there are two branches of Viśiṣṭādwaita philosophy viz. (i) Śaiva and (ii) Vaiṣṇava. The first branch is taught by Śrīkaṇṭha Śivācārya and preaches the supremacy of Śiva while the second is taught by Rāmānuja, preaching the supremacy of Viṣṇu. As the word itself indicates Vaiṣṇavas are those who follow the teaching that the 'Viṣṇu' is the supreme of all deities. The prefix 'Śrī' is added to those who particularly follow the precepts of Rāmānuja.

Earlier Preceptors

Rāmānuja (1017-1137 AD) it is stated has formulated his system of philosophy after the earlier preceptors. A long list of the preceptors is as below:

Bhagavad Bodhāyana, a Rishi, whose commentary is known as 'Bodhāyana Vṛitti' in 100,000 grandhās on the Brahma-Sūtrās.

Dramidacārya, who also wrote a commentary on Brahma-Sūtrās known as Dramida-Bhāṣhya.

Tankācārya, (also known as Brahmanandī), who wrote a treatise on Brahma-Sūtrās known as 'Vartika'.

Guhadevācārya.

Acārya Bharuci, who wrote a treatise on 'Dharma Sāsthra' and commented upon Brahma-Sūtrās.

Acārya Kapardi, who wrote commentary on Brhma-Sūtrās and Apastamba Kalpa-sūtrās.

Nāthamuni, (824-924 AD) who wrote Nyāya Tatwa and Yoga Rahasya.

Yāmunācārya, (916-1041 AD) who wrote 'Siddhi Trayam' (embodying: Ātma Siddhi, Īśwara Siddhi, and Samvit Siddhi), Āgama Prāmānya and many treatises.

Parabrahman

The central teaching of the philosophy is that Parabrahman, the Supreme Spirit, is in reality the only 'ONE TRUTH' (Tatwa or Principle). It is eternal (Nitya), unconditioned reality (satya), eternal and infinite knowledge (Jñāna), infinite in point of the time and space (Ananta,) Omnipresent (Vibhu), Omniscient (Sarvajña) Omnipotent (Sarvaśakti).

It is the material cause (Upādāna kāraṇa), the instrumental cause (Ninitta Kāraṇa) as well as the auxiliary cause (Sahakāri Kāraṇa) of the Universe.

Other names given to this Parabrahman in the Vedās and sacred scriptures were:

Sat (Self-existent), Ātma (Spirit), Brahman (Great), Īśa or Īśwara (Lord), Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa (Dweller in the cosmos), Puruṣhōttama (Supreme Spirit), Vāsudēva.

Parabrahman, who is the 'upādāna Kāraṇa' of the manifested worlds can find no room in published speculations according to Madame H.P. Blavatsky in her 'The Secret Doctrine', since that ideal even is a misnomer, when applied to that of which no human reason even that of an adept (Mukta) can conceive (vide 'The Secret Doctrine', Vol. I. Pp. 55-56, 1972 Ed.). Brahmā is the cause of the potencies that are to be generated subsequently for the work of 'Creation'. On the subject of creation, the following excerpt from the same source will be self-explanatory:

'Viśiṣṭādwaita Vedānta, an orthodox and exoteric system yet fully enunciated and taught in the 11th century (its founder Rāmānujacārya, being born in A.D. 1017), at a time when European

"Science" still believed in the squareness and flatness of the earth, of Cosmas-Indicopleustes of the 6th Century. It teaches that before evolution began, Prakriti (Nature) was in a condition of laya or absolute homogeneity, as "matter exists in two conditions, the *sukshma* or latent and undifferentiated, and the *sthula* or differentiated condition." Then it becomes *anu*, atomic. It teaches of suddha satwa "a substance not subject to the qualities of matter, from which it is quite different", and adds that out of that substance the bodies of the inhabitants of Vaikuntaloka (the heaven of Viṣṇu) the gods, are formed. That every particle or atom of Prakṛiti contains Jīva (divine life), and is the śarira (body) of that Jīva which it contains, while every Jīva is in its turn the śarira of the Supreme Spirit, as "Parabrahm pervades every Jīva, as well as every particle of matter". Dualistic and anthropomorphic as may be the philosophy of the Viśiṣṭādwaita, when compared with that of the Advaita—the non-dualistic,—it is yet supremely higher in logic and philosophy than the cosmogony accepted by either Christianity, or its great opponent, modern science, (Vide *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, Pp. 522).

The Only Reality

Parabrahman, being the only Reality (tatwa), is the cause of the Universe or Worlds. It is knowable in the condition of manifestation but does not belong to the category of 'material' in the normal sense of the term.

While Parabrahman is the independent Reality, Chit (ātma) and Achit (Anātma) are the two dependent realities out of That. In fact these two are the qualities of the independent reality.

These three maintain an indissoluble union among themselves.

All seen and unseen worlds are rooted and located in this principle, Parabrahman. It is often stated that "We live, move and have our being in Him", that Divine Principle.

Facets Of The Divine Principle

Parabrahman, the Divine Principle has its own unique qualities. They are six in principle—

1. *Jñāna* (Wisdom, that is the centre of all Intelligence)

2. *Śakti*, (Potence of doing anything and everything)
3. *Bala* (Strength of containing everything in itself)
4. *Aiśvarya* (Power of having everything in an order)
5. *Virya* (Power by which it has no *Vikāras* or modifications although it is the material basis of the Universe)
6. *Tejas* (Power by which it is superior to everything)

There are certain other minor Guṇas, attributed to Parabrahman. They are:

Kṣamā (Forgiveness)—*Kṛpā* (Mercy)—*Vātsalyā* (Love)—*Śīla* (Purity)—

Ārjava (Straightforwardness)—*Souhārdam* (Goodness)

In essence all virtues belong to That.

The Parabrahman has no particular name because all names belongs to 'THAT'.

It has no shape, colour or form because it is omnipresent, infinite and all pervading. It can take upon itself by its own Will, any form or body which is finite and "of the colour of the Sun".

Forms Of Expression

The Parabrahman has five distinct forms or shapes of expression. It should be noted clearly that though the Parabrahman is One Absolute Principle that is also the guiding spirit for the emanation of the worlds and all other beings and the indicator of the way for the humans towards the supreme goal. In the context, the five forms enunciated hereunder are to be understood as the functions of that principle.

1. *Para*: The manifested Īśvara remains always in *Vaikunta Loka*. He is endowed with various ornaments and instruments. The various names of these ornaments and instruments (e.g., Śankha, Chakra) are emblematic of the divine qualities and the functional responsibilities. This is a form which is not just a form in the literal sense of the term but an all-total of the Universes and emanations emerging from the Parabrahman. This is the Divine Principle at its highest, as the term literally means.

2. *Vyuha*: This form is supposed to be situated in Satyaloka, again within "the Manifested World". The names and corresponding states of consciousness for the forms here are Sankarṣana,

Pradyumna and Aniruddha and Amoda, Bhuvana and Pramoda. These three forms are worshipped by the Upāsakās, who have attained “Mokṣa” when the Prakṛita-Pralaya has taken over the three Lokas. These are the planners and builders of the Universes and Worlds and assist the Divine Principle in working out or revealing in nature its own qualities.

3. *Vibhava*: This happens in the manifested world. The principle itself takes a form like Rama-Kṛiṣṇa among his beings to employ and instruct the humans and to set an example of conduct and behaviour. The moral and social virtues needed for the humans are expressed in flesh and blood. These manifestations are remembered by humanity through ages as Avatārās and leave a distinct imprint upon the human heart.

This is also idolized with all aesthetic spirit so that the image is as well physically retained and enjoyed. This body naturally dovetails into the next in sequence.

4. *Arca*: This is an invisible body of subtle and intellectual nature, which is made to enter into the “idols” by certain rituals, forces of concentration and Mantrās. This form is specially provided to the world to enable the humans constantly remember their allegiance and loyalty to the “invisible Divine Principle”. The sanctity of the “Idol” is to be maintained by periodical worship and similar rituals, otherwise it becomes “polluted” or “impure” and the subtle nature of the principle gets lost. The purpose of the “idol” is to enable people rise up their thoughts to the “idea” or the “Divine Principle”.

5. *Antaryami*: This is a kind of sheath indwelling in the human material body, rather in a subtle form and in general terms known as the “Divine in human” or “Īśvarāmsa within the person”. When the aspirants meditate on the Divine Principle Absolute, at the earlier stages of “Sva-Svarūpa Jñāna”, they get in touch with this subtle body. This is a definite beginning of the real spiritual life.

This body also indicates “the fundamental identity of all souls (Ātmās) with the Universal Over-Soul (Paramātma) and the obligatory pilgrimage for every soul—a spark of the oversoul—through the cycle of incarnation in accordance with cyclic

and Karmic Law, during the whole term. (Vide H. P. B’s third fundamental proposition in *The Secret Doctrine*)

Īśvara, the embodiment of the Divine Principle, is infinite. We have seen from the above that He finites Himself at various levels in the bodies. When a term “material” is used, it cannot be supposed to be just the physical matter. The Matter is the whole essence of the Nature (Prakṛiti) with all its subtleties and fineness. The bodies of the Divine Principle, the Absolute, are of material far superior and in no way comparable to this “nature”. The Principle being self-luminous; the bodies are also, as they are the expression of the very Being, equally self-luminous, endowed with all spiritual Intelligence (Adhyātma Prajñā). Not only the positive aspect but the opposing polarity or the negative aspect, named Śrī Laxmi, in the Philosophy of Viśiṣṭādwaita, forms invariably an integral part of the manifested bodies at all levels. Thus the finite bodies are part of the “total infinity”, the major content being that of Akāśic Akasa tatwa.

The Guṇas of Nature

Parabrahman is not subject to the Guṇas of Prakṛiti, which are three in number viz. Sattva, Rajas, Tamas; and therefore it is stated to be “Nirguṇa”. He has no material limitations, vices, pettinesses or imperfections.

The Prakṛiti (normally termed as Acit) has three Guṇas, viz., Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The Divine Principle is not touched or effected by any of the Guṇas belonging to Prakṛiti. The “Sattva” appearing in the three Guṇas of Prakṛiti is far lower to the “Sattva” attributed to Parabrahman which is very often distinctly mentioned as “Suddha Sattva” or Pure and Prestine Sattvic matter. Thus the bodies of the Parabrahman discussed above are not the resultant forms of interaction of the constituents in Nature. They are composed of Suddha Sattva or a peculiar intelligential substance. The bodies are put on to facilitate the contemplation of sages and aspirants at various levels. The body attains subtlety (Sukṣmata) depending upon the nature of comprehension of the aspirant.

By the interaction of the manifested Īśvara upon the “nature”, Intelligence (Mahat) and egotism (Ahamkāra) are produced. The

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Intelligence and Egotism again are classifiable into three groups based on the three qualities of nature, Sattvik, Rajasic, Tamasic. Sattvik egotism produces the Mind (Manas), the five Jñānendriyas and the five Karmendriyas.

The Tāmasik Ahamkara produces the five Tan-matras: Sabda, Sparśa, Rūpa, Rasa and Gandha. (Sound, Touch, Form, Taste and Fragrance)

The Rājasika Ahamkara helps the above two types, and by the very Will of Īśvara, to produce everything in the World.

Individual Souls

The individual Souls, the chit or Jivās are divided into three categories viz., Nityās, Muktās and Baddhās. Mokṣa is the Paramapuruṣārtha (Supreme pursuit of life) for the individual souls. It is a state of consciousness, though very often ascribed to be a plane of nature in the Worlds. It is severally known as Paramapada or Vaikuntaloka. As is already mentioned, the planes of this nature are not material but are composed of the 'Suddha Sattwa'. It is beyond the ken of all material worlds.

