

Jnana Yoga Chapter 16

*Om Namah Shri Ethirajaya Vivekananda Surayeh
Sachit Sukhaa Swaropaya Swaminipaharineh*

We are entering the most interesting part of Jnana Yoga. In India, three schools of philosophy have become most popular. Of these three, one is extremely popular amongst the intellectuals, but the least understood and the least followed. The other two dualistic schools, Dvaita and Visishtadvaita, are most followed and much easily understood. This school of philosophy which propagates, preaches, is called the Advaita Vedanta. And if we have to ask one question, what is Advaita Vedanta, we can never understand it unless we understand the very foundation of the Advaita Vedanta. That is the concept of Maya. If we cannot understand the concept of Maya, we can never understand the propositions of Advaita Vedanta. We all use the word Maya. In fact, I talking about and you listening about, all fall in the realm of Maya. According to Vedanta, let me also clarify one particular misconception. Before Sriramakrishna, the word Vedanta only meant the word Advaita Vedanta. After the advent of Sriramakrishna, he tried to change, and still we are under the past misconception that Vedanta means only the non-dualistic philosophy. It is not true. Our ultimate goal is Advaita. Sriramakrishna's famous saying, tie Advaita or self knowledge at the corner of your wearing cloth and then do whatever you like. This is such a paradoxical statement because there is nobody or nothing to tie, nobody to see and nothing to do. I am reminded of a funny Vedantic verse. There goes the son of a barren woman having bathed in the cooling waters of the sky and having decorated himself the horns of a hare. What does this verse really mean? The person who is saying this verse and the one who is listening to it, both are fools. That is why Bhagwan Krishna, in the second chapter, was forced to say, Ascharyavath Pashyathi Kashchyathenam. Some people look at it with wonderment. Hold it with wonderment. Experience it, they cannot believe it. The person one who listens also does it with wonderment. And even after listening, nobody understands. Why is it that anyone cannot understand it? What is the reason? The secret lies in the very word Maya. What is Maya? Reverse the word as Ya ma. Ya means 'that which' and Ma means 'is not there', and yet we talk about it. Without Maya we can never understand the non-dualistic philosophy. Because one of the very first obstruction we encounter, as soon as we try to understand. First, who are you? who is trying to understand? Second, with which instrument are you going to understand? Thirdly, what is it that you really want to understand? All these three falls under the category of Maya. Maya is that which doesn't exist and Swamiji had to expound that this greatest, most fundamental doctrine. He wanted to preach nothing less than the non-dualistic philosophy, the Advaita Vedanta, in the West. Before starting this series, I had given several reasons, why Swamiji had preached only the non-dualistic philosophy and nothing else. One of the most important reasons is the whole world is becoming connected together in so many ways. Religions are being connected, social customs are being globalised, eating habits are being globalised. Everything has become what we called, a Khichdi, a terrible mixture. In this situation or climate, if at all anything appeals to Man, it is only Advaita Vedanta. Why is it so? It's for one simple reason. I have already dealt with it but reminding here again. There are so many religions and every religion claim that I am the only path to the highest bliss to God. They go on

