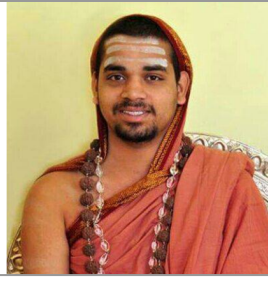


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Navratri Special and 70th Aradhana of 34th Peedathipathi of Śrī Sringeri Sharada Peetham Jagadguru Śankarācārya His Holiness Śrī Chandrashekara Bhārati Mahāswamigal (2nd October 2024)

28th Oct 2024 132th Jayanthi Mahotsava of 34th Peedathipathi of Śrī Sringeri Sharada Peetham Jagadguru Śankarācārya His Holiness Śrī Chandrashekara Bhārati Mahāswamigal (1892-1954)

ADVAITA

(Jagadguru Śankarācārya His Holiness Śrī Chandrashekara Bhārati Mahāswamiji)

(From the book Dialogues with The Guru)

1. A MATTER FOR REALISATION



H. H. Sri Chandrashekara Bhārati Mahāswamiji (34th pontiff), Sringeri (Navaratri Darbar)

(An elderly devotee who had some acquaintance with the Vedānta literature once approached Acharyal and expressed his doubts. For that how Acharyal showered his blessings, we will see in this topic)

Devotee: I have tried to understand the Advaita philosophy but numerous doubts and difficulties keep on cropping up now and then, which I don't find it possible to solve by myself or with the help of the scholars whom I have met. I shall be very grateful if Your Holiness will be pleased to initiate me into the Advaita Vedānta yourself.

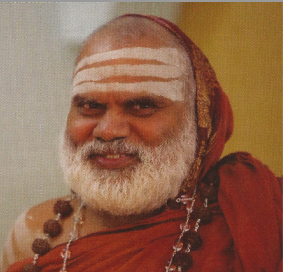
Acharyal : I shall certainly be very glad to do so, if I can do it. But it is quite beyond my competence.

Devotee : I am sure Your Holiness is not serious. If Your Holiness professes incompetence to teach Advaita, I do not see how anybody else in the world can claim to have

understood or claim to teach it.

Acharyal: What can we do? It is the nature of the subject. The Upanishad itself proclaims "He who claims to know, knows not." The Advaita is not something to be learnt; nor can it, therefore, a thing to be taught. It is essentially a matter to be realised by oneself. I cannot therefore undertake to

We submit our efforts at the Lotus feet of Jagadguru Śankarācārya His Holiness Mahāśannidhānam Śrī Śrī Śrī Bhārati Tīrtha Mahāśwāmiji and Jagadguru Śankarācārya His Holiness Sannidhānam Śrī Śrī Śrī Vidhuśekhara Bhārati Mahāśwāmiji

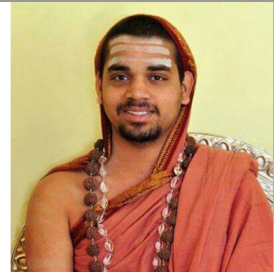


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teach you. If, however, in the course of your Vedantic studies, you want any passage to be explained either in a text or in a commentary, I shall certainly try my best to explain it. I can thus help you only to understand the significance of words or of sentences which are composed of words, or of ideas which are conveyed by sentences. But it is impossible to convey to you a correct idea of what Advaita is, for it is neither a matter for words nor is it a mental concept.

It is, on the other hand, pure experience which transcends all these. Suppose I do not know what sweetness is. Can you describe sweetness in words sufficiently expressive to convey an idea of sweetness to me?

Devotee : That is certainly impossible.

Acharyal : Sweetness can be known only when I put some sweet thing on my tongue. It is impossible of being explained in words or of being learnt from another person. It has to be realised in direct experience. If a thing so familiar to us as sweetness transcends all expression, how much more transcendental will be the truth of Advaita, which is the supreme sweetness.