Once the Jiva separates himself consciously with the matter of the material worlds and transcends the influence of the actions (Karma) and the results consequently generated, both Good and Bad; that state is commonly termed as "Mokṣa". This is again two fold; one being Kaivalya where the Jiva enjoys himself in the pristine purity or supreme bliss of consciousness and the other is "Brahmānanda" or Sāyujya, where the being enjoys the supreme bliss as Parabrahman Himself.

It is not possible for the Jiva to become absolutely one with Parabrahman on attaining Mokṣa. Whether this is possible at all at any stage or not is a matter of philosophical speculation. A lot of time and energy is spent by scholars in debating this point. But the exercise may not yield commensurate results and instead it will be beneficial to the beings for their further progress if they know at the early stages more about the kind of right living to be adopted in the material worlds. Living at the higher realms is a factor dependant upon the subjective quality one improves within and speculation alone will not be useful.

Jivās once they attain the stature of "Muktas" do not

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however revert to the lower position of "Baddhās". They are no longer bound by the normal limitation of time, space and carry on further spiritual contemplation to attain the goal in the enjoyment of Bliss.

"But if they choose, for the sake of doing good to the world, they may incarnate on Earth". These voluntary reincarnations are referred to in various systems of philosophy. The Doctrine as Nirmānakāyas (the surviving spiritual principle of human) is referred to by Madame HPB in her *The Secret Doctrine*.

Means For Liberation

Means for attaining liberation (Mokṣa) are principally stated to be five in number:

The Path of Action: Karma Yoga which is inclusive of Japa, Homa, Yagna, Dana, Tapas.

The Path of Wisdom: Jñana Yoga which is inclusive of Yama, Niyama etc.

The Path of Devotion: Bhakti yoga which is inclusive of Upāsana, the steps of which are Vivēka, Vimōka, Abhyāsa, Kriyā, Anavasādā, Anuddharṣā.

The Upāsana is broadly divisible into two categories:- Pratīka and Apratīka (With the Form and Formless)

The Path of Surrender: Prapatti Yoga: which is casting off all the other means of Mokṣa and contemplation on . . .

- (i) One's own inability to practice any of the three others and
- (ii) Īśvara with all its attributes and qualities as the sole redeemer.

The Path Of The Grace: Acāryābhimāna: which is either resort to mediator by the aspirant for liberation or resort to be saved by the mediator himself from His own choice.

The position of Acārya in this system of philosophy is unique. He is loved, admired and also adored by the Lord Himself. He has all the qualities of the Divine Principle in him with no shade of egotism (Ahamkāra).

It may be seen that to popular paths are added the specific points of Viśiṣṭādwaita. Later exponents have therefore stressed that Prapatti and Acāryābhimāna are alone the means for salvation, as though the other three are not needed at all. It may perhaps be

noted here that both intellectual and intuitional understanding is essential for a "Wholistic" comprehension of the subjective and objective natures of things in and around us.

Viśiṣṭādwaita is a philosophical system clearly explaining the schemes of evolution of the worlds upto the lowest speck in the manifestation. Considering the religious aspects alone and ignoring the philosophical concepts will not reveal to us the total spectrum. In fact in the East, the philosophy and religion are so inseparably mixed up and the difficulty in finding the grain from the chaff is very often experienced. Though both are interrelated, a clear understanding is possible when they are studied and viewed separately. The "orthodoxies" and "cults" taking over and clouding the nascent principles of religion and philosophy respectively is another danger we see around in the world.

This philosophy specifically deals with the nature of the Brahman, its relationship with the Beings and the Matter, where they can be studied together and where the lines of distinction can be drawn. It gives the rightful place for everything in the manifestation. Moreso the human potential is explicitly pointed.

Śrī Ramanuja's definition of the term "Brahman" is as below:-

"By the word *Brahman* is denoted the Highest Person who is, by nature, devoid of all evils and is possessed of a host of auspicious qualities, which are innumerable and unsurpassable in excellence. For, everywhere in the contexts the word *Brahman* is seen to have been derived from the association of *brhattva* (greatness) and whatever greatness is, by nature as well as by qualities, unsurpassable in excellence, that is its primary and natural meaning. And He, who possesses such greatness, is alone the Lord of all. Hence the word *Brahman* is primarily used to signify Him alone. In cases where, on account of the association of a modicum of that quality, other things than the Lord are meant by the word *Brahman*, it must have been used in a secondary sense; because it is improper to postulate a variety of meanings for it, as it is improper in the case also of the word, *bhagavat*. He is the supreme self known as Nārāyaṇa whose abode is 'Srivaikunta and whose consort is 'Śrī or Mahalakshmi'.

(Vide Sri M.B. Narasimha Ayyangar's "Introduction" to the book "Vedantasara of Bhagavad Ramanuja")

Cosmology:

It is equally important to know the theories about the origin and nature of the universe. As indicated earlier, the Divine Principle—Parabrahman—is the material cause (Upādāna Karana) of the manifested Worlds, as also the instrumental and auxiliary causes (Nimitta and Sahakāri). The entire position of Cosmology is explained in terms of 'Śarīra-Śarīri relationship'. The Divine Principle is the śarīri and the śarīra is the Universe or the Worlds. The relationship is inseparable. The Cit and Acit being eternally real, in the State of emanation (Sriti), one becomes the many and the non-differentiated becomes differentiated. By knowing the one, all else is known.

Nature (Prakriti) exists for "consciousness" and not in consciousness. In the state of creation it energises and evolves into Mind (Mahat) and Ahamkāra (I-ness). Mind becomes the co-ordinator of the human activities and functions as the principle for Desire and the principle for Higher Intelligence.

The Divine Principle in gradation enters into Nature (Prakriti) and produces all beings, the Higher Intelligences, Lesser intelligences, human-beings and sub-human elementals. Each of these Jīvās is eternal and persists independantly in its own nature even in the State of "Pralaya". In the state of Sṛṣṭi it is, of course, the "inner ruler immortal".

Each new Sṛṣṭi is a repetition of the earlier order, of course at a higher level. The cyclic spiral evolution carries on till the peak is touched. Thus Pralaya and Sṛṣṭi cause the enfolding and unfolding of the total process.

The imperfections in life are because of the moral freedom of the self. These cannot be traced in the original source i.e. the Divine Principle. The workings of the humans in the lower nature bring all the misery and therefore the need for understanding the right kind of Living and the purpose of Life.

Service

Kainkarya for Service is one of the key notes in the Viśiṣṭādwaitic thought. Human it is said, has to live performing 'Kainkarya' perpetually. Bhagavad Kainkarya and Bhāgavata Kainkarya are two distinct types of services ordained to man. Bhagavad

Kainkarya (Service to God) does not merely mean reciting His name and glory but acting in His name for the glory of the entire Universe.

Service is threefold: Physical, emotional and mental. One has to attain the purpose of life (Puruṣārtha) by rendering this service. Bhāgavatha Kainkarya (Service to those belonging to God) is of superior stature to Bhagavad Kainkarya. The entire Universe and all creation belongs to God. Service to all the sentient and insentient beings is expected of the souls.

God has six divine qualities; Jñāna, Bala, Aiswarya, Vīrya, Śakti and Tejas. Attempting to acquire any of these will enable man to improve the divine quality within himself. It is each one's sacred duty to do this as his service to humanity at large.

Divinity is ascribed as 'Personal God' and it is possible to have spiritual communion with Him. The means are 'Bhakti' (devotion) and 'Prapatti' (total surrender). Spiritual realization is not complete without the practical striving which is achieved through service. The spirit of 'Prapatti' can be developed as a result of self-discipline, austerity, purification, culture of social and moral virtues and service to the beloved manifestation of God.

According to Śrī Rāmānuja action performed in the right spirit leads one to 'wisdom' and thenceforth to 'devotion to Lord'. His dictates to disciples includes the following:

'Let not the performance of your duties be regarded as a means for achieving worldly ends, but consider it as service rendered to the Supreme Being'.

The essential nature of souls is Immortality. The immortal true nature in human is sheathed by various layers of temporal character for his working in the relatively unreal fields. This immortal nature is to be understood, excavated and realised in a subjective manner. Service is the path by which this can be done best. Service makes the temporal nature of man subservient to the immortal nature.

Each act, be it a word spoken to another, a thought sent outward or an act performed through the instrumentality of organs, is an offering to God. So any such act set out has first to be purified and sanctified if it has to produce the right result. That is why the stress that every spoken word has to be

true and kind. Any ugly thought which is not expressible has no place even in the mind. It is not sufficient if one's physical actions are brought under control. His emotional and psychological nature should also be brought into strict harmony with the right attitudes. Being in perfect harmony with everything around is one of the basic attitudes needed for service. We have no right to pollute the atmosphere with ugly and extraneous thoughts or feelings. This becomes possible when we are conscious of the presence of Divinity within and around us.

God is the soul of all souls being the central reality of soul and matter. Thus nothing is without Him. This is fundamental to the idea that anything done to any being, sentient or insentient reaches Him. Serving God is serving His manifestation. 'Nara Seva (Service to man) is Nārāyaṇa Seva (Service to God)' is a popular dictum in all schools of thought.

It need not only be Service to humanity (Nara Seva) but any service rendered in utmost humility and perfect unselfishness to anything in creation is done unto Him.

We have to be consciously aware of the presence of God and live in that awareness. Then life becomes a sacrament fulfilling its right work and achieving the "Paramapurushartha".

In his daily Sankalpa, a Viśiṣṭādwaitin repeats the words: "Śrī Bhagavadajnaya-Bhagavadkainkarya Rūpum, Śrīmannārāyaṇa preeetyartham" meaning "In obedience to the dictates of Divinity, in the form of service to Divinity and for the adoration of Śrīmannārāyaṇa, the Supreme Self, I am offering this daily worship" This is the true spirit of service.

Every minute action in life is consecrated to the glory of God and to the perfection of Humanity. The entire attitude of a Bhāgavat towards life is that he should be of maximum service to the maximum numbers. The sacred Ashtākṣari of a Vaishnavite means "All is dedicated for the Glory of Nārāyaṇa".

Service (Kainkarya) is God-oriented as all life is God-inspired. For a Viśiṣṭādwaitin the world is equally real and is not to be ignored or neglected. Performance of right action in this world leads one to higher states of consciousness. Worldly life is to be carried out in a normal and natural way, without any mental reservation or equivocation.

Kainkaryarati (the enjoyment of the Bliss of service) is spoken of by many saints. Men find highest pleasure and joy in rendering due services to all beings. Doing Nitya-Kainkarya (one's day-to-day service) itself is defined as Mukti or liberation.

Universality

That the Universality of the Principle (Sarva-Vyāpti) is the primary factor to be propagated through this philosophy is obvious. The Universe 'without the Divine Principle is analogous to matter without energy'. Laying stress upon the concept of 'Oneness of Life' human beings have to conduct themselves so that they do not fall apart from the source, the Divine Principle, but tend to express it in its totality.

Many of these philosophical bases are now being established firmly, also by the scientific discoveries. The terms such as 'Space Time continuum' and 'Force-field' may be remembered here. This is mentioned not to draw an authority for one thing from the other but only to show that human inquiry into the nature of the 'Ultimate Reality' can be more purposeful and meaningful when a wholistic approach is adopted rather than a fragmentary look or view.