quarrelling. What could unite them is the philosophy of non-dualism and nothing else. The greatest enemy as well as the greatest friend of all of us is science. Science produces technology. Technology produces gadgets. Gadget make us eat three things, time, space and causation. And what is Maya? It is time, space and causation. Where is time? Gone! From the time I started speaking, I wanted to talk to you about so many things, but nine minutes of time has gone! Time, space and causation are the very fabric of the three gunas. Swamiji's greatest talk was about explaining the highest philosophy in the simplest terms to people who are not familiar. Lest you may think Indians are supremely intelligent and understand Advaita Vedanta. They do understand. Only very few people, that is only realised souls understand what Maya is. No one else. Because the very instrument with which one tries to understand Maya is the main mischievous agent of Maya, which is the intellect. Whatever we try to understand through the mind, through the intellect is pure Maya. What a difficult concept it is! Yet we are living here, denying it, accepting it, we are doing everything here, but at the same time do not understand anything of it. Swamiji was trying to explain something that is not really explainable. What is the description of Maya given by the great Shankaracharya, who is the propagator of Advaita Vedanta? Ghatana Ghatana Patiyase. Maya is that which seemingly makes the impossible possible. It is seemingly, because if really the impossible becomes possible, then it is not impossible. Maya seems to do seemingly impossible things. Maya can do that. Because it doesn't do it. Can you understand? If you wish to understand it, you should understand the analogy of a dream. Anything is possible in a dream. You can fly like a bird. You can be in Delhi in the twinkling of an eye. Be anywhere and do anything you want. That is called Maya. Swami Vivekananda delivered three lectures, each lecture lasting at least one and a half hours in London. We are very fortunate because our Swamiji delivered lectures in our place. That is Maya! Maya and illusion is the first lecture in the series of Maya. Maya and the conception of God, Maya and freedom. Swamiji has lucidly expounded on the concept of Maya in his three lectures, but that's what we are trying to understand. Once I think I mentioned a peculiar statement that Sriramakrishna is an aphorism and Swami Vivekananda is the commentary, at the direct disciple level. Swami Vivekananda is the aphorism and Swami Dayatmananda is the bhashyakarar or commentator. What is Maya? It is time, space and causation or desha, kala and nimita. We all have to spend time. I have to spend my time and you have to spend your time. I have to think I have done something really useful and you should also think you have spent your time very usefully. Because later you will come and tell me it was very illuminating or it is not at all understandable. Whichever statement you make it is a very useful thing. This greatest truth was summarised by Gaudapada in his Mandokya Upanishad, Mandokya Karikas. First of all there is no illusion, or Maya. There is no spiritual aspirant. There is no spiritual practice. There is no bondage. There is no liberation. This is the highest truth. So what are we doing? This is spiritual practice for me. It is spiritual practice for you. And especially in the summer season, in the afternoon!

Coming back, what is Maya? Aghatana Ghatana Patiyese. That seeming impossible feat of making it possible that which is impossible. What is it? That Brahman is made to forget its nature of pure consciousness and make it feel I am not infinite, I am not eternal, I am not unchanging. I am ephemeral, limited and finite. That is one side of the story. What is the other side of the ghatana? This finite man, who can never hope to become infinite, again Maya makes him, the finite seemingly becomes the infinite, apparently the limited becomes the limitless,

apparently the changing becomes the unchanging, apparently the bound becomes absolutely free! This is called Aghatana ghatana patiyese. Sriramakrishna had in his own teachings have dwelt upon this topic. I am going to read as an introduction. Sriramakrishna classified Maya into two. That which is unlimited, that which is infinite makes it feel like I am finite and limited. I am Brahman becomes I am abrahman. Brahman becomes I am brahma by the Vidya Maya. The limited man through the help of the Vidya Maya gains knowledge that I was limited but I am now unlimited. I was finite, I am now infinite. I was changeful, now I am changeless. What a grand Maya, it is!

I would like to start these three series with an introduction, starting with the teachings of Swami Adbuthananda, then the teachings of Sriramakrishna.

Let's start with the teachings of Swami Adbuthananda. Man identifying himself with ego becomes bound by Maya. It is a paradoxical sentence, in a human language. It's not that man becomes bound by Maya. The moment man thinks I am so and so that it self is the bondage. Not that one comes first and the other next. It's like when you are in darkness, you cannot see things. You cannot see things because you are in darkness. That itself is the bondage. Darkness and the inability to see things are not two separate things. Both come exactly at the same time. In creation and destruction, in happiness and misery, in success and failure, in every domain of duality is Maya's play. In short, Maya's play is duality. Duality is Maya's play. Non-duality is just the opposite. What a profound teaching!

If Maya has an independent existence, you can never get rid of it. If it is an illusion you can get rid of it. If it is truth, you can never get rid of it. If Maya is inexistent, eternally we will be here only. That's not the case. All the scriptures emphatically, with one voice, they roar, 'You are free'.

vedaham etam purusam mahantam aditya-varnam tamasah parastat
tam eva vidvan amrta iha bhavati nanyah pantha vidyate ayanaya

Swamiji roared this most inspiring Upanishadic statement at the Parliament of religion. Similarly, Maya is of the infinite being, but not the infinite. Maya bel to God, but Maya is not God.

