

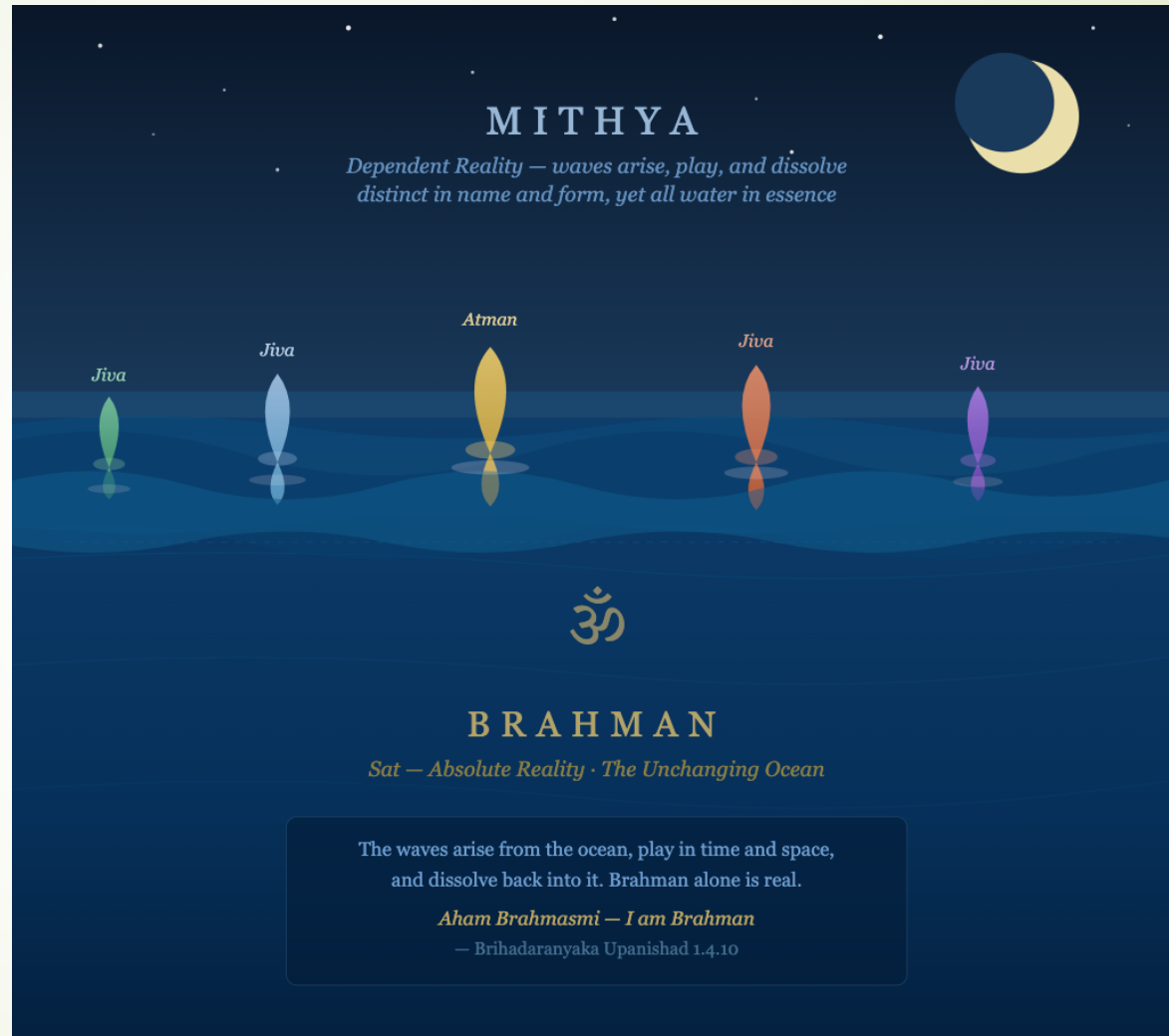
Introduction to Hinduism

Session 2

25

Brahman is the Absolute Reality

Manifestation is the Dependent, or Apparent Reality



Vedānta

Suffering and Liberation

- The goal of spiritual practice is to achieve a tranquil state of mind which can apprehend Reality as it is (the oneness of everything; interconnectedness; *Brahman*) rather than the sense of separation projected by the ego or “I”
- Stated differently, spiritual practice seeks to remove the veil of ignorance (caused by the ego/ sense of separation) so one can apprehend the true nature of oneself, which is nothing but *Brahman*. This is liberation (*mokshā*) from the cycles of birth and death (reincarnation)
- The Golden Rule is similar in intent as envisioned by Vedanta
 - “Do unto others what you would have them do unto you. This is the meaning of the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets” (Matthew 7:12)
 - Seeing oneself in the fellow being – the Oneness of everything
 - Foundation of Compassion

Vedānta

A Common Prayer From Isa Upanishad

This is a reflection on the nature of Reality and it points to the Path to Self-Realization

Om
Purnamadah Purnamidam
Purnat Purnamudachyate
Purnasya Purnamadaya
Purnameva Vashishyate
Om shanti, shanti, shanti

Om

That (*Brahman*) is Complete (Whole, Infinite) and This (manifestation) is complete
From That Infinite this became manifest
If from That Infinity this is taken away
What remains is but the Infinite
Om Peace, Peace, Peace

Vedānta Happiness

- As individuals we are all seeking happiness
- Vedānta defines happiness as cessation of desires (clinging to likes and dislikes)
 - Example: desire to own something leading to agitation, which is satisfied when the desired object is obtained. That state is happiness because the desire has ceased. But that is transient because soon another desire arises and we are back on the same track.
 - This yo-yo of mind leads to dissatisfaction and suffering, keeps the mind agitated and prevents it from seeing things the way they are – and creates *avidya* or ignorance
 - A pond reflecting surroundings when still vs when agitated by winds. A calm mind can see things the way they are and apprehend the true nature of Reality; an agitated mind cannot and is therefore deluded