In the words of Sriman P.N. Srinivasachariar, "Viśiṣṭādwaita is the perception of the one in many and makes for social solidarity and religious toleration. It insists not only on the brotherhood of man, but also on the quality of all Jīvas, sub-human, human and celestial, and delights in spiritual service".
(vide His article on 'Visistadwaita-Religion and Philosophy')

SECTION II

THE FIVE BASES FOR WISDOM

The human-being is a unit of consciousness, and is invariably a part of the Absolute, the Divine Principle. This 'unit of consciousness' when aspiring to reveal to himself the whole secrets of the mysterious Universe and the causeless-cause for that starts at a level first understanding the philosophical concepts verbally. For him to attain the spiritual rejuvenation, Śrī Pilla Lōkācārya says, the knowledge or the revelation of the five bases of Wisdom (Artha-Pancaka) is needed.

Śrī Pilla Lōkācārya

Śrī Pilla Lōkācārya, (Born 1213 A.D.) was an exponent of Viśiṣṭādwaita philosophy and gave many treatises of which the Aṣṭādasa-Rahasyās (Eighteen Esoteric Teachings) are considered supreme. These text were named as under:

Mumukshupadi
Tattwatrayam
Śrī Vachanabhūṣaṇam
Artha Panchakam
Archiradi
Pramēyasēkharam
Prapanna Pārijatām
Sāra-Sangraham
Samsāra-Sāmrājyam
Navaratanamāla
Navavidha Sambandham
Yadricchikappadi
Parandapadi
Sriyahpati padi

Tattwa Śekharam

Tanidwayam

Tanicharamam and Tani Praṇavam

These very elaborately consider the various aspects of the philosophy and bring to the less learned commonfolk the pregnant concepts and their applicability in day to day living.

Artha Pancakam

The fourth text in the series is 'Artha Pancakam' wherein the Acārya deals with the preliminary knowledge needed for the aspirants to liberation. The aspirant is involved in the world and its whirl-pools. To be able to get over these, the manner and structure of this world and that world aspired to be entered into is evidently necessary. The aspirant should cross the threshold and enter the stream, to use a popular phrase. This need not be a physical journey, in other words a travel in Space, but is essentially a change or transformation in the State of consciousness of the particular being. The unit of consciousness, the real man who has now turned to be an aspirant, has for long put on various cloaks or vehicles for his expression in the world and in the course of their usage, the vehicles also have attained a consciousness of their own besides the egotism of the being. All these seemingly separate consciousnesses must be rinsed in the total stream of consciousness and made to be in perfect harmony with that. To be able to do this, the knowing of the process is one thing and the knowing of why all this has to be done is another thing. An inquiry into this why and how is essentially dealt with in the present treatise 'Artha Pancakam' (The Five Bases for Wisdom).

It may be remembered here that 'Artha' is the second cannon, according to the human pursuits laid down by Manu in his Dharma Śāstra viz. Dharma, Artha, Kāma, Mokṣa. Artha in general means 'profit, riches, worldly means and possessions'. According to Bābū Bhagavān Dās (in his 'The Science of Social Organisation—Vol. I), while the basis is no doubt the material vehicle with its sensor and motor organs, the form has become intermixed and refined with infinite mental moods, thoughts and emotions, and also the influence of the nearing current of 'refinement' and the gradual dawning of the Universal-Self within the individual.

The Five Fold Division

The five possessions, the knowledge of which is needed, are:-

Nature of the Soul—Ātma Svarūpa

Nature of the Over-Soul—Paramātmā Svarūpa

Nature of the human pursuit—Puruṣārtha svarūpa

Nature of the means—Upāya svarūpa

Nature of the obstacles—Viródhī svarūpa

One should know about himself, his material and subtle bodies (Soul), about the Universal Over-Soul (Paramātmā), about the varied pursuits of human-beings, about the means for attaining the above, last but not the least the obstacles for such means of knowing the total nature of things.

'Man-Know Thyself' is an axiom, very often quoted and attributed to the Greek philosophers, but now becoming a common current of all inquirers.

Knowing oneself is not just knowing the physical anatomy of the body or its electro-chemical composition. It is knowing the whole structure of one's being, more and more about the 'Real Man' or the 'Divine Man' encased in the flesh and blood.

The Beings or Souls

The Beings are stated to be five fold:-

The Free —Nityās

The Freed —Muktās

The Bonded —Baddhās

The Isolate —Kevalās

The would be Free —Mumukṣūs

1. The Free (Nityās) do not have affiliation or affliction of the 'Worldly life'. They are not involved in the material and manifested world (saṃsāra) even for a minute. Being embodiments of the Pure and pristine matter, ever accessible to the grace of Bhagavad-anubhava (the enjoyment of the Supreme-Bliss in Paramapada, a state of supreme consciousness) they appear to be the Lords of that high-land. They are ever-ready to obey the dictates of the Divine Principle, assisting in the three pronged functions relevant to the worlds viz., the manifestation or emanation, the preservice or administration and the distinction or deforming for regeneration. They are capable of descending to the lower

states of consciousness, if need be, such as Builders and Prophets (Vyūha, Vibhava) etc. They take on the forms of Arca-avatārās in the temples and bring the sanctity of the supreme Lord of Bliss to the complex and restricted land of physical matter. They are ever-ready to take up any sort of work (Kaikarya) which fulfils the working of the Divine Plan.

2. The Free (Muktās) are those beings who were liberated from the impurities and afflictions incidental to the involvement in the worldly life and nature. Having enjoyed the bliss of the Divine Principle in its full texture, form, attribute and manifestation, they keep on singing joyfully from their heart, all their devotion to the Lord.

The Free (Nitya) and the freed (Mukta) enjoy a supreme position in the total scheme of things and their state of consciousness is not perceivable or comprehensible objectively. Madame H.P. Blavatsky in her work 'The Secret Doctrine' says:

"There are worlds, of course, in the esoteric as well as in the profane scientific Teachings, at such an incalculable distances that the light of the nearest of them which has just reached our modern chaldees, had left its luminary long before the day on which the words 'Let there be Light' were pronounced; but these are no worlds on the Devaloka Plane, but in Our KOSMOS—
Even in the most tenaciously anthropomorphic vedanta sect of the Viśiṣṭādwaita, one finds that: After reaching Mokṣa (a state of bliss meaning 'release from Bondage, or Bandha'), bliss enjoyed by it in a place called *Paramapada*, which place is not material, but made of *Suddasatwa* (the essence of which the body of *Īśwara*—the Lord—is formed). There, Muktās or Jivātmas (Monads) who have attained Mokṣa, are never again subject to the qualities of either matter or Karma. "But if they choose, *for the sake of doing good to the world*, they may incarnate on Earth. The way to *Paramapada*, or the immaterial worlds, from this world, is called 'Devayana'.

—————They are entities of the higher worlds in the hierarchy of Being, so immeasurable/high that, to us, they must appear as Gods, and collectively God.

—————Science cannot deny point blank the possibility of there being worlds within world, under totally different conditions of

those that constitute the nature of our world; nor can it deny that there may be a certain limited communications between some of these worlds and our own—."

As said earlier, the Muktās cross the barriers of this world present through the enjoyment of Bhagavad-svarūpa-rūpa-guṇa-vibhava and enter that region and remain there as seers or saints.

3. The Bonded (Baddhās) are those who are tied down to the worldly possessions and positions. They have a body constituted of the five elements: earth, water, air, fire and akāśa, which gets decomposed in course of time. That body is an instrument for them to enjoy the pleasure and pain of the material life. It is not capable of perceiving or contemplating the analysis of the self and Non-self. It is also the cause for certain misconceptions. It presupposes itself (the material body) as the self, but it is full of ignorance, misconception and super-indulgence. It contemplates that taking good care of the material body, which is the repository of the five senses, is the worth while pursuit of the life. It makes one devoid of all social and moral virtues, get round the unworthy, commit harm to other beings by taking away their life, greedily grab the possessions and properties of others and thus works for the total involvement in the mundane-life only. The physical or material property alone becomes life's pursuit here. The body clouds the vision or contemplation of the human and shuts it away from the attributes of the Divine Principle. Thus in the form of a bonded person the unit of consciousness is totally blind, ignorant and lacks the desire to 'work for the virtue for virtue's sake'.

4. The Isolates (Kévalās) are those who are alone, having abandoned the great thirst and hunger for human passions, gained the needed discrimination and transcended themselves beyond their material body. The mundane fires do not bother them. They do possess the kind of knowledge that extinguishes the *samsāric* (mundane) thirst and hunger, are awake on the right path of virtue. They have definite knowledge that the material body is composed of the 24 elements and the Real Man is the 25th element and know that this 'real man' the Ātma, is eternal, self-luminous, ever-pleasant, devoid of all mean properties of the nature and by virtue of this knowledge and the past experience of pain and suffering in the world, want to attune themselves to the

Ātma, the pure essence ultimate. Immersed in Jñāna Yoga and the resultant experience in the realm of the spirit (Ātmānubhava), deep contemplation in the experience of the supreme Bliss (Bhagavadanubhava) they live only in the realm of the spirit (Ātma) and are not possessed by the material body.

The experiencing of the soul in the region of the spirit (Ātmānubhava) has to be explained a bit here. This state is also a kind of Mokṣa (Release from bondage) inasmuch as it is the release from, or cessation of, sorrow, or in other words becoming free from the influence of the wheel of births and deaths and the regaining of the original state of pristine purity. It is a sort of life not confined to any objective influence but totally in a pure psychic state, yet not divine, isolated there, alone in his own involvement. This state is also called the 'Kaivalya'.

Bhagavad-Anubhava is true liberation (MOKṢA). It is release followed by supreme Bliss. A total effacement or remission of all effects of deed takes place. This is identical in a way to the mutation of the body. Traditionally it is said that the souls at this point plunge into sacred waters and are conducted to His presence after crossing the *Virajā* river. This is symbolic of crossing the 'stream of life and death' and entering into the grand stream of life. 'His Presence' is again the concretization of the abstract thought of 'Supreme Bliss, the highest state of serenity'.

The Isolates study the science of the soul in themselves and try to assimilate the teachings they have already accumulated.

5. The would-be-free (Mumukṣūs) are the aspirants for liberation. They are divided into two classes. One of them are absorbed in Bhavad-upāsana, and the other in 'prapatti Upāsana'. In other words, those who contemplate on the God-hood and those, surrendered in total to that Supreme, performing all acts as service (Kainkarya) to Him. They are also called Bhakti-Niṣṭās and Prapatti Niṣṭās (deep rooted in devotion and surrender respectively).

Mutual Relationship

Thus we see that intelligences, separated from the one consciousness either materially or psychically are broadly categorised into these five groups. What distinguishes them, obviously, is

their approach towards the real and the appearance. It must be remembered here that a knowledge that what appears to 'be' is fleeting and what does not immediately appear can also be in existence—is the beginning of philosophical or spiritual enlightenment. In other words, a belief in the unseen is the initial step in approaching the Reality.

While the bonded are deep rooted in material belongings, the would-be free aspirants (Mumukṣūs) are longing to plunge into that state of consciousness which is endless, eternal and all-knowing. The human starts with a verbal understanding of the nature of things in respect of himself and his surroundings and gradually transforms this into practical understanding.

The all-knowing consciousness is available in all living beings. But to know that it is available is a preliminary stage and, perhaps, that is the level of human understanding. Then, locating the centre of consciousness in himself and trying to expand it or deepen it in an effort to touch the whole-consciousness is done as one understands the phenomenon and realizes the immediacy for such action. It is like raising the levels of understanding or consciousness to heights and dying down to all that which hurdles the pathway. This shall be examined further as we deal with the 'obstacles' in due course.

The Free-Freed-Isolate—are far beyond the ordinary folk of the world. While the would-be free (Mumukṣūs) are on the path of realization, it is the lot of the bonded that need the greatest attention of the Spiritual Guides and Teachers.