Sriramakrishna is very fond of saying this statement, 'The wave belongs to the ocean, but the ocean does not belong to the wave.' They are profound Vedantic statements put in very simple words. If you have never studied Vedanta, Sriramakrishna's words will appear to be very simple. But if you have studied Vedanta, this is what he really is trying to restate in his own simple words. Yet, true it is, that the ultimate purpose of the play of Maya is to lead man godward towards the infinite reality. This is a great teaching of Sriramakrishna and his order. Before Sriramakrishna, somehow you have to destroy Maya, never again to be caught in the net of Maya. But Sriramakrishna turned the whole thing upside down. What he says is, Maya is not Maya, but Maya is Guru. Maya is the teacher. Maya will lead you out of Maya. Maya is nothing but the infinite. It's only function in life is slowly to lead us from the state of duality to the state of non duality. This is the function of the Maya. Without Maya, we will be forever here! Actually, it is a wrong statement, because without Maya, we never would have been here. Imagine if every Sunday is a holiday, every Saturday is a holiday, no class, no clash!

The ultimate purpose of Maya is to lead man godward. First Avidhya Maya, the binding part of Maya, the illusory part of Maya. What is the purpose? It is not to drown you, but to give you hard beatings, and slowly awaken you and take you to the highest. Can you believe it? We don't believe it. Unattached and in perfect balance, Maya plays her dual role. On one hand it is she

who lulls man into forgetfulness of his true nature, and again it is she who awakens him to the consciousness of God. These are profound statements specifically on the subject of Maya by Swami Adbuthananda.

To understand what is Maya, I will start with a simple story. A number of you may already know this story. This was dramatically narrated by Swami Vivekananda in the West. What is Maya? There was a great sage called Narada and he was the greatest devotee of Lord Narayana. He had one to one access and could approach Lord Narayana anytime. He had no visa problem or password problem, but could ride straight and go to Narayana anytime. Narada had permanent visa. Once he went and requested Lord Krishna, 'Oh Lord, I have heard so much about Maya, and I would like to know about Maya'. Srikrishna smiled enigmatically, which is also part of Maya, and said he will grant his boon. A few days passed. Narada might have thought that the Lord has forgotten his promise. Often, it looks like that happens. One day Krishna said to Narada that they should go for a walk. This incident happened in South India when the weather was very hot and humid and in the summer season. They went for a long walk, probably with having their breakfast, walked for hours together. Lord Krishna said to Narada that he was feeling very thirsty and to kindly fetch him a glass of water. Fortunately there was a small stream nearby with a small village on the other side of the stream. Narada got a cup and went to the middle of the stream, bent down to fetch some water. Suddenly he found the stream disappeared, the village appeared and he found himself in front of the first house in the village. He knocked on the door, it opened as though someone was waiting for him, and there was the most beautiful gorgeous young girl, so pure and innocent asked him what she could do for him. He asked for a glass of water. She welcomed him inside as it was too hot outside. He was only too glad to be invited inside. Narada forgot who he was. You must remember that Narada is a young man in the bloom of youth, rearing to enter into Srishti, Stithi, Samhara. He asked her what her name was and who she was living with. She said she was the only daughter of her father, her mother was dead, her father was a farmer. He has gone out to the fields to do some horticultural activity. He will be coming home soon before sunset. Possibly provided Narada some food to eat, but Swamiji did not furnish all those details! The food she gave must have tasted like Amrita, in that state of exhaustion and thirst. He enjoyed all that and time passed. What is Maya? Desha, kala and nimita. Now nimita is gone. What for has he come here? The stream. The stream disappeared and he found himself in this village. Now what is left is kala. Kala also was passing. In the evening the farmer came home and was very glad to see in his house a prospective son in law. He said Narada must take rest. Provided first class food cooked specially by that young innocent girl. Now minute by minute, second by second, Narada's mind is engulfed by Moha. First it was Maya now it was Moha. Moha means infatuation. A few days passed. The father said to Narada you are a young man, you have been leading a wandering (useless) life for a long time. He emphatically said you should get married and lead a grihastha life. This is the greatest ashrams in the whole world, which you need to enter. Narada need not have to be told twice because he had already decided in his mind what he was going to do. If the father had refused to give the daughter in marriage to him he would have even murdered him on the spot. He got married to that girl. Slowly the father gave his fields to Narada and said I have only one daughter, everything belongs to you. Narada slowly learnt how to cultivate crops, his father in law died, he had a number of children, became prosperous by the grace of God,

accumulated a lot of wealth. As there was no banking facility in those days, all the money had to be stored at home only, in pots and in several hiding places.