I am reminded in this connection of a gentleman who came here some time back. He was a Brahmana but his training had all been on the 'modern' lines so that he was a Brahmana only in name; and thanks to circumstances, he has attained a prominent position in public life. It was his first visit to this place. He seemed to have been very much enchanted with the crystal water of the river, the natural scenery all round, the peaceful atmosphere and other things. When he came to me, he expressed the delight he experienced and added "Why, it is brahmananda!" He evidently meant, of course, that it was like brahmanananda, the bliss of Brahman, the Absolute. It struck me that, in spite of his training and habits so divorced from our time-honoured religion, this idea that brahmananda was the highest of all anandas and that, therefore, that alone could be used as a simile to express a delight which defies adequate expression was still uneradicated from his mind.

I mention this incident to show that, even in common parlance when we find words wanting to express an intense sensuous pleasure, we resort to brahmananda alone as an adequate or expressive simile. That means that it is universally recognised that the ananda of Brahman which is the same as Advaita is beyond all words. Ask me not therefore to teach you Advaita, for it is an impossibility. But you may ask me to unravel for you some grammatical construction or to solve some of your doubts in the logic of the system. That is the best that I can do for you.

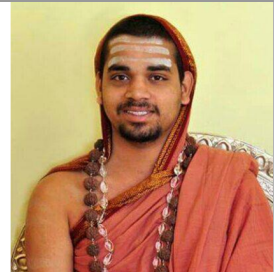
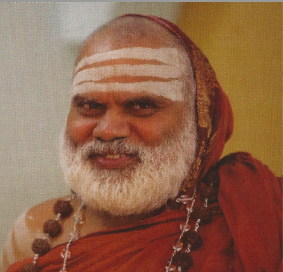
Devotee : I now quite understand the standpoint of Your Holiness. But I do not think I shall be justified in troubling Your Holiness to solve doubts in grammar, syntax or logic.

Acharyal : It does not matter in the least. If the solving of even such a doubt takes us nearer to a realisation of Advaita, it is worth doing.

Devotee : But I have not brought any book with me now and I am unable to state from memory any of the passages which I found difficult to understand.

Acharyal : We shall reserve it then for some other occasion. We may now consider some topic for which no reference to books is needed.

Devotee : As Your Holiness pleases.



2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAME

Acharyal : First, we shall try to understand what is meant by Advaita. How have you understood it?



Devotee : I have heard it explained thus: dvi means two, dvita means the state of being two, that is, two-ness, Dvaitam is the same as dvita. Advaita is therefore that thing in which there is no two-ness or duality.

Acharyal : Quite So. What do you call that something in which there is no two-ness?

Devotee : It is Brahman.

Acharyal : Perfectly right. And by Brahman you mean that basic principle of reality where from the universe derives its existence, whereon it rests and wherein it disappear?

Devotee : Yes.

Acharyal : Let us ignore the word Brahman and its full significance for a moment. You give the name of Advaita to the principle which is responsible for the creation, maintenance and dissolution of the universe?

Devotee : Quite so.

Acharyal : You mean then that there is no two-ness in the principle?

Devotee : Yes.

Acharyal : In other words, you mean that that principle is One and One only?

Devotee : Certainly.

Acharyal : To paraphrase it again, you mean that there are no two such principles?

Devotee : Yes.

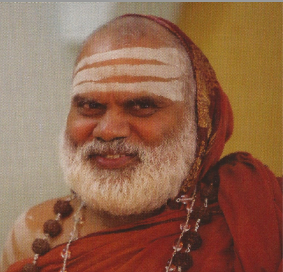
Acharyal : And you claim that our system of thought is rightly called Advaita as it enunciates the doctrine of the non- existence of two such principles?

Devotee : Quite so.

Acharyal : That is alright. Now we shall consider for a moment the other systems of thought, be it Christianity or Mahomedanism, Visishtadvaita or Dvaita, Tarka or Yoga, be it any system of thought which admits the existence of a principle which is responsible for the creation, the sustenance and the dissolution of the universe. Do any of these systems ever proclaim that there are two such principles or do they all agree in proclaiming that there is and can be only one such principle?

Devotee : No system postulates any plurality in God. There may be and is plurality among the devas, who are as much created beings as ourselves, but certainly none in the Supreme Godhead. He is ever One.

Acharyal : Quite so. No system therefore enunciates any duality so far as God is concerned.