We shall see the modesty in the system of philosophy when all are put together as basics to be known as the nature of the self (soul). By their very nature and spirit, all the intelligences (souls) are one and there is, of course, difference in degree as to their states of realization. It is the effort of the individuals that leads them to the grace needed or blessing deemed for higher realization.

The over soul or Paramātma

Having examined the categorization among the individual souls, Śrī Pilla Lokacārya now moves on to the second section which deals with the nature of the over-soul, Paramātma swarūpa.

The Paramātma swarūpa is otherwise called the Īśvara Swarūpa or the nature of the manifested God. This is again classified and studied under five modes.

1. Paratwa (Absolute)
2. Vyūha (Planner)
3. Vibhava (Guide)
4. Antaryāmitwa (Inner Ruler) and
5. Arcāvatāra (Idol)

What is imparted in this section is that the Paramātma, the Universal Over-Soul, the manifested portion of the Divine Principle assumes five forms. The assumption of the form itself is for the benefit of aspirants so that they can concentrate and meditate upon that with lesser difficulty. That the manifested Īśvara can be approached by the aspirants through any or all of these forms is implied here. The emanation of the Worlds, Lókās, the planes of nature, forms in which life is entered into (His life is injected); the guidance afforded to the human kind from time to time—which in itself is of continuous process—and the various and numerous forms themselves are the reflections of the Universal Over Soul is explicitly brought out here.

1. Parā

The Paratwa with reference to Īśvara is the self-Luminous position of Vāsudéva. He is seated in Paramapada; does not talk to any or respond to casual manners. Paramapada, as was explained elsewhere, is a state of consciousness. It is not a place geographically located. The entire state is filled with the Supreme-pure-prestine-Sattwic nature (which is again not the nature endowed with three Gunas). It is far beyond this. When it is said that the Lord does not respond to casual manners, does not talk etc., it is indicated that at this stage He is not communicable. That highest subjective realm is one which the human with his limitations and senses cannot by any chance or grace, enter into.

2. Planner

Designer Or Architect (Vyūha) is that aspect of the Īśvara where the planning and building of worlds is contemplated. In this plane of nature, he is assisted by many overseers, assistants and

helpers. He supplies the design for the emanation of the universes, gives out the detailed plans of architecture and entrusts the further work of 'building' to them.

He is the Great Architect of the Universes. He supervises the building activity through his power of Divine Ideation, though keeping away from the day to day working. The planning here includes the creation through evolution-emanation-emergence; the sustenance by protecting the virtue and diminishing the evil; and the destruction for regeneration when the forms outlive their purpose and cannot successfully express the 'energy' or 'Life-force' which was revealing more and more in sequence to the various operations. The central point here is that the entire universe is filled with his 'Life' or 'Energy'. In the course of emanation, he first prepares the field, then evolves the forms and later fills them with specialized life which is again Himself. The inseparable combination of life and form or energy and matter is the canon. The energy expresses itself through the forms.

Forms are composed and whatever is composed must one day get decomposed. Life is not composed of any external factors; it is self-emanating/eternal force. This force searches for the forms through which it can express itself better and best. Thus the forms when they become incapacitated, for various reasons which we do not propose to discuss here, get broken releasing out the life-force and giving choice for emergence of yet another definite form.

The principal officers assisting the work at this level are variously named. They are hosts of Intelligences. The three group-names given to them are:

Samkarṣaṇa—Pradyumna—Aniruddha

These names are suggestive of their functions and responsibilities. If we examine the etymological meanings of the terms, their purpose becomes further clear.

Samkarṣaṇa emanates from Vāsudeva; Pradyumna comes out of Samkarṣaṇa and Aniruddha from Pradyumna. This can be likened to 'one flame proceeding from another flame'.

We can also see how the attributes of the Divine Principle are shared by the three in execution.

Vāsudeva who has all the six attributes asunders Himself into three parts called the Vyuhās as below:

Samkarṣaṇa possesses Knowledge and Strength (Jñāna and Bala)

Pradyumna possesses Lordship and Virility (Īśwara and Virya)

Aniruddha possesses Potency and Splendour (Sakti and Tējas)

Functionally they carry out:

Samkarṣaṇa: destruction of the universe and propounding the Scriptures.

Pradyuma : Creating universe and introducing the Dharmās.

Aniruddha : protecting the creation and expressing the principles (Tattva).

The principal officers again are assisted by sublords like Keśava-Nārāyaṇa - Mādhava - Govinda - Viṣṇu - Madhusūdana - Trivikrama - Vāmana - Śrīdhara. They are the presiding deities for various operations in the universe.

Each plan and design (Vyūha) is through the emanation of the highest Divine Principle, dominated by the two characteristics and performs the cosmic and ethical functions as well. It is also stated that the three principal deities are the force through which living beings (humans) derive the Jīva (soul), Manas (Mind) and Ahaṁkāra (Egotism).

The whole work of building, which includes manifestation, perseverance and destruction for regeneration, is very carefully performed by the Higher Intelligences, who are named only for purposes of our understanding and comprehension. The scheme of evolution is guided from within inasmuch as the forces or intelligences arrive out of the principle deity and take charge of a particular function.

The descent of the Divine Principle into lower manifestation is evidently and explicitly made out and this further enhances our understanding the statement 'We live, move and have our being in Him, the Absolute.'

We have a great deal of anthropomorphism in this system of philosophy but the purpose for such configuration must be well understood. Extreme care is to be taken to see that there are no mental fixations as to the forms and their structures. Personification is not just a 'figure of speech' in the language and literature. It has crystallised the human mind to a very large extent that

today we are unable to grasp anything in its pure abstract nature and therefore tend to picturize, almost in a vulgar fashion.

3. Now, the multified form or Guide (Vibhava) is explained. 'Vibhava' etymologically is the term to express the all-pervasiveness (sarvavyāptitva) of the Divine Principle.

This all-pervasiveness is considered to be three fold:

(i) Essential nature (ii) Attributive consciousness (iii) Body.

Vibhava is the emanation of beings like Rāma, Kṛṣṇa among the humans to teach them the higher values of life, ethics and supreme truths. The teaching is, from the beginning not through mere 'precept' but by 'practice' also.

What are generally called the Avatārās of the Lord are the 'vibhavas'. The Ten Avatārās: Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Nārasimha, Vāmana, Parasurāma, Rāma, Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa and Kalki are traditionally mentioned. Besides these there are certain minor avatārās, such as Padmanābha etc.

Without getting caught up in anthropomorphic ideas, if we examine the purpose and function of the Avatārās it can be clearly seen that they indicate definite stages in the course of evolution of life upon earth.

Here one point requires elucidation. The coming down or descent of Divine Principle into these forms is not because of any *kārmic* influences but because it is the WILL (Itacha) to preserve and progress the life-waves in manifestation. The protection of the virtuous and the destruction of the vicious is the inherent action of the Divine Principle and is not extraneous to the nature of things.

What H.P. Blavatsky said about Avatārās may perhaps be relevant here:

"What is an Avatara?—for the term before being used ought to be well understood. It is a descent of the manifested Deity-in-to an illusive form, of individuality an appearance which to men on this illusive plane is objective, but is not so in sober fact. That illusive form, having neither past or future, because it had neither previous incarnation nor will have subsequent rebirth has naught to do with Karma, which has therefore no hold on it".

4. The indweller or the inner Realer (Antaryāmitva).

This is explained in two modes.

The Divine Principle enters into all souls and posits in the region of the heart. It will be the constant companion to the soul during all its turmoils as pleasure and pain. A clairvoyant vision can perceive this form. The soul is subject to afflictions but this 'Antaryāmi' form remains untouched of such taints. This is the Divine Principle in its positive and negative aspects. It will be the silent spectator of all the attitudes, actions and contemplations of the soul. It is also called the 'witness' (Sakṣī).

The terms 'Hridayakamala' (as the seat of the Antaryāmi) 'vidyullekha' (sparkling line of lightning) are also relevant here.

The aspirants on the path will get in touch with this Antaryāmi in the initial pursuits. This is perhaps the beginning of the Swa-Swarupa Jñāna.

5. The Idol or Image (Arcāvatāra is the pointer where the Divine Principle takes on the name and form attributed by the devotees. Setting aside its own omniscience for a time, it puts on a show of 'ignorance'. Similarly not operating its omnipotence it appears to be absolutely powerless. Likewise, forgetting its over-all Lordship, it puts on the cloak of simplicity. Even as it is the all-protection, it assumes a form which needs someone else's constant protection. It shall be perceivable to the human eyes, accessible to devotees who are ever ready to serve and is established in temples and houses, and is supposed to be beyond the concerns of space, time and establishment.

It is the descent of the Divine Principle into the body (idol) with a non-material body. The Arcāvatāra is self-manifest (svayamvyakta), consecrated by the divine beings (Daiva). Sages (Siddhās) and human-beings (Mānuṣa) and in all the four fold establishment it remains as those bound by space, time and environment.

The term 'Arcā' is pointer in likeness. The following definition of the term is worth careful consideration.

"An object of either wood or stone fashioned, usually in the form of a human-being, and in which form a certain spiritual force or forces are focussed, by Will-Power of Adepts (i.e.) the highest initiates, for the purpose of aiding a worshipper to attain that stability of mind which is necessary for him for the contemplation of the ONE—ALL as enjoyed in the Upaniṣads".

The purpose of an idol is also explained in the following terms: Ruchi-Janakatva (Creating a sense of aptitude or thirst in the devotees for worship).

Subhāśrayatwa (a feeling of contentment and prosperity at sight).

Aśeṣa loka saranyatwa (propelling force for gathering countless men together).

Anubhavyatwa (an aid for concentration or meditation for the aspirants).

It is always possible that humans who are accustomed to personifications cannot visualize an idea or concept quickly unless an embodiment of that is manifest before their eyes. This explains the need of idols and images apart from the aspects of their sanctity and glory. It is also constantly stressed that one has to go beyond the 'idol' to the 'idea' as he progresses on the path.

Hence it can be said that a would-be free individual (aspirant for liberation) can start with an idol and climb up the subjective states of Parā-(Absolute), if he is mindful of the various intermediary purposes and practices. A knowledge of these forms will help the aspirant attune to his path appropriately.

The personified name of the highest is 'Para Vāsudēva' but so far as the manifestation of the world is concerned it is 'Nārāyaṇa'. To have a detailed grasp on the subject it is profitable to discuss here certain views of this concept.

The Concept Of Nārāyaṇa

Lord Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme Being in the ancient Hindu thought. He is the Mahā-puruṣa from whom all universes emerge. They live, move and have their being in Him. He is the transcendental form of Reality before the triple manifestation as Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva arrive on the scene of manifestation. This is the 'Parā' aspect of the Viśiṣṭādwaita philosophy.

Parabrahman or the Ultimate Reality appears in every manvantar as Nārāyaṇa or Swayambhu, the self-existent. He is the personification of Eternal Breath of the unconscious all, as explained by Madame H. P. Blavatsky in her book 'The Secret Doctrine'. Here comes into play the 'Vyūha' aspect of the Divine Principle. The word 'Nārāyaṇa' primarily means 'one who moves on the

waters'. Here the waters are of the 'Life'. The life of Parabrahman flows towards his manifestation continuously. This is symbolised in an ocean of milk, whiteness of milk being symbolic of the purity of unsullied nature. Nārāyaṇa is pictured reclining over this ocean. Thus the other name 'Kshīra Sāgara Śayana' for Nārāyaṇa. Ocean is also symbolic of the waters of space and Nārāyaṇa moves on these abstract waters. In this aspect he is the Divine Universal Soul manifest, concealed in Ākāśa and present in Ether.