Several years passed, with all his children, he was totally immersed in what we call samsara. He was very happy. When we are happy time passes very quickly. After several years, Narada woke up one morning and found his hair turning grey. One day when he was about to go to his fields, the stream that had disappeared many years back, had a flash flood and flooded his village. The entire village was about to be inundated and everything was going to be damaged. Narada, his wife, his kids and all accumulated wealth had to go to the other side of the stream. These flash floods can be very dangerous. One minute the stream looks dry and the next minute the flood comes and huge elephants can be carried away. Which is why it is called flash flood. Narada had no go but to enter the stream, as to remain there was to court destruction. As he was crossing the wife got snatched away in the floods. Two of his children were sitting on his shoulders, and two were holding on to his hands. One by one they got separated. You can imagine the amount of agony with each separation! It was like the Tsunami. Finally everything was lost, his money was lost, children were lost. All his memories came flooding back to him, how happy he was. From the highest state of domestic bliss he had fallen into the lowest state of unmitigated misery!

He asked, 'Oh Lord, what have you done?' Indians, when something good happens, always say what have I done and when anything goes wrong they always say, 'Oh Lord, what have you done! Once a poor man came to our Sriramakrishna mission. He had twelve or thirteen children. Swamiji asked why he had come there. The man said he was very poor and needed some help. Swamiji found out he was poor because he had many children. He asked the man why he had begotten so many children. The man answered that God had given him those children! Swamiji asked the man to go and ask God for help and not to come to the mission asking for help! This is the funny thing about Indians! They know about Maya, they talk about Maya, the highest philosophy comes from everyone. But, then they need not practice it! Narada was at his lowest depths of indescribable misery and in that state he heard, 'My child, why are you delaying bringing water?' The moment he heard it, all Maya had fallen apart. They were Bhagavad Dhvani, words from the Lord! He looked around and saw Bhagwan Krishna sitting under the tree, holding the tumbler, as he had not filled water yet. How much time has taken for all this drama to take place? It was within a few seconds. Like a dream! Narada quickly filled the water, gave to Bhagwan Krishna, made one sashtanga Pranam, and said, 'Lord, I have a request to make. Please grant me that boon by which I will never again ask you what is Maya.'

Sriramakrishna explained this beautiful story in his own words. Bhagwan was pleased with Narada and asked him to accept a boon from him. Narada asked him for the boon, never ever to fall in the clutches of Maya. God was even more pleased and asked Narada to request one more boon. Narada said if you have to give one more boon, 'May I have motiveless devotion to your lotus feet. I do not want anything from you.' To ask never to have the experience of Maya, that request can come only from one person who had somehow experienced Maya, knows the depth of its misery, and then made this request. It is a very symbolic story. Who is Narada? We are all Naradas. We have asked the Lord, 'Oh Lord, let me experience your Maya.' All of you attending my classes and listening to this talk on Narada and Maya are all part of desha, kala, nimita Maya.

What is Maya? It is that which seems to happen when really nothing happens. Everything happens only under three conditions, desha, kala, nimita. Time, space and causation. That is called Maya. That which doesn't exist but seems to exist, that is Maya. There is Shankara's beautiful commentary in one of the mantras of Kathopanishad, 'Oh, how unfathomable, inscrutable and strange is this Maya. Owing to which every creature, though in reality, identical with the supreme Brahman and instructed as such again and again, doesn't grasp the fact that I am the supreme self. Whereas even without being instructed, he accepts the self as the non-self, I am the son of so and so. Verily deluded by the Maya of the supreme being, all people are wondering and wondering. Shankar goes into ecstasy in describing this indescribable effect of Maya. Nobody can define Maya but we can define the effects of Maya. People always reach out and ask, 'Mum, Dad, where are you? Why am I suffering?' From every corner of the earth these cries are going up to the Lord.

