Swāmi Vivēkānanda cautioned mankind aspiring for spirituality against the darkness and sorrow that envelope those who attempt to pass through life in ignorance of the Ātman. Ātman is the principle of man’s life, the soul that pervades his being, his breath or prāṇa, his intellect or prajñā and yet transcends them. The Ātman is the eternal 'within' of all the phenomena of nature, but the phenomena do not know It, nor can they ever know it. But there is one phenomenon of nature that can know the Ātman and that is man. It is in man alone that nature has evolved and attained that development that is necessary for the recognition and realization of the Ātman. But, today, man in spite of his obvious limitations, thinks too much of his strength and glory, but little realizes that all this only ends in death. If only man knows and realizes the one, the source of all strength, glory and excellence in men and nature, life would become most blessed for him and he would become fearless of death, for life is trivial if it does not overcome death in the knowledge of the deathless self, the one self in all – the Ātman.

Discussing, on the nature of the all pervading Ātman, Swāmi Vivekānanda propounded that the Ātman, the absolute and infinite Reality, beyond the categories of speech and thought is beyond the categories of both the known and the unknown. It cannot be

classified as unknown for it is the most known of all. It is the Dṛk or the Eternal Seer, the self of all. Again it is not known as substance of objective experience, but it is the self of the knower himself and in this sense is most known than any other object. To sum it all, the self or Ātman is different from what is known and it is beyond what is unknown.

The self or Ātman is beyond the world of the sensate and yet it imprints upon us occasionally through sense experiences. No doubt our daily experience tells us that all our knowledge comes though the senses and their relativeness, yet the fact is that, "There is a changeless reality at the innermost core of man unborn, ageless, deathless and fearless, which is revealed to the intelligence of the wise, and which expresses itself through the functions of the ear and other sense organs, being the one source of all their divergent energies"¹ This is to say that Ātman as the true self of man is none but that intelligent and changeless subject behind the activities of the changeful mind, senses and ego of the individual. Ātman is never to be understood as a mere concept, for it is the very principle of awareness which imparts meaning to all concepts and statements.

In accordance with the view of the Swāmi Vivēkānanda every one and everything is the Ātman or the Self, which beyond all, it is the infinite and ever blessed one. It is that existence which is beyond the known, beyond the knowable and it is in and through that very Ātman that we see and experience this universe.

All the material universe of name and form is but a mere reflection of that One Eternal being or Atman. In reality the whole of this universe is one unity of existence. It is stated that, "Everything in the universe has this subtle reality for its self. That is the true, that is the Atman, and That Thou Art." Since the Atman is the essence of the entire cosmos, in this Atman is sustained the entire activity of the cosmos. The cosmic energy in which all the different forces of nature are unified, but an infinitesimal play of the Atman within itself.

The self or Atman can be aptly described as that perpetual, abiding light, through which alone the universe lights up in its various projections. The Atman is that which is immortal, it neither lives nor dies, it is that which has neither movement nor change and which endures when everything else disintegrates. Its true nature is Pure Consciousness, and Pure Awareness, and as such it lights up all acts of knowledge and awareness of the mind. In this manner Atman is 'Pratibodhavidhitam' or in other words known though every pulsation of knowledge and awareness "That which clearly manifests Itself in the waking, dream and dreamless sleep states, which is inwardly perceived in the mind, in various forms, as an unbroken series of 'I' impression, which is the witness of the ego, buddhi or intellect, etc. Which are of diverse forms and modifications, and which shines as the eternal existence - knowledge bliss absolute, know thou this Atman, thy own self, within thy heart".