Nara means the body of men. One who possesses these bodies and lives as the immortal being or Antaryamin within men is therefore Nārāyaṇa. This is by itself a unique aspect of God.

Nara also means the congregation of men. He is termed Nārāyaṇa because he is the user of these Naras.

There is another interpretation to the word. Rāyaṇa means one from whom all sound emanates. One who is not Rāyaṇa is Arāyaṇa and one who is not Arāyaṇa is Nārāyaṇa.

Nara being the primordial ocean, Nārāyaṇa creates Naras (human being) out of those waters.

Naras stands for collection of eternal substances, which are 20 in number according to Sri Pilla Lokacārya. These include the Divine qualities, subsidiary qualities, His body, glory of that body, His weapons, ornaments, consorts, His guards and similar retinue, Souls that are eternally free, bonded, prakṛiti (primordial matter), its various transformations like Mahat, various worlds, time etc. This long list indicates that the glory of Lord is Omnipresent.

There is one 'Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad' in Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda which elucidates the nature and functions of Lord Nārāyaṇa. This is a very minor and crisp Upaniṣad consisting of five sections.

The first section of the Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad indicates how various creative principles and forces emanated from Nārāyaṇa sequential to his desire to create. The following are stated to have emanated:

Para (Vital airs), Manas (Mind)—Indriyās (organs of action and senses) Ākāśa (Ether), Vāyu (Air), Agni (fire), Apas (water), Prithvi (Earth).

While the above are the principle constituents of creation, the following forces also emanated from Him:

Brahmā, Rudrā, Indrā, Prajāpatis (Nine in Number), Āditya (Suns, twelve in Number), Rudrās, Vasus and all the Chandas (Védās). These are the creative forces personified. The first section indicates the teaching of Rig-Veda that all these 'proceed, prosper and re-absorb' in Nārāyaṇa.

The second section is an extract of the teaching available in Yajur-Veda and this speaks of the attributes or qualities of Nārāyaṇa.

He is Eternal; Brahmā—Śivā—Indrā, Kāla (Time), Dik (quarter and intermediate quarters)—above and below is Nārāyaṇa. He is the embodiment of the whole Universe. Nārāyaṇa has the unique qualities of being stainless, sinless, changeless, nameless, pure and divine. He is advitīya (One without the second).

The second section concludes with an affirmation that one who knows these attributes of Nārāyaṇa will become Viṣṇu Himself.

The third section is an excerpt from Sāma Vēda and is an elucidation of the Aṣṭākṣarī Mantra. (Ōm Namō Nārāyaṇāya). The result of the japa of this Mantra is stated here. One who recites constantly this Aṣṭākṣarī attains 'full life' and supermacy over men, enjoys pleasures of royalty and becomes the master of *pasu* (animal nature). He ultimately attains Mōkṣa.

The fourth section of the Upaniṣad indicates 'OM' as the name of Nārāyaṇa. The nature of Praṇava is suggested.

The result of constant pronouncement of this name is release from the bondage of birth and mundane existence. The person who repeats Aṣṭākṣarī will reach Vaikunta, the abode of Viṣṇu, which is the highest subjective state of consciousness. This section is an essence of Atharva-Vēda and stresses fundamentally that Nārāyaṇa pervades all elements, He is the only Causeless Cause, Paramātmā. That OM is the denominator of Īśwara is also mentioned by sage Patañjali in his Yoga-Sutras.

The fifth section of the Upaniṣad indicates the 'Phala Sruti' in the traditional manner. One who studies this Upaniṣad could destroy his earlier sins. He would get redeemed of the five great sins (theft, drinking, killing-life, unlawful sex-course, indulgence

in lust and luxury). We may note that these are almost identical to the five precepts of Lord Buddha. The recitation of the Upaniṣad will bestow the same good result as of reciting Védās. This recitation is also a means for attaining Sāyujya with Nārāyaṇa.

Lord Nārāyaṇa is the presiding deity of the universes as also the guiding factor for the various life-processes.

Śrī Vaiṣṇavites do not mention the name of Lord Nārāyaṇa Solo: they always say 'Srimannārāyaṇa' to indicate that 'Śrī' his principle consort is always an inseparable part of Him. The Lotus feet of Lord Srimat Nārāyaṇa are the place of solace for all Jīvas.

It is again Lord Nārāyaṇa who comes down into human incarnation, in his 'Vibhava' aspect to employ and instruct people in righteousness.

He provides an opportunity to human beings in His 'Arcā' aspect so that they may worship Him and emulate his Kalyāṇa-guṇas. It is only by becoming like Him—through His grace that the souls in bondage (Baddhās) can find salvation.

Though conceptually 'Nārāyaṇa' is indicative of a name and form that is the embodiment of whole Universes and manifestation. The Absolute, Divine Principle, which cannot be expressed in words, took this name when it had to be expressed for the convenience of those who can comprehend well in the concrete only.

In general terms, it is considered that the Viśiṣṭādwāida philosophy propogates a 'personal God'. This view is not entirely correct. This system of philosophy as enunciated by Rāmānuja talks of Parabrahman, Divine Principle, which has several attributes. The entire universe (or worlds) with its chit-Achit (sentient and Non-sentient beings) is the Parabrahman. The chit-Achit and Īśwara (the manifested form of the Divine Principle) are one and together in a sense. The three are inseparable and cannot exist otherwise.

The anthropomorphic God and the personification are part of this philosophy, no doubt, but it is clearly explained that the form of Īśwara or the Divine Principle is meant for the worship, contemplation and meditation of the disciples, aspirants and devotees. The names given are more indicative of the functions of the principle, as already explained earlier.

The Human Pursuit (Puruṣārtha)

Having gone in sufficient detail about the first two bases, now the third, the nature of human pursuit (Puruṣārtha Swarūpa) is explained:

Puruṣārtha is the pursuit of the humans. It is again five fold as Dharma, Artha, Kāma, Atmānubhava and Bhagavadanubhava.

Dharma is the avocation one abides by for his self-sustenance.

Artha is earning the material prosperities according to the social laws relevant to oneself and expending them judiciously.

Kāma is the desire which is two fold: One concerned with the material worlds in which the soul is involved and the other concerned with the subtle worlds which are relatively the real abode of the Soul.

The material world is the combination of one's feeling for parents, pearls, money, things that quench thirst and hunger, friends, progeny, circle of his own people-wife, children and all things that give the sensuous pleasures. All this is the replica of experiences obtainable through the five senses of the outer personality.

The subtler world is the combination of self-luminous body—which has no thirst, hunger, appetite, association, old-age, death and when one enjoys the pleasures resultant to the virtuous deeds he performs in the material world.

The material and subtler worlds, though classified as two for purposes of clear comprehension, by the very nature of their existence are interdependent. If one is generally the world of enjoyment the other is that of contemplation. The interdependence is so deep that one dovetails into the other and both seem to be the two compartments of a cage. The person with no sufficient knowledge about their interaction will be running like a squirrel in these two compartments of the cage.

Soul-bliss (Atmānubhava) is the absence of the misery, pain and suffering that are generally attributable to the individual soul. This stage is the right one for the contemplation on liberation.

God-Bliss (Bhagavad-anubhava) is the supreme state of liberation. Having exhausted all types of Karma (results arriving to one consequent to the release of forces by himself), leaving concern of the mundane body which gives room for the six

distortions like: existence, birth, evolution, progression, decay and extinction; incessant material quests and makes one feel unconcerned about the Divine Principle, go far and far away from this in attitudes and actions; at this stage the mundane body is set aside deliberately and consciously and the individual soul (unit of consciousness) enters into the subtle body and travels in the regions of space and outer space, gets into the State of Pure and pristine sattwic tattwa and ever remains with the Higher Intelligences there.

The body determined by Karma is now absent, has not further scope or use at this stage of progress in the pursuit of the individual soul. This is again the region of the non-material senses but they are not due to the interplay of the causes and effects or the release of forces and the ensuing results.

The unit of consciousness casts away its limitations and enters into an eternal manifestation, Nitya-anubhūti. The state of consciousness here is explained as Paramapada or Vaikunta. It is the abode of the Divine as 'Ānanda'. This is likened to a great construction 'Mahamaṇi-mantapa' with thousands of pillars imbedded with Jewels. The Ananta in the timeless and eternal state is lusted with gems on his countless (thousand) hoods and he makes the seat for the Divine Principle.

This region and its contents are again Paravāsudēva; as below:

Region of Vāsudeva	—	Vaikuṇṭha
„ Aniruddha	—	Sammóda
„ Pradyumna	—	Pramóda
„ Samkarṣana	—	Āmóda

The divine throne, the seat of the Divine Principle, is composed of Dharma, Jñāna, Vairagya and Aiswarya.

The Supreme knowledge is seated here. It is again the Supreme Existence without any further modification or distortion.

At this point it is again necessary to recollect that the planes or regions mentioned above are not geographical locations but are states of consciousness.

Nature of the Means:

Now we come to the Nature of the Means (Upāya Swarūpa) viz. the means to attain that supreme state of consciousness or liberation, as commonly understood.

The approaches to this are again five fold:

Karma (Good Deeds), Jñāna (Wisdom), Bhakti (Right devotion), Prapatti (Surrender) and Acārya Abhimāna (Grace of Mediator)

Karma—Jñāna—Bhakti are generally known to the outer world. The approaches Prapatti and Acārya-abhimāna are specific and exclusive to the philosophy of Viśiṣṭādwaita.

Again it should be remembered that these three or five approach roads are not watertight compartments but do certainly overlap in their working. That way they are supplementary and complementary to one other. The individual's life pursuit is to understand them as a whole and as stepping stones to be passed over with single minded devotion and undisturbed dedication. According to the temperament of the individual, one of the paths becomes primary and the others auxiliary.

To be more precise, the others are absorbed by the primary and predominant attitude or path. This depends more upon the build-up of each soul and the earnestness of effort put on the way.

It is not right to put one superior to the other. All roads are to lead to the final stage of liberation i.e. release from the obstacles and attaining identity with the pure and pristine nature of Sattwa or regaining the original status of the Divine Principle in its embodiment. For this an independent and comprehensive understanding of the five fold division of the paths is essential.

It can also be mentioned here that when we say 'path', 'approach road' or 'stepping stone', it does not literally mean a journey without. Words are used to help one to come to right understanding. Again, the 'journey' or 'reaching' should not mean travelling from one point to a different point. All this is a figurative expression. In actuality everything in nature is posited at the point it is, in a great perennial motion and rises higher in understanding or reverting to itself the meaning of higher purposes of existence. Sometimes it is said that it is not a journey 'without' but a journey 'within'. In the present context it is all the same. One can be static and know more and more about things around him. But that he is part of 'absolute motion' is a fact in nature. All the explanations are meant to suggest that the non-essentials are to be dropped down and then the essentials will reveal in

newer and yet newer meanings. All this is not the action of a moment, a day, an year or a life but of continuity in the far and is beyond anybody's guess. It is only when we reel off all the layers of 'understanding' that we can come to a region of peace and serenity. This is all-embracing and all-illuminating.

Performance of good deeds is a specific activity for the human having been instructed well by his elders, scriptures etc. He understands according to his ability. Actions are performed without an eye on rewards or awards. They are performed for the right reason as they are a natural part of the duty. Such selfless and altruistic actions, help the individual soul get rid of the impurities. This will also propel in him a kind of right knowledge that is helpful for progress, on the right lines. To be more specific, these will lead him to the path of Wisdom (Jñāna Yoga) which will further put him on the path of Devotion (Bhakti), develops in him love for all beings which are nothing but emanations from the Divine Principle and essentially are one with That all the time.