Sriramakrishna is one of the greatest, latest incarnation of the Lord. Before we take up his teachings, I must talk to you about the symbolism of one of the incarnations. One of the ten incarnations accepted by Hinduism is Varaha Avatara. God incarnated as a boar. It is all God's grace. Every story in the mythologies is laden with meaning. Varaha means boar. What can a boar do? It is one of the animals that can successfully dig through the earth. One of the demon carries the earth along with its four vedas to the very bottom of the earth. People started crying. Lord Narayana promised to rescue the earth. He digs deep, goes to the bottom, fights with the Varaha, destroys the demon, rescues the vedas and comes up. Hereby, balance is restored, dharma is reestablished and the world goes on for some. Only for sometime. You know why? Because if it goes on for ever then God will not have the opportunity to come down. He has to come down again and again and we are all eager helpers to make him come down. How do we help? By being Adharmic! Because he comes down only when we are misbehaving. This is a very short story. What is the symbolism of this? Rescuing the Vedas means what? Does it mean a number of books have gone down the drain into the ocean? It means truths that are deeply hidden, which people misinterpret in their own arrogance, pride and scholarship. The ordinary people have no way other than to listen to these people. Because of these various misinterpretations there is so much of quarrel, misunderstandings and non-cooperation. As a result every time the Lord incarnates, he becomes a new Varaha Avatar. He takes up these scriptures, dives deep, brings out the original truths that have been covered. Then he explains to people in the simplest understandable language. There is a song in Sriramakrishna's book, Oh Lord, you have taught us the highest truths, in simplest terms which anybody can read and understand in his or her own way. Of course there are depths of meaning in that, but everyone can understand the common sensical meaning. There are many religions that talk about incarnations. Christianity accepts only one. Except Hinduism and Buddhism no other religion accepts incarnations. Judaism do not accept incarnations but talk about prophets. Islam never accepts incarnations. Mohammed is their Prophet, a very wise man or a pure devotee to whom God dictates His understanding of what life is and what should be done through Prophet Mohammed. What they forget is, every time a new millennium comes, a new age comes, circumstances vastly changes. Under changed circumstances our understanding of spiritual truths also becomes changed. We will be definitely lost. It is at that time that God incarnates, lives that life as an ideal or inspiration and brings out all these truths which are there but as though completely hidden to us. He gives a depth of meaning which we can understand at that

particular age and then makes the hidden path an open path and discovers new paths. What are the four effects of an incarnation? Firstly his name becomes a mantra, his teachings become new scriptures, he himself becomes an object of adoration and meditation, Ishta Devata, or one of the Gods to be meditated upon. Finally, in his name an organisation springs which he tries to preserve with his teachings in tact for sometime. But again, organisations degenerate. These three things remain intact for a long time. If you remember the story of Varaha Avatara, Sriramakrishna reinterpreted the scriptures suitable for this particular age, that which we can understand and also practice. For example, the coinage which was currency in the Mughal's times was not currency in the Nawab's times. Sriramakrishna's expressions on Maya, he does that under four different meanings. They are as four different expressions. The ephemerality and triviality of the world and it's values. As per the fourth commandment of Sriramakrishna, always practice discrimination. God alone is real. Everything else is unreal. What he means by unreality is, that which is of short duration, ephemerality, changefulness is another sense in which Sriramakrishna used to describe Maya.

Second, the falsity of the world, called Mithya, or seeming reality. It is not to be equated with no existence. It is not existence, it is not no existence, it is seeming existence. It is not non existent because you can experience it. You cannot say it is existence because after sometime it is not there. What is existence is permanently, eternally existent. What is non existence is permanently, eternally nonexistent. But whatever is seemingly existent means, it is that which is changing. This changing doesn't happen in the object but changefulness comes because of our perception. When you mistake a rope for a snake, no rope has become a snake here, the rope is outside and snake is in our mind. This is called mithya. Not able to see a thing exactly as it is, mistaking it for something else, that is called mithya or adhyasa, super imposition. This is the second concept.

The third concept is, Brahman in its aspect as power or Shakti, in which the mind arrives as such for the cause of the world. We all live in this world of cause and effect. The moment you see a child you ask whose child it is. That means you are seeking the cause of that child. Everything in our experience falls under the net of cause and effect. If you take the world as a whole you also wonder what is the cause of this world. That power which has caused the world, that power which made this world come into effect, that cause is called Maya.

The fourth concept is expression. The expression of power of the world as twin forces, working for the bondage as well as the liberation of the egos experiencing the world spell. We are all experiencing the world spell. We are all in the world. We are worldly. But, there are two expressions of Maya, Vidya Maya which is the liberating Maya and the binding Maya.

Sriramakrishna used it in the four senses, as the cause of the world, the cause of changefulness of the world, the cause of ephemerality, and also as binding and liberating power.