1. Chāndogya Upaniṣad. VI 8.7
2. Śvāmi Rāgavīthananda, Op. Cit., P.224
Thus the Ātman is in all things and entities as their changeless essence. "The Ātman exists undivided in things apparently divided". This Ātman cannot be attained through a mere study of scriptures or by hearing discourses about it. It is not to be considered as an object of the world of the not self which can be discovered by certain worked out means. Swāmi Vivēkānanda says, "No books, no scriptures, no science can ever imagine the glory of the self that appears as man, the most glorious god that ever was, the only god that ever existed, exists or ever will exist." Our limited vision sees only those aspects of things which appear finite, but the fullness of being or truth is an ever present fact which can be seen through internal reflection or 'adhyātma-vidhi. What is required is that man is to be educated in the of his own divine nature, which is ever pure, and free from all sin or error. This self knowledge or Ātmajñāna is the glorious, eternal knowledge of the one self which is the self of all. This knowledge is most essential for only this can restore to mankind freedom, purity and perfection. Swāmi Vivēkānanda says that we have to go beyond the senses of the mind through Jñāna & Dhyāna and through the inner vision one can attain that knowledge which is blissful & knows no boundaries. It is a Jñāna-sāgara. Which can be attained by mystical experience. That is the true art of religion or Vedānta which is practical in nature.

1. Bhagavad Gītā XIII 16
2. Swāmi Vivēkānanda - Complete Works Vol I P 250
Swami Vivekananda taught that Atman, as the self, is something that can be best known through realization and the way to realize it is by carefully separating it from the conglomeration of senses and mind. It is only when man realizes that he is not this body, not this bundle of sensations, thoughts and emotions, but that he is essentially divine, that he comes to realize or know divine, that he comes to realize or know Atman.

But again this is not so easy, it requires penetrating discrimination, deep reflection and concentration, for the Atman to be known and realized is none but the very self of the seeker. Hence to 'know' or realize the nature of Atman, the divinity inherent in man marks the culmination of the evolutionary process in human life. This evolutionary process involves the whole process of spiritual and ethical discipline which leads to the awareness of the spiritual reality behind man and nature. It is only through spiritual knowledge and discipline that one becomes aware of the unity behind the world of differences. That unity is termed as Atman - the one underlying reality or Absolute which is none other than Brahman.

Atman is identified with Brahman, both being the same one Reality. Brahman is not merely the transcendent, luminous other, but it is also the Universal Spirit which is the basis of human personality and its ever renewing, vitalising power. In fact Brahman as the first principle of the universe is known through Atman, the inner self of man. God as Swami Vivekananda

believes in both the wholly other transcendent, beyond this world and its individuals and yet he enters into man and forms the inmost content of his very existence (Tatsr̥tatva Jādevānu Prāvisat) Thus the Ātman which is the inmost individual being is Brahman only (Eyam Ātma Brahmaḥ) the inmost being of universal nature and all its phenomena.

The realization of this identity of the infinite and immortal self, the Ātman and the all pervading consciousness, the Brahman as absolutely one reality is the Śunnum Benu of Swāmi Vivēkānanda's process of spirituality. "When the self-controlled spiritual aspirant realizes in this very body, the truth of Brahman through the truth of the Ātman, self luminous as light, then, knowing the Divinity which is unborn, etenal and untouched by the modifications of nature, he is freed from all sins (bondage) " . Thus the culminating point of the Advaita Vedānta as Swāmi Vivēkānanda preached is the spiritual unification of all experience in the Ātman or Brahman. Again it is said, "This Brahman is without a prior or a posterior, without interior or exterior this Ātman is Brahman, the experiencer of everything." Hence to know, realize and experience the true nature of reality as Ātman is to know realize and experience the reality and experience the reality of Brahman.

1. Svetāsvatara Upaniṣad.II.15
2. Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad.II 5.19
CHAPTER - 9

Māyā

Ages ago Indian thought discovered that whatever is conditioned by space, time and casualty belongs to the category of the relative. As a consequence of this, it quite naturally follows that the entire world of sense, perception, though, and ever the ego, all come under the category of the relative. Being relative, as they are, they fall within the network of cause and effect and are conditioned in time. This phenomena of the relative found in the field of space and time is what the Vedānta terms as 'Māyā'. The Vedānta declares that all which lies within the range of speech, thought and human perception, falls within the net of relativity or in other words lies in the category of Māyā. This view means that all human activities and relationships, all worldly desires, ethical strivings and even religious aspirations lie within this framework of what is otherwise known and believed to be 'Māyā'. "Māyā is coeval with life. We do not know how or when we got into it. Nobody walks into an illusion consciously. We can only know how to get out of it. It is a false identification of the Real and Unreal".