Right Devotion (Bhakti) is the flow of an incessant stream of remembrance of the Divine Principle, which is also indicated as 'meditation upon God', flowing all the time from the individual soul and enriching and fulfilling the thirst of the soul for the light of the total consciousness. The devotee is stated to become what he meditates upon. The eight limbs of Patañjali's system of Yoga viz. Yama, Niyama, Āsana, Prāṇāyāma, Pratyāhara, Dhāraṇa, Dhyāna, Samādhi are part of this path of right Devotion. By their help the gradual weeding away of the impurities in the body and the mind becomes possible and the unit of consciousness, the human, thus gradually rises above the concentric centre and merges itself into the Supreme Centre.

Bhakti again has a seven fold discipline traditionally known as 'Sādhana Saptaka' viz. Vivēka, Vimōka, Abhyāsa, Kriyā, Kalyāṇa, anavasada, anuddharṣa which in general terms in the context mean discriminatory purification of the body and the contents of the mind; detachment from all desires, constant practice of meditation on the Divine Principle, actions performed with the best understanding, dwelling upon the virtues of the Divine Principle, cheerfulness in spite of the miseries and security under all circumstances of life.

This description of Bhakti path includes in itself the steps of Rāja, Jñāna and Karma paths of the ordinary parlance. Thus the statement that all the paths are one in essence. They have been severally stated by different preceptors depending upon the meanings attached to the terms in the contemporary times.

Contemplation on the Divine Principle, the Absolute or the Parabrahman, includes the idea such as this:

"I am Parabrahman, I am an attribute of Him. I am his body. I am one of his many bodies" etc.

In the detailed process of contemplation or an image in Bhakti Yoga, it is interesting to note, there are two classifications viz., Pratīkōpāsana and Apratīkōpāsana. The former is contemplation upon 'OM' and certain other vidyas like Madhu, Udgithavidya etc. The latter is direct contemplation on Parabrahman through Sadvidya, Nyāsavidya etc.

Pratīkōpāsana leads to good results and then liberation through them while Apratīkōpāsana leads to liberation direct.

The pursuit through Karma, Jñāna and Bhakti differently and together requires a lot of mental energy and determination. It is not that anybody and everybody can follow these. Right results shall ensue only when they are understood in a right perspective and apt connotation.

For one who is not capable of pursuing these the other paths are approachable. These are very often stated to be, relatively speaking, easily accessible. But a deeper look will decidedly show how 'far-reaching' they are, particularly in the present age of intellectual advancement. The radical and rational views are gaining ground and are well supported by the scientific spirit. It can be hoped that the knowledge concerning them will soon become common to all.

4. Prapatti as a means

The path of surrender is a direct means to the Divine Principle in any of its forms. Consecrating all one's actions to that Divinity, the response is obtained very early. The primary factor here is whether the desire for such surrender can generate without a basic knowledge of the preceding paths.

The path 'surrender' is leaving all concerns and contemplating only upon one's inability to practise any of the three earlier paths and upon the Divine Principle with all its attributes and qualities as the sole redeemer, not doing anything that is repulsive to that WILL, retaining absolute and implicit faith and obedience in that. The six attributes are often pondered over by the aspirant so that he comes to a truer and nearer understanding of them and becomes one with them. This surrender (Prapatti) can be practised by anyone either through or independent of a preceptor. This can be taken as a pure and highly sophisticated way of intellectual understanding, though often it is understood as an inability or inefficiency to perform otherwise.

Ārta Prapatti and Tripta Prapatti are the two classified ways here. Through causal grace of the Divine Principle, and by the precepts of the Adepts, certain individuals feel an urge to surrender. This is Ārta. That born out of dispassion and desirelessness and the only desire to be of service to the Divine puts one on the path of Tripta Prapatti (contented disposition and hence surrender). Whatever be the modus operandi, the mental attitude of one who has attained this stature is the same, the total surrender to the supreme without any reservation.

5. Acārya Abhimāna

Similarly the final classification of the means (Upāya) is the 'Acārya Abhimāna: and this can be attained only after a definite course of right conduct. This adoption of this path evokes the sympathy and consideration of the 'Over Lord' and his determination to save all the souls. This is a means of attributing the grace of the preceptor. Though this path is supplementary to the others it is yet independent and unique.

As is already mentioned Surrender (Prapatti) and the consideration of the preceptor (Acārya Abhimāna) are specific pointers in this philosophy. Volumes have already been written on the scope and efficacy of these two modes. But the central theme to be held fast in the mind is that these five paths are interdependent and are essentially expressions of one and the only one path.

There can only be 'One' right path and many or multifarious wrong paths. The one right path includes all the seemingly different inasmuch as the individual soul moves forwards through trials and tribulations, learning from his own experience. The various names are only 'tags' depending upon the temperament of the individuals.

The five paths provide the approach an aspirant has to develop intellectually and intuitionally. This sets the right mark and seal upon the total work. The unfoldment of the Divine Consciousness is possible only when the spirit of all the five paths is imbibed carefully coupled with the right discrimination.

Thus the means for attaining liberation are discussed. The core of the teaching remains to be the constant contemplation or meditation upon the Divine Principle in all or any of its attributes and attempting to get nearer to that.

Nature of the Obstacles

The final section of the five bases (Artha Pancaka) is concerned with the obstacles (Viródhī Swarūpa) to liberation.

It is worth mentioning, at the outset, that the means very often become the obstacles when there is no right understanding, just as each rose has a thorn underneath. The obstacles for pursuit of liberation are there and they can as well be transformed into means if a proper approach is attempted.

For one who is mindful of a safe or secure journey the need for knowing full well the means and obstacles together and differently is of great assistance.

Five Fold Obstacles

The obstacles are Five Fold.

1. Obstacle to the nature of the self
(Swarūpa Viródhī)
2. Obstacles to the nature of the Over-Lord
(Paratwa Viródhī)
3. Obstacle to the nature of the Human Pursuits
(Purusārtha Viródhī)
4. Obstacle to the nature of the means
(Upāya Viródhī)

5. Obstacle to the nature of the final attainment
(Praptti Viródhī)

'Obstacle' is the other word for 'wrong approach' or 'misinterpretation of the knowledge'. If things are not rightly understood the final results are not to arrive. Having possession of the material or subjective objects is one thing and knowing their right use and utility is another thing. This portion of the text is employed by Sri Pilla Lokācārya to warn the aspirants that a thorough knowledge of the pitfalls is also essential so that they do not spoil all the efforts on the path and the same time the aspirants can guard themselves against such nature.

1. Obstacle as to self :

Indulgence in self-centredness, too much identification with the bodies, assuming that there is something beyond the Divine Principle and that one is independent of everything else constitute the obstacles of the form of self. If the physico-psychic nature is filled with views that one as a 'personality' is supreme and that there is nothing beyond what is 'objectively available' is decidedly an obstacle for attaining the right knowledge about the soul.

2. Obstacles as to Paratwa :

Considering that all forces in nature are Intelligences, assuming that all Intelligences are equal in their status, worshipping the lower elementals or lesser-gods, attributing human elements to the descended forms of the Divine Principle (Vibhava-Avatārās) measuring their actions in human yardsticks and asserting that the Arcāvatārās (idols and images) have no potency in themselves are obstacles for the understanding of the nature of the Over-Soul (Paratwa).

The manifestation is full of brute forces and Intelligences of various grades. It is necessary for the aspirant to understand the over-all nature of things, to give the devil its due and to gain a sense of propriety in dealing with all matters concerning the living.

In otherwords, giving the right place for the right things and setting aside the wrongful things is most important. To hold the right and apt views alone is extremely necessary. To be able to develop this sort of discrimination one should necessarily know the obstacles on the path.

Obstacle as to pursuits

Becoming prone to lower passions of human nature, not realizing that service to the highest principle is the only right pursuit and all kinds of repulsion to right pursuits are the obstacles known as puruṣārtha Viródhī.

Obstacles as to means

Treating the wrong means as the right steps, searching for short cuts, mistaking the means to be ends in themselves and succumbing to the various pitfalls are the nature of obstacle to the means.

Obstacles to final attainment

Clinging to the material body and possessions, disservice to the Over-Lord; disservice to the preceptors of the Over-Lord, being repelled to right attitudes are the nature of obstacles to the final attainment.

By and large it can be seen that the wrong knowledge, wrong attitudes of mind and body, wrong deeds and clinging to lesser, petty and wrongful means are the obstacles included in this concluding subsection.

A fundamental knowledge of the various wrongs is needed so that it becomes an armour for the aspirant to save himself. The goal has to be clear in his mind and set well before him. He should guard himself against being tempted to step upon and enter the many by-paths and by-lanes. A royal and straight road is to be carved by each one for his use. This can be done and secured well by his perseverance and strong will to 'endure to the end'.

By the in-take of wrong food the brain cells become contaminated and do not cooperate well for the gain of right knowledge. By association with wrong groups of people, the attainment of right knowledge becomes impossible. Self-esteem and self-opinionation result in utterly wrong attitudes.

Summation

Thus the aspirant for liberation should possess the knowledge of the five bases of Wisdom so that he can carry out the supreme purpose of life and shun all the distractions.

He should cast away all indulgences in the lower nature and should succinctly endeavour to fill his entire nature with all finer qualities. Having done this satisfactorily the real man, the unit of consciousness, becomes purified, sanctified and shines in all its original glory.

This is possible when his actions, feelings and thoughts are pure and consecrated to the Divine Will.

The aspirant should realize his insignificance before the Over-Lord, his ignorance before the preceptors, his interdependence upon all the living-beings, should be moved by an inner urge for obtaining the virtues and shun all vices. The desire for material prosperity should transform as the will for right deeds in purposeful service. He should always feel a sense of gratitude to all his well wishers. As an Adept remarked, ingratitude should not be among the vices of aspirants. He should tune himself to the attitudes of the Divine Principle to the best of his ability and understanding. His quantity of work should constantly increase while the quality improves in the course of this endeavour.

Once the aspirant takes upon to all this earnestly and works assiduously he will become nearer and dearer to the Divine Principle, the Absolute.

The only precaution he should take is to see that there is no gap between the precept and his practice. His behaviour should be in strict accordance with his beliefs. All the promises and pledges should be performed having realized that the 'Real Life' is the only one worth aspiring for.

SECTION III

A CODE FOR HUMAN CONDUCT

(Quintessence of Śrī Rāmānuja's ethical teachings)

The Period of the Preceptor

Śrī Rāmānuja lived in a period when the entire country was in great turmoil socially, politically and religiously. He systematized the practices of worship at the individual and the collective levels besides giving out vast commentaries on Brahma-sūtrās, Bhagavad-gita and other treatises. A code of conduct was also formulated by him almost at the fag end of his physical existence. To be precise, this was given to the disciples gathered around him on his last day.

Tradition says that he was born in the Saka-era year 938; Pingala, Chaitra-month, Sukla Pakṣa Panchami (in the year 4118 after the Kali-era started) corresponding to the Christian era 1017 A.D.) at Śrī Perambūdūr (now in Tamil Nadu State) and lived for a full cycle of 120 years.

On completing the work which was assigned to him by his preceptors he laid down his physical body in the year 1137 A.D. at Sri Rangam (also in Tamil Nadu State). For over sixty years he travelled all over the country propagating the highest philosophical teachings of his system and drawing around him a great numbers of devotees, followers and aspirants.

Great Idealist

As a preceptor he was great and ideal, his practices did not fall short in anyway. According to him the human society is one and the numerous divisions on social or similar considerations are redundant. All sections of people received due and appropriate treatment from him.