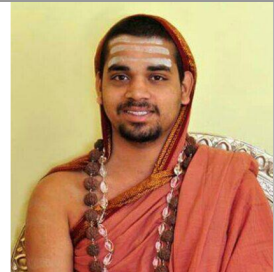


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Devotee : It is so.

Acharyal : Then, every system, inasmuch as it negatives the existence of two Gods is entitled to give the name of Advaita to the God enunciated by it and to appropriate the same name for itself also. If so, what is the justification for your monopolising the name Advaita specially to your God and to your particular system of thought?

Devotee : I pray that Your Holiness may be pleased to explain it.

Acharyal : There is another difficulty. You know that in the Advaita philosophy a practical saguna Brahman and a transcendent nirguna Brahman are both enunciated.

Devotee : Yes.

Acharyal : None of the other systems accepts similar distinction so made and they decline to conceive of Brahman as twofold?

Devotee : Yes.

Acharyal : It would seem therefore that all other systems, except your own, enunciate a single supreme principle and that in your system only there is an enunciation of two supreme principles, the saguna and the nirguna. Strictly speaking, therefore, it would seem that all systems are equally entitled to call themselves Advaita and that, if any system can be disqualified from using that name by reason of enunciating plurality in God, it is certainly your system only that can be so disqualified. The Advaita system is thus not only not exclusively entitled to call itself Advaita, but is not entitled at all to call itself by that name. How do you then call it Advaita?

Devotee : The answer for this also must come only from Your Holiness.

Acharyal : Not necessarily, for you yourself can give the answer quite easily.

Devotee : How?

3. DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

Acharyal : Generally speaking, a particular name gets attached to a particular thing only if some attribute which is denoted by that name happens to be the exclusive attribute of that thing. If an attribute is common between a particular thing and to several others, that particular thing cannot be called by the name which connotes that attribute.

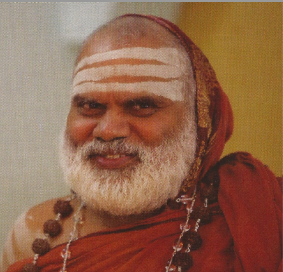
Devotee : Certainly.

Acharyal : A name is therefore given to a particular thing when that thing has an exclusive characteristic of its own which is associated with that name.

Devotee : Quite so.

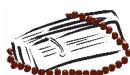
Acharyal : Now, what is the exclusive characteristic of our system of philosophy which is absent in all other systems?

Devotee : I suppose, the doctrine of Maya.

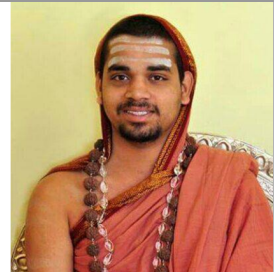


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Acharyal : Quite so; and its implications.

Devotee : What are the implications?



Acharyal : Before we go to that question, what do you understand by Maya?

Devotee : I have heard it explained as the differentiating principle which is responsible for diversity in the universe.

Acharyal : In the universe of matter or in the universe of souls?

Devotee : In both. Maya is the prime cause of all diversity, in the objective as well as the subjective universe.

Acharyal : Then, but for Maya, there can be no diversity at all?

Devotee : I have heard it so said.

Acharyal : Matter, inert as it is, will have no independent existence of its own, but for Maya?

Devotee : No.

Acharyal : Similarly, I suppose, we, individuals as we are now, will have no independent existence of our own, but for Maya?

Devotee : It would seem so.

Acharyal : If we do not enunciate any such differentiating principle as Maya, matter, inert matter, will persist in having an insistent existence of its own consistently with God the Supreme Principle, just as the mud from which a pot is made claims consistent existence with the potter who uses it for making the pot.

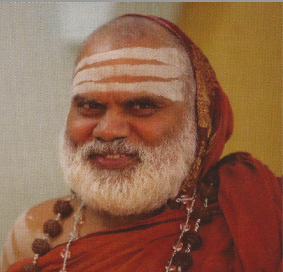
Devotee : It is so. In some other systems, they assign to God only the status of the potter and enunciate instead a primary substance, be it pradhana or the atoms or any other thing, as the material out of which the universe is made.