Vedānta

Preparing the Mind

- Thus, reducing clinging to likes and dislikes (*raga* and *dvesha*) allows the mind to become calm and prepared to see the true nature of Reality, the Essence of All
 - Begin to appreciate that happiness does not come from outside, but from within
- This internal essence of bliss is our true nature and the nature of all that exists – *sat* (existence), *chit* (awareness or consciousness), *ananda* (bliss)
- As long as we see the real (*satya* – independent reality; changeless, permanent) in the apparent (*mithya* – dependent reality; changing, impermanent), there is agitation of mind
- Preparing the mind to accept the wisdom requires practicing the teachings

Vedānta

Discriminative Analysis

- **"Through discriminative analysis separate the Pure Self within from the sheaths covering it like wheat from chaff." Sankaracharya, Atma Bodha, v15**
- **Discriminative analysis achieved through:**
 - **Listening to the words of a teacher, guru (*sravanā*)**
 - **Reflecting on the teaching (*manānā*)**
 - **Meditating to assimilate the teaching (*nidhidhyāsānā*).**
- **This process when practiced diligently will slowly shed ignorance and reveal the true nature of the all-pervading reality which is the Self (*Atman*) or Brahman**

Vedānta

Karma

- **Karma** – is based on action and consequences (moral action; intention).
- It is a complex term with no simple translation in English, but a rough meaning is “a law of cause and effect”
 - You reap what you sow
 - Ethics of personal responsibility
- ...and here they say that a person has desires,
and as is his desire, so is his will;
and as is his will, so is his deed;
and whatever deed he does, that he will reap. (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Ch.4, v5)
- **One's status in the next life (reincarnation) is determined by karma in this life**
 - Good karma will lead to advanced stage of rebirth
- **Concept of transmigration of the soul (metempsychosis or palingenesis) in the West – similar to reincarnation**
 - Greek Orphic religion (6-7 century BCE)
 - Plato
 - Schopenhauer

Vedānta

Karma

- ***Karma* can also mean actions based on the underlying intentions and the results thereof: Our intentions, thought and actions determine the outcome of our actions (*karma*)**
 - “Good”/skillful *karma* leads to purification of mind and reduction of ignorance of the nature of Reality, thus facilitating the spiritual journey toward liberation
 - “Bad”/unskillful *karma* leads to strengthening the ignorance of the nature of reality and hinders progress towards liberation

Vedānta

Karma

- **Three types of Karma**
 - *Sanchitā karma* – accumulated “store” of *karma* from past lives
 - *Prarabdha karma* – Part of Sanchita karma that has “borne fruit” in this lifetime, and underlies the proclivities one is born with – to be exhausted in this lifetime with skillful thoughts, words and deeds
 - *Agami / kriyamana karma* – karma created during the present lifetime
- The goal of spiritual practice is to exhaust *karma*, complete elimination of which leads to *mokshā*, liberation

Vedānta

Reincarnation

- The theory of reincarnation is based on the concept of cause (*karmā*) and effect (reincarnation)
- Existence is an ongoing cycle of birth and death (*samsara*) until all karmas are exhausted
 - When all karmas are exhausted then the *jivā*, individual, has become *jivanmuktā*, liberated individual and is said to have achieved *mokshā*, liberation
 - The liberated individual is free from the cycle of birth and death. The sense of separation ('ego') is transcended, and one merges with *Brahman*, the all-pervading essence
- An individual's station at birth is determined by the quality of *karma* accumulated during the previous incarnation
- Skillful actions lead to exhaustion of the *prarabdḥā* karma that one is born with
 - Skillful defined as intentions, thoughts and actions that are consistent with the concept of interconnectedness of everything (the oneness of *Brahman*)

Vedānta

Reincarnation

- Reincarnation is the belief in the transmigration of the soul
 - The essence of the *jiva* (personality), the *atman* or the soul, is reborn after death
- The form of reincarnation, whether human or animal, is determined by the *karma* (actions) conducted during one's lifetime
- *Karma*, actions, have moral component
 - Good karma leads to reincarnation in a higher form
- Reincarnation applies to gods as well. Heaven, *svarga*, is only a temporary abode!
- Reincarnation is believed in different forms in Indian religions (Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Hinduism).
- Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato also contemplated the concept of transmigration of soul

Vedānta

Samsara

- *Samsara* is the cycle of birth and death
- This cycle continues through multiple births until one achieves liberation, *moksha*
- The quality of one's actions determine progress through multiple incarnations (reincarnation or *punarjanma*) toward liberation
- One can achieve liberation from this cycle by practicing ethical living as taught by the Vedas
 - This is the goal of spiritual practice
- In the present incarnation it refers to the impermanence of all that exists
 - Ignorance of this nature of reality leads to suffering and hinders the path toward liberation (*moksha*)
- Example – how attachment to likes-and-dislikes is contrary to this principle, and ultimately leads to suffering and being caught in *samsara*

Vedānta

Gunas and Karma

- ***Gunas* or tendencies or qualities of a person:**
 - *Sattwic* (balance, harmony, goodness, non-egoistic),
 - *Rajasic* (passion, activity, egoistic),
 - *Tamasic* (imbalance chaos, violent, ignorant).
- **Gunas determine the intention, thought and action of the individual, which in turn determine the accumulation of *karma***
- **Subtle (*sattwic*) actions lead to exhaustion of karma and eventually to liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*moksha*).**
- ***Rajasic* and *Tamasic* karmas lead to further accumulation of Karma thus prolonging the *samsara***
- **Spiritual progress involves evolution of the individual toward *sattwic gunas***