Quintessence of His System

Tradition states that the following 72 plus 10 teachings were given by him, as quintessence of his philosophical system, and they stress on principles that constitute a "Right Kind of Living". Therefore this can be deemed as a 'Code of Conduct' common for all, though primarily intended for his disciples and followers, who were aspirants of a fuller appreciation of life upon earth.

The teachings appear deceptively simple but a sincere adherence is bound to lead the aspirant to the supreme levels of fuller understanding in Eternal Truths.

These statements (Vākyās) are in vogue in a South Indian School exemplified as 'Eighty two statements (Suktis). Some mention them to be 'Seventy four' only. Sometimes the same idea is repeated, substatements are numbered separately. Whatever be the actual number, the import and the line of thought are worth consideration. It must be noted that what was made available as the teaching of the preceptor has come down traditionally by word of mouth and it was actually brought on record only after passage of considerable time. This accounts for the over stresses or even the interpolations.

Parallels

1. Vyāsa the seer who codified the Védās, wrote and classified the Ithibāsās and Purāṇas is supposed to have given this verse as quintessence of his ethical teaching :

Parópakārāya Puṇyāya

Pāpāya Parapeedanam

(It is virtuous to be altruistic and evil to be malificent)

2. Lord Buddha, when asked by his disciples, to sum up his teaching in a short verse so that it can be easily committed to memory, is stated to have given this :

" Cease to do evil

Learn to be good

Cleanse your own heart

This is the way of the Buddhās."

But Rāmānuja's epitomization is too long and rather explicit in details.

Now we shall see the text of the teachings :

The Seventy Two Statements

1. Service to one's own preceptor (Acārya) and any other devotee (Bhāgavata) should be on the same par.

Serve any devotee of the Lord (Bhāgavata) as you would serve your own spiritual preceptor.

2. One should have faith and reverence for the precepts of the earlier teachers (Acāryās).

3. One should not be a slave to his senses and indulge in pleasures all the time.

4. Time should not be ill spent in reading what leads to mere worldly knowledge, devoid of the Wisdom about the Supreme.

5. Always be contemplating upon the study of the Lord, His Manifestation (Bhāgavad-Viṣaya) and His plan for the individual-souls.

6. Having approached a preceptor, as a result of the past virtues, one should not revert to mundane affairs.

7. In the matter of sensuous pleasures, be cautious and austere.

8. Running after perfumes, flowers and similar decorative pieces is not good.

9. Practice the repetition of the name of a devotee as you do the name of Lord.

10. To attain proximity of Lord, follow the sayings of Bhāgavatās and be earnest in observing their dictates and directions.

11. Without service to Viṣṇu and Vaiṣṇavas, one can never attain liberation. He shall decay.

12. Practice of the precepts is not a means to an end.

13. Practice of the precepts is in itself the goal.

14. While addressing Vaiṣṇavās or naming them elsewhere do not use singular person. Always be reverential and humble to them.

15. When a Śrī Vaiṣṇava is in sight, approach him with folded hands in all reverence.

16. In the presence of Lord, Devotees or Preceptors (Bhāgavad-Bhāgavata-Acāryās) even the sitting posture should be decent.

17. While sleeping, take care that the feet do not extent towards the temples, residences of devotees or preceptors.

18. As soon as waking up in the morning, the Pedigree of one's preceptors (Guruparampara) should be chanted.

19. While approaching the Lord in the temple or the Vaiṣṇavās in assembly, a surrendered person (Prapanna) should chant 'Dwaya Mantra' * and simultaneously prostrate to them.

20. When a learned person is chanting the virtues of Lord, pay due respect to him, and do not get away in the middle of the discourse.

21. When a Śrīvaiṣṇava's approaching is noticed, go forward to meet and receive him in all reverence. Similarly when he is moving out, accompany him to a reasonable distance and take leave of him.

22. Follow the precepts of the Teachers and adhere to your righteous conduct but do not run after people who are worldly and non-believers.

23. As one goes by the way of the temple and other structures of the Lord's presence, reverential prostration before them is essential.

24. One should not be awfully wonder-struck when the material palatial buildings are seen.

25. One should not feel inclined to hear and enjoy about the mundane affairs.

26. When the divine qualities are being praised and sung; hear with all attention and enjoy the bliss.

Do not comment upon them adversely.

27. Do not dishonour even the shade of Śrīvaiṣṇavās.

28. Do not cast your shade on Śrīvaiṣṇavās.

29. Having touched or contacted the non-surrendered person do not again touch or contact the surrendered devotees (Prapannās).

30. Do not neglect or look down the Śrīvaiṣṇavās even when they are not rich in worldly possessions.

31. When a Vaiṣṇava greets you with salutations, immediately respond and reciprocate. Non-response or neglect is unbecoming and vicious.

* Dwayamantra:

Srimannārāyaṇa Caraṇam Saraṇam Prapadye

Srimatē Nārāyaṇānamah

I take refuge at the feet of the Over Lord, Srimannārāyaṇa;

All my acts are consecrated in Nārāyaṇa.

32. Even as certain dark spots of the Śrīvaiṣṇavās such as their low parentage, neglect of duties, slavery to vices etc., come to notice, do not mention them to others. Only transmit or propagate the bright part of their being and behaviour.

33. The sacred water (Tīrtha) of Lord, Preceptor etc. should not be taken in the presence of non-believers.

34. Do not accept the Śrī-Pādā-Tīrtha of those who do not have the Wisdom of the three secrets and three principles.*

35. The Śrī Pāda Tīrtha of the preceptors and devotees who are wise and practitioners of scriptural sayings should be taken every day.

36. Do not consider yourself equal to any other devotee (Bhāgavata).

37. By sheer accident, if the non-believer's contact comes up, purify your body by a good bath and receive afresh the Śrī Pāda Tīrtha of the Preceptor.

38. The Physical and subtle bodies of the devotees who are endowed with Jñāna-Bhakti and Vairāgya (Wisdom—Devotion and Dispassion) are to be reverentially treated.

39. The devotees who are endowed with Jñāna-Bhakti and Vairāgya should be honoured irrespective of the class/caste in which they were born.

40. The idols/images of Gods in the residences of the non-believers should not be worshipped.

41. Similarly, the Tīrtha in the houses of non-believers should not be accepted.

42. In the temples of Lord Viṣṇu and his other forms (Avatārās) even as non-believers are in view, the Tīrtha and prasāda can be accepted.

43. In the temples of Lord Viṣṇu and his other Avatārās when Tīrtha and prasada are offered, they should not be rejected on a plea of one's being on fast etc.

44. Under no circumstances whatsoever, the tīrtha and prasada offered at the sacred places should be rejected.

* Tatwa, Hita and Puruṣārtha are the three secrets;
Cit, Acit and Īśvara are the three Principles.

45. One should not raise and praise himself and his virtues in the presence of other Śrī Vaiṣṇavās. One should be conscious of one's own insignificance all the time.

46. None should be insulted or injured, in the presence of Śrīvaiṣṇavās.

47. The virtues of preceptors and devotees should be chanted in adoration for a time before any other work is taken up.

48. A part of the day should be spend in praising/contemplating upon one's preceptor's virtues.

49. A part of the day should be spent in reciting with understanding, contemplating the works of Nammālwār and other Alwārs (earlier preceptors of the philosophical system).

50. Association of those who identify themselves with their body and mind is to be shunned.

51. Even as they are Śrīvaiṣṇavās, if they are slaves to their bodies and psycho passions, their association should be shunned.

52. Do not associate with those who always talk ill of others.

53. To compensate the sin/vice of association with nonbelievers, have a nice conversation (dialogue) with Śrī Vaiṣṇavās.

54. Contact, either by sight or by talk, with those who talk ill of devotees and who habitually work against the preceptors should be avoided in total.

55. Always be in touch with those devotees who will be chanting the Dwaya Mantra.

56. Leaving aside the followers of the other paths, always be in association of devotees who know the right means to the goal.

57. Always be in the association of those who know the three secrets and the three principles.

58. Do not mix up with people who are after material possessions and desires but be always with the devotees of the right kind.

59. Even as Śrī Vaiṣṇavās have insulted, one should not attempt to rebuff or retort.

60. Śrī Vaiṣṇavās who are keen on attaining the supreme bliss, should aspire for the welfare of all devotees.

61. A surrendered being (Prapanna) should not resort to those actions which are against the Divine will and Plan even as they seem to bestow upon him certain comforts.

62. Food that is not offered to Lord should not be consumed. Even the flowers, fruits, scents and similar things should not be accepted if they are not first consecrated in the service of the Lord.

63. Monies and valuables should not be received from those who are disinclined towards Divinity even as they are offered unasked for.

64. One who has surrendered (Prapanna) should not consume food seen or contaminated by others.

65. The offering to the Lord, should not be selected upon his own criteria of taste and liking.

66. The offering has to be pure, fresh and unsullied.

67. What is offered to Lord and then distributed for human consumption must be treated as Sacred material. It should not be consumed in lust and lavish.

68. All the prescribed ceremonies/deeds must be performed with utmost dedication and feeling or surrender.

69. Ill-will towards the preceptors/devotees who are scholars in the three truths (Principles) and are constantly contemplating upon them is very harmful to one-self and results in self-annihilation. Revering such scholars and doing things pleasurable to them is a sure means to liberation.

70. The whole pursuit of life is to adore the devotees. Insult done to devotees will lead to self-annihilation.

71. To consider an idol/image (Arcāvighraha) of the Lord to be a stone-image, to liken Acārya (preceptor) to a mere human as anybody and everybody, to schedule and classify Śrī Vaiṣṇavās, to treat as simple water or food the sanctified Tīrtha and Prasāda, to estimate the Over-Lord as one of the many Gods... such wrong and misleading notions reduce the stature of an aspirant and will also retard his spiritual progress.

72. Worship of Bhāgavata more than the worship of the Lord is Ideal. An insult to a devotee (Bhāgavata) is more a heinous crime than an insult to Lord Himself. The sanctified Tīrtha and Prasāda of a Bhāgavata are more sacred to the Lords Tīrtha and Prasāda.

Ten Further Statements

The disciples who received these 72 statements in the course

of the sermon, unasked for by them, appealed to their preceptor, again the tradition says, why all these were being repeated now.

There upon Rāmānuja had indicated to them that he was to lay aside his physical body in the coming three days. The panic and agony among the devotees reached its peak upon hearing this.

But the most compassionate preceptor and the well-wisher of all beings, Rāmānuja profusely consoled them and gave again 10 statements for their adherence all through the life.

These 10 aphorisms are :

1. A person who has surrendered himself to the Lord (Prapanna) should consider whatever that happens to him is ordained by the Lord. He should not lament even as it involves lot of suffering and misery. If he laments his conduct will be inconsistent to the concept of surrender he made earlier to the Lord. The surrender once made should be total and irrevocable. It should not be even for a moment treated as 'illusory' and set aside or treated in a casual way.
2. The net work of happenings in a human life is a result of his actions, emotions and thoughts which are totally his own making in the past and the present. So he should not lament for that. Any lament or misgiving makes him a non-believer in the Law/Principle. He should face life with undaunted courage.
3. The actions/deeds should not be performed as though they are merely means to an end.
4. All actions should be performed as though they are consecrations to the Lord.
5. The great devotees (Bhāgavata Uttamās) should be served sincerely and under their guidance Śrī Bhāṣya is to be studied and understood. These higher ideals are to be propagated in the world for the benefit of humanity.
6. If this cannot be done—
atleast the teachings of the Alwārs (Divya Prabandhās) should be read and propagated among public.
7. If this cannot even be done—
attend that the physical cleanliness of the temples is maintained well and offerings of flowers decorations etc. be made to the Lord.