Acharyal: But there are some systems which deny the independent existence of matter and which enunciate that God is Himself the material cause as well as the efficient cause. That is, He is as much the mud as the potter.

Devotee : Quite so. I think such an idea is formulated by the Visishtadvaitins.

Acharyal : It finds a place in some other systems also. Though they conceive of God as the material as well as the efficient cause of the universe, they do not grant that God is the material cause of individual souls, for souls are not matter; nor is God the efficient cause of such souls, for souls are not 'made'.

Devotee : Certainly not.

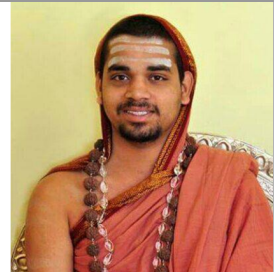


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Acharyal : Then, by postulating that the individual souls are not made but exist from time beginningless, they assign to them an existence, an independent existence, co- eval with God Himself.

Devotee : No doubt so, for they call all souls eternal.

Acharyal : But so do we. The difference between our system and theirs lies not in ascribing eternal existence to the individual soul, but in their ascribing to it eternal independent existence as an individual soul and in our ascribing the eternality to Brahman and in our denying to the soul any existence independent of Brahman.

Devotee : It is so.

Acharyal : Now then, we find that there are some systems which postulate the existence of God as the Supreme Being and at the same time grant the independent existence of matter and also the independent existence of individual souls. In some other systems, God is conceived of as the Supreme Being as well as the primary material cause of the universe of matter, thereby denying to inert matter an independent existence of its own, but conceding such an existence to individual souls.

Devotee : Yes.

Acharyal : It is only in the Advaita system that matter is denied existence independent of God and that the individual soul also is denied existence independent of God?

Devotee : Quite so.

Acharyal : It will be clear now that the distinguishing characteristic, which exclusively belongs to the Advaita system, is its enunciation of the non-existence of the universe of matter or of individual souls independent of God which is called by us Brahman.

Devotee : No doubt, it is so.

Acharyal : It must be then this distinguishing characteristic which is responsible for the name Advaita, which our system has appropriated to itself and by which it is generally known to all.

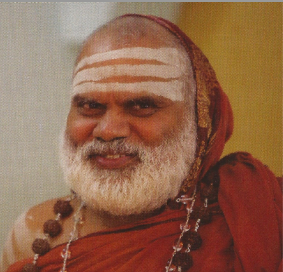
Devotee : Certainly. But how does the name Advaita convey the idea of this distinctive characteristic?

Acharyal : You yourself said that Advaita signified a negation of duality.

Devotee : But Your Holiness pointed out that no religion in the world postulated a duality in God?

Acharyal : Quite so. You committed the mistake of understanding 'negation of two-ness in God' to mean 'negation of two Gods', thereby giving room for my further questions. If Advaita meant only 'negation of two Gods', our system has no sole right at all to appropriate that name to itself; but, if it means on the other hand 'negation of any second principle independent of God', we have got every right, and sole right to monopolise that name for our system. It is only in the latter sense that our system goes by the name of Advaita.

Devotee : I now understand the significance of the name; but there is Maya the differentiating principle which is responsible for the diversity in the universe of matter and of individual souls. Surely, that is a second principle.

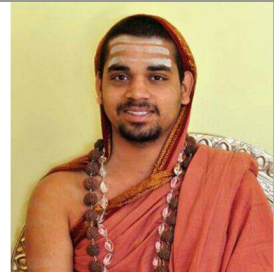


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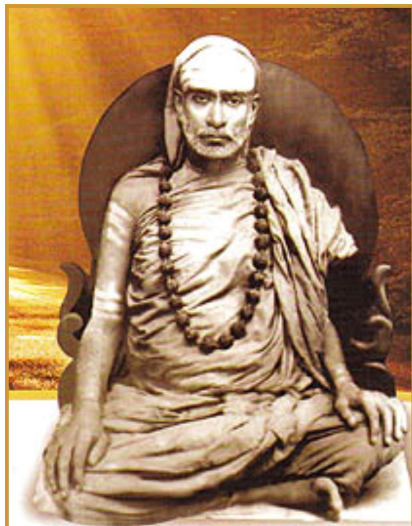
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Acharyal : No. That cannot be a second principle. Viewing it even as the Sakti or Power or Potentiality of Brahman, it can have no independent existence of its own apart from the Sakta, the Supreme Person or Brahman. From the still higher standpoint of absolute truth, it has no existence at all. Maya is the name given to it because it is not (yaa maa), but seems to be, borrowing its seeming reality from the eternal verity called Brahman.