The Advaitic view of Māyā is neither Idealism nor Realism, nor is it a theory, but on the other hand it is viewed as a simple statement of facts of what we are in this external world and what we see around us. Swāmi Vivēkānanda says while discoursing on the nature of Māyā, "Māyā is not a theory for the

explanation of the world; it is simply a statement of facts as they exist, that the very basis of our being is a contradiction, that everywhere we have to move through this tremendous contradiction, that wherever there is good, there must also be evil, and wherever there is evil there must be some good, wherever there is life, death must follow as its shadow, and everyone who smiles will have to weep and vice versa." Again he says, "this eternal play of light and darkness, indiscriminate, indistinguishable, inseparable, is always there. A fact, yet, at the same time, not a fact; awake, and at the same time asleep. This is a statement of facts, and this is what is called Mayā. We are born in the Mayā, we live in it, we think in it, we dream in it. We are philosophers in it, we are spiritual men in it, nay, we are devils in this Mayā, and we are gods in this Mayā. Stretch your ideas as far as you can, make them higher and higher, call them infinite, even these ideas are within this Mayā. It cannot be otherwise and the whole of human knowledge is generalization of this Mayā, trying to know it as it appears to be. In this way Mayā is but a statement of the fact of the nature of this universe and of how it is evolving itself.

According to the teachings of Śvāmi Vivēkānanda, for Advaita, Mayā is not real for the Real is the Absolute only. The 'Pure Being' which is the Absolute is non dual and the indivisible infinite. So whatever status is given to the concept of Mayā is that which can have reality or value for thought only, which identifies it purely for practical purposes, as 'not-

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1. Śvāmi Vivēkānanda - Complete works, Vol. II, P-27
real', -- the Real being the Absolute only, and not unreal -- the unreal being the counter positive of the ideas like the hare's horns, etc. This is to say that the first version denies to Māyā the state of absolute reality and the second grants it only a practical or conditional reality. The reason underlying this granted status of the term Māyā is that it is contradictable and whatever is contradictable is not Real in the true sense, and again, Māyā, in its version as conditional reality presents itself as the material source of the objective world of experience which man interacts with as practically real. Thus Māyā is a category of thought which appears to be accepted conditionally operating within the relative framework of space and time but never absolutely. This means that Māyā can neither be definitely described as either Real nor unreal for apart from Brahman which is the only Reality, it has no existence but at its best can only be described as indescribable or anirvacanīya.

It is the doctrine of Māyā which is the explanation for the world appearance. This view of Māyā states the fact that Brahman without losing his integrity is the very basis of the world. Brahman through the veil of Māyā is conceived as Tāvāra. Māyā is the power of Tāvāra from which the world of name and form arises. Māyā is that which measures out mould forms in the formless 'Miyate annene yeti Māyā'. But God or Tāvāra has control over Māyā, for he is not subject to it. Tāvāra has in him the power of manifestation, non-manifestation and other manifestation -- 'Kartham, -a-kartum, anyatha kartum'. The Svētasvātata Upanīshad describes God as Māyin -- the wonder working powerful, Being, who
creates the world by his powers of Māyā. Māyā is also used for Prakṛti, the objective principle which Iswara used for creation. While prakṛti is said to be the Māyā of God, its varied forms seem to be external to us individual souls. This is the source of our ignorance of its real nature, for the world has the tendency to delude us into thinking that it is the all self-dependent reality. Māyā is a quality which finds its locus in sentient beings. It is a type of ignorance or avidya, that is beginningless but it is not eternal like Brahman, for it is destroyed or overcome with the dawn of right knowledge and Brahman realization.