8. If even this cannot be done—
a cottage may be built at Tirunārāyaṇapuram (Melkote) (a place now in Karnataka State) and residence made thereat—
9. If even this much cannot be done—
Recite the 'Dwaya-Mantra' with full connotation and stay where you are.
10. As a last resort, if this is considered beyond one's scope—
Preceptors (Bhāgavatās) who are imbedded in Wisdom (Jñāna), Devotion (Bhakti) and Dispassion (Vairāgya) may be contacted and served in all humility, casting away all sense of egotism.
There is not a further short cut for leading a righteous life.

Friends/Enemies/Neutrals

He has again, tradition says, epitomized the teaching and stated:

“The life on earth is full of pit falls, illusions and misgivings. Discrimination is to be employed and a knowledge of 'who is who' is to be attained :

Śrī Vaiṣṇavās (followers of Viṣṇu) are your friends.

Haters of God are your enemies. Those involved in worldly affairs are your neutrals.

Have dealings with friends only. Treat your enemies as you deal with snakes. Keep them at a distance.

Ignore the neutrals as stocks and stones. Constant association with friends, like-minded and right minded, alone will lead to spiritual enlightenment. Shut all other extraneous “behaviour”.

The long list of statements contains certain repetitions and overstatements. Perhaps it is due to an anxiety to stress a particular point of view. No effort is made by the present translator to edit, epitomize or classify them. They are rendered as are in circulation.

We may now consider certain aspects of the teachings for elucidation.

Acārya/Guru

The place accorded to the Acārya in this system may be noticed first. He enjoys a superior position, because of his conduct,

Wisdom and Capability to save the individual souls by guiding them to and on the right path.

He enjoys respect and adoration as a spiritual preceptor. In a way, he is considered the Lord-incarnate on earth. The Bhāgavata also gets an equal treatment. He is a senior person who is well informed in scriptures, an earnest devotee to the Lord and is considered equal to the Lord Himself. It is said that the Lord will tolerate an act of omission done unto Him but not to him, the Bhāgavat. (Bhāgavata apacāra is a greater sin compared to Bhāgavad-apacāra).

Human Relationship

Treatment to be afforded to the Vaiṣṇavās is elaborated. This can be understood as a factor of mutual relationship. The terms 'Vaiṣṇava' can mean any 'human' and the implication will still be the same. Relationship that should prevail within a community of common believers and their possible attitude towards non-believers and neutrals is explicit. A believer is asked to mix-up and move together only among a group like-minded and thus not give room for infiltration or dilution of his practices and ideas.

A Surrendered Being

The term 'the surrendered individual' (Prapanna) is to be examined. Prapanna is one who has offered himself in terms of 'Prapatti' to the service of the Lord and His beings. He has surrendered his whole being to the work of the Lord and his creation and has nothing kept in reserve for himself alone. The relationship between the Lord and a Prapanna is very intimate.

But the human nature being what it is, the pulls of mundane life can also influence him and push him away from the track. So it is warned that he should be more careful in his conduct. It is not what happens that is important, but what is more important is how one responds to that. After all, each human enjoys the result of his own actions performed (Karmaphala). Nothing is thrust upon a human by an external agency (Karma-devatas or

God). Karma is a universal Law and is also stated as 'Law of Harmony'. Whatever may happen to a human being, the cause is 'within the individual'. There is no scope therefore for any complaint, picking hatred or animosity with the persons instrumental to the inconveniences caused. One should have firm faith in this Law of Harmony and carry on the life's pursuit. Normally humans complain when something inconvenient to them happens, while they consider all conveniences and comforts as their own making. A basic factor in life that a human being is 'an absolute law giver unto himself', and he 'makes or mars his future' is very often lost sight of. A 'Prapanna' should not drop into this pitfall and hence this has been explained in various terms (Particularly in the Second set of 10 statements).

Sensuous Pleasures

That one should not fall prey to sensuous pleasures and over indulge in such activities is stressed at greater length. Explicit instructions are given in the matter of toning up the physical, emotional and mental nature of human beings. To bring about harmony among these three seemingly separate parts of personality is the goal aimed at. Unless the efforts of an individual are conserved and concentrated towards this unification, the real spiritual life will not sprout. All the performances, actions of all kinds are supposed to bring about this unification and at the same time purify the vehicles. It should be clearly understood that body and mind of the individual are only instruments/vehicles for the Divine Consciousness who indwells as a Unit of consciousness. The consciousness in this unit slowly propels and widens its area of activity. As the entire world is the body (Śarīra) of the Lord (Śarīri), the physico-mental structure (Personality) of the individual (Jīva) is also the body for the individuality (Jīvātma). Thus the idea of a container and the contained is well maintained at appropriate levels. Then comes the need/scope for maintaining this relationship well. Unless the body is kept well from all sorts of worldly contamination it is not fit for use by the individuality/individual soul. So, the whole 'matter of living' of an individual has to orient itself into a matter of 'proper preparation'. The code of conduct is directly that endeavour.

Grace of the Guru

Then abundant stress is laid upon 'Acārya Abhimāna', the Grace of the preceptor, which has to be gained by the individuals by proper exertion and working. The aspirant or a well-meaning person will try to do things that would draw the attention of the preceptor/Teacher towards him. Here we may perhaps remember the statement in ancient philosophical thoughts that when the disciple is ready the Teacher is already there. This system lays stress upon the idea of Divine grace flowing towards the aspirant through the preceptor. The preceptor is the guide and teacher for the aspirant in so far as he elevates his understanding, enlightens his behaviour and enriches him in all modifications.

Faith in the Absolute

We see the word 'Faith' mentioned in the rules as well as the literature of Viśiṣṭādwaita. Faith in the supreme Lord, as the ONE DIVINE PRINCIPLE from whom all emanations start; faith in the scriptural statements that they may be thoroughly studied, examined and emulated in individual lives for attaining liberation is what it stresses upon. The consecration of all actions and surrender of one's whole being is towards this Principle. But we see a great deal of personification, reasons for which are discussed elsewhere earlier.

Basic Values

A study of what is right, what is needed and what is essential for pregnant understanding of the concepts of man, God and the universe is advocated. What is studied is to be assimilated. Thus the quintessence of the teachings becomes one's own being. The spirit of Wisdom (Jñāna), Devotion to the supreme (Bhakti), Dispassion (Vairāgya) to all else born out of this Wisdom and Devotion should rule the aspirants. The preceptor—Guru—is considered to be an embodiment of these three qualities, in fact only one the basic, Jñāna, the other two stemming out of a better understanding of the one. So he is revered, honoured and adored as equal, if not more, to the Supreme. The Supreme works, guides through him and so he is still greater. The teacher is with us in flesh and blood and can brief for us when our conduct is well founded. In

glorifying his qualities which are again the qualities of the supreme, preceptor's Grace (Acārya Abhimānam) can be attained and ultimately obtainable is the Bliss of enjoyment in Lord's presence (Bhagavad Guṇānubhava).

God's Will

God's will is another factor receiving prominence. This Will is the sum total of the plan the Divine Principle has for its working in the manifestation and tends to bestow upon the individuals the needed effort and energy for action. In other words, God's Will is worked through the individual souls, Intelligences of various grades in the manifested world. To know or perceive this Will and modulate one's life in strict accordance with that is the safe and secure ultimate path open to an aspirant.

Wisdom and Humility

The humility needed for an aspirant is stressed.

"One should be humble if he has to attain Wisdom and humbler still after attaining Wisdom" is what a scripture says elsewhere. Humility and Wisdom go together. So are together arrogance and ignorance. A serious attention is to be given to this in working out the life. It is only the wisdom that comes as a hand-aid of the individual ultimately and that wisdom is attainable through humble service and devotion to duty. Duty is 'what is due to humanity'. Responsibility is 'being sensitive to this duty.' Spirituality is the 'capacity to be responsible.' Then we see that wiser concerns and the so-called human duties are interwoven. In fact, life is not divisible into compartments, as personal-domestic national-religious-international etc. Each dove-tails into the other making a homogenous whole. Life is to be viewed in its right total perspective and all duties performed.

An escape from duties will not exonerate the individual from the responsibilities. He will have to pay for it in due proportion. The path leading to spirituality implies a perfect understanding of the moral and social responsibilities and their performance in an indisspassionate, non-personal way.

The individual souls compose the world. The working out of the world is clearly beneficial to living-beings to the extent the

individuals are endowed with a spirit of selfless attitude and altruistic nature.

Study

We will notice that sufficient stress is laid upon the study needed by the aspirants

Study to know

Know to act

Act to Achieve—is decidedly the process.

Viśiṣṭādwaita is not just a philosophy highlighting the service or devotion. In fact it stresses upon the need to know so that the service and the devotion can be better expressed.

Reading the scriptures, earlier Acārya's writings, commentaries of Rāmānuja, other Alwars and preceptors is advocated. Indication is also there to say that the study is a matter of daily activity.

Reading always includes contemplation and reflection on what is read.

Adoration of Divine Qualities

Adoration of the divine qualities is advocated. The adoration includes a contemplation and concentration upon them. 'Thinking' is supposed to make human 'a whole and integrated being.' By constant meditation upon the virtues the divine qualities, the aspirant invariably becomes these. Here we may also refer to various Stótrās in the names of various Gods. For an outer look the stótrās contain phrases of adoration and flattery but interestingly they exemplify the qualities of the Divine Principle. Thus the constant repetition of the Stótrās of course necessarily with a contemplation on the meaning brings the aspirant nearer to the Divine qualities.

Blessings in Kind

Acceptance of Tīrtha and Prasāda (Sacred Water and Blessed eatable) from the right places alone is suggested. The intake of these is considered in itself a great Blessing. Śrī Pāda Tīrtha of his own preceptor (water flowing from the feet of the teacher, after

a wash) is considered still sacred and works like a protective cover against pit falls.

The Philosophy of Viśiṣṭādwaita clearly enunciates that the Parabrahman the Absolute, the one Divine Principle, is composed of all the Universes, worlds, individuals, sentient and non-sentient beings, the Intelligences and the brute forces. It is All-knowing and All-Inclusive, working through various layers of manifestation of which the human (individual soul) is the central factor, so far as this universe is concerned. It must be constantly remembered that the human-being 'lives, moves and stays, in this ONENESS, the Absolute'. The human being is in a distinct position to make and mark the future events in the stream of history. That was the only reason why the human conduct, its rightness and propriety, are stressed all along. The Code of conduct ultimately leads the human being to enjoy the Bliss of that Universal Soul and become a dynamic part of the Living Absolute in the process of singular pursuit of life.

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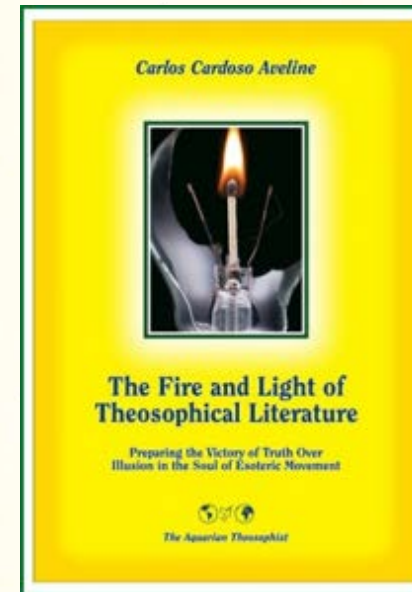
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The End of "Living in the Absolute".

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On the role of the esoteric movement in the ethical awakening of mankind during the 21st century, see the book "**The Fire and Light of Theosophical Literature**", by Carlos Cardoso Aveline.



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