4. OUR IMMEDIATE DUTY

Devotee : The doctrine of Maya is a bugbear to many of the modern scholars and they even go to the length of saying that it is really a weak point in the otherwise sound system of Advaita.

Acharyal : It will be well if it proves so much of a bugbear that the 'modern' scholars leave Advaita alone. The Advaita doctrine is enunciated from a plane which ordinary people cannot aspire

to for very many more births to come. They have absolutely no right to approach it, much less to sit in judgement over it. As at present situated, most of us are far, far below that stage. Frankly speaking, it may take innumerable births for some of us (who do not think of the soul at all) to attain even the stage of the Charvaka or materialist, who thinks that the soul is no other than our physical body itself.

Devotee : I hope we are not so low down as that. The days of rank materialism are past and I am sure we can claim to be astikas or believers.

Acharyal : I am not so sure about that. If you consider for a moment, the significance of the word astika, I feel sure you will yourself hesitate before you claim to be one. An astika is one who says a thing is (Asti) and a nastika is one who says a thing is not (Nasti). Suppose there is a vessel before me. Can a person say that it is and another person at the same time say it is not?

Devotee : Certainly not. If the vessel is, it is for both.

Acharyal : Quite so. Suppose a man says that the Himalaya mountain is, can another man who has never seen it say that it is not?

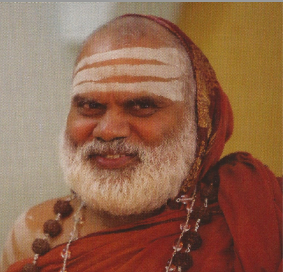
Devotee : No. He can only say that he has never seen it. He cannot deny its existence.

Anand : That is, in your view, if a person says that a thing exists and if the existence of the thing is patent to all or is verifiable by everybody, no other person can possibly say that it does not exist.

Devotee : Quite so.

Acharyal : Therefore, an honest difference of opinion as regards the existence for a thing can possibly arise only if that thing is not manifestly perceived or is incapable of being verified immediately.

Devotee : Quite so.

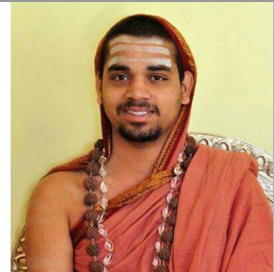


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Acharyal : That there is a future birth is a fact not patent to all and not capable of being verified now. That there are regions of experience other than this earth is also a fact neither patent nor capable of immediate verification. Similarly, the existence of God is not patent to all, nor can it be verified by our limited capacity of perception.

Devotee : No doubt so.

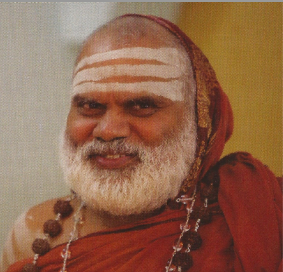
Acharyal : When we call a person an astika, we do not merely mean that he says that any particular thing is; nor, when we call a person a nastika, do we merely mean that he says that that particular thing is not. We limit the term astika to one who asserts these three things: the existence of a future birth, the existence of other lokas of experience, and the existence of God. Similarly, we limit the term nastika to one who denies the existence of these three.

Now, consider for a moment the attitude of the modern man, however educated he may claim to be. Does his daily conduct bear out that he believes in a future birth, a future loka, or even in God? Why does the craze for pleasure increase day by day as if all enjoyment must be had now or never? How is the belief in a future state of experience consistent with the growing neglect of Dharma? What justification is there for the increase in the number of Law Courts and Registration Offices if the people believe in God, the Eternal Witness of all their transactions? Whatever people may choose to say in public and whatever they may think of themselves, I am convinced that astikyam, faith, is going down rapidly. All our present endeavours must be directed towards a restoration and maintenance of this astikyam.