The function of Māyā is two-fold, āvarana and vikṣepa one is that it suppresses and conceals the real nature of the object and in its place projects some other one. It conceals the true Reality - that is, Brahman and projects in its place the Universe with its multifarious world of souls. In this way it not only prevents mankind from apprehending Brahman but also projects something else in its place namely the Universe as the reflection of Brahman. Māyā is 'vyāvahārika' or merely a Pragmatic Reality. On the transcendental level only Brahman is true, Māyā is merely its reflection in the practical world and therefore the ever pure Brahman is untouched and unaffected by Māyā.

According to Svāmi Vivēkānanda the senses and the influence exerted on them by the empirical world drag the human soul out, urging man to go on seeking for pleasure and happiness where it can never be found. Man feels with every breath and pulsation of

1. S'veta's'vatara Upaniṣhad. III. 10
2. Svāmi Vivekānanda - Complete works, Vol. F-102
the heart, he exhausts his limited intellect, thinks his will to be supreme, thinks that he is free in everyone of his movements, but he is ultimately shown that he is not so, for he is a bound slave of nature and all that he experiences is what is \textit{M\=ya}. And \textit{it is but truism} that men born in \textit{M\=ya}, live in \textit{M\=ya} are slaves of \textit{M\=ya}.

No doubt the lives of mankind are enshrouded in this dense veil of \textit{M\=ya}, but still as the truth of knowledge dawns, there is arisen, the feeling of the urge to find a way out of this \textit{M\=ya}. There are two ways of coming out of \textit{M\=ya} - One which gives the bold assertion that all talk about \textit{M\=ya} is nonsense and what should be concentrated upon is life itself and not religion. This view asserts and encouraged men, to live life, making the best of what it is - thus showing them into a hypocritical and false life which would be unworthy of itself. Dealing with this inadequacy of being content with the life of the relative world Sw\=ami \textit{Viv\=ek\=ananda} says, "According to the agnostics, we must enjoy life as it is. But this life means, above all, this search after the ideal; the essence of life is going towards perfection. We must have that, and, therefore, we cannot be agnostics, or take the world as it appears. The agnostic position takes this life, minus the ideal component, to be all that exists; and this, the agnostic claims, cannot be reached. Therefore, he must give up the search. This is what is called \textit{M\=ya}, this nature, this universe."

\begin{footnote}
1. Sw\=ami \textit{Viv\=ek\=ananda} - Complet works - \textit{M\=ya} and Illusion; Vol.II P-102
\end{footnote}
Therefore, there is another way that can and should be opted and that is, the most hopeful assertion that when one goes beyond Māyā, there is way out. And it is this search for what is beyond Māyā that is the burning urge behind all ethics and the search of religion. Swāmi Vivākṣānanda aptly says "All religions are more or less attempts to get beyond nature .... all have that one object, all are trying to get beyond these limitations. In one word, they are all struggling towards freedom .... the way out is not with Māyā but against it.". Thus beyond Māyā there is something which is not bound by Māyā and on reaching it man is freed from the shackles of Māyā. This Reality found beyond Māyā is beautifully brought out in the Śvetāśvatara Upanīṣad which says, "Know Nature to be Māyā, and the great God to be the Lord of Māyā. This whole Universe is pervaded by Him through beings which form His parts". Hence, the Vedānta teaches that there is Māyā or nature and there is one being who is the Ruler of this Māyā. He is one who is beyond all the manifestations of Māyā and is independent of Māyā and most important of all is that he is calling all towards His Truth. It goes to say, "This my Maya is divine, made up of qualities, and very difficult to cross. Yet these who come to me, cross the river of life" - "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy ladder and I will give you rest."

1. Ibid. P.103-4
2. Śvetāś'varta Upanīṣad.IV.10 369

"Dāvī hṛṣa guṇamayā mama māyā dūrāyā
Mām eva ye prāpadyaṁ māyāṁ etāṁ taraṇī. Qa. - Gītā-VII.14."