All questions as regards the Ultimate Reality, whether it is one, two or one-and-a-half, have no practical interest for the large majority of us. We may therefore leave such questions for the present and interest ourselves in the practice of our Dharma. Everybody knows that it is wrong to tell a lie. Nobody has the slightest doubt about it. All the same, falsehood is ever on the increase. Everybody knows that it is wrong to cheat another. All the same, cheating is the normal practice in modern life. What is the practical use of enunciating the abstract truth of the Absolute Brahman to people who are not prepared to put into practice the elementary principles of even Samanya Dharma, Ordinary Law.

After securing steadiness in Samanya Dharma, and after purifying and qualifying himself by the earnest practice of Visesh Dharma, the Special Law, prescribed for him, a person attains the requisite standard of competence to enable him to enter on the study of Advaita. The tendency to neglect the wholesome doctrine that Vedantic study is intended only for the competent that is responsible for the confused thinking of modern days. Even for simple crafts, such as masonry or carpentry, a preliminary course of training is required before a person is allowed to handle the instruments; but in the field of Brahma- Vidya, the science of the Self, the highest and the most difficult of all sciences, everybody thinks himself competent and entitled to study the system of Advaita and even to sit in judgement over it. This attitude must go and must be replaced by earnest endeavour first to secure the necessary competence.

If we make an honest attempt to secure that competence by following implicitly the directions of the Sastras and of Guru, the Lord will guide us smoothly along the path or progress, incidently solve all our problems and doubts, free us from all worry and trouble and lead us on to the state of

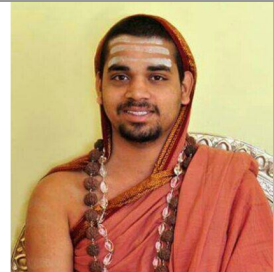


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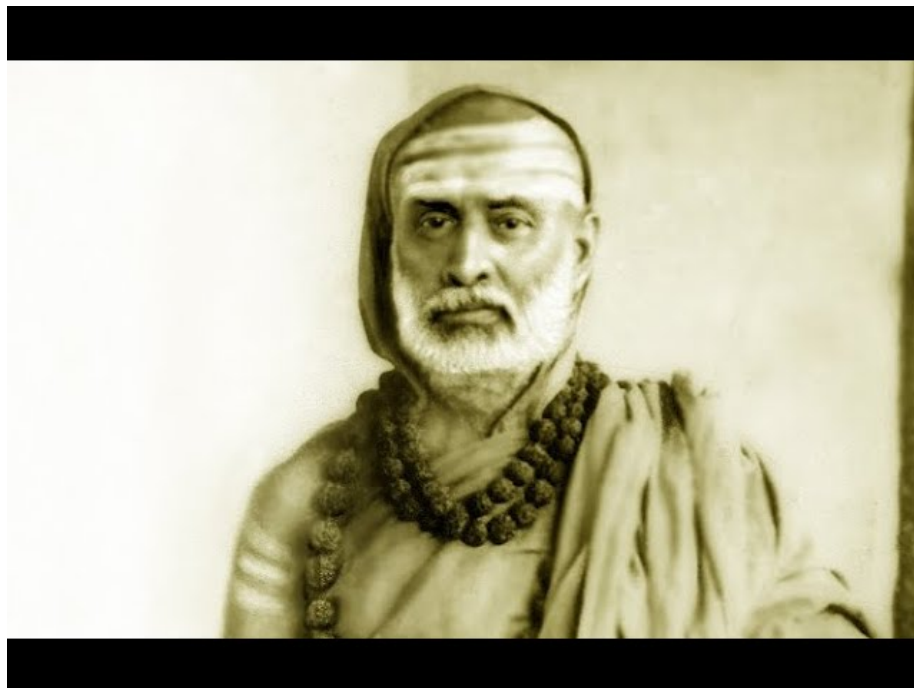
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realisation of the Advaita Reality, the truth and the bliss of the absolute oneness of all in the



undifferentiated Brahman.

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