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

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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, indiscriminately, 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 Māyā. We are born in the Māyā, 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 Māyā, and we are gods in this Māyā. Stretch your ideas as far as you can, make them higher and higher, call them infinite, even these ideas are within this Māyā. It cannot be otherwise and the whole of human knowledge is generalization of this Māyā, trying to know it as it appears to be'. In this way Māyā 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 Swāmi Vivēkānanda, for Advaita, Māyā 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 Māyā is that which can have reality or value for thought only, which identifies it purely for practical purposes, as 'not-

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 Īśvara. Māyā is the power of Īśvara 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 Īśvara has control over Māyā, for he is not subject to it. Īśvara has in him the power of manifestation, non-manifestation and other manifestation -- 'Kartham, -a-kartum, anyatha kartum'. The Svētasvātara 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 Iśwara 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 vikṛṣepa 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 'vyūvahārika' 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 Śvāmi 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'vetas'vatara Upaniṣhad. III. 10
2. Śvāmi Vivēkānanda - Complete works, Vol. P-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 Māyā. And it is but truism that men born in Māyā, live in Māyā are slaves of Māyā.

No doubt the lives of mankind are enshrouded in this dense veil of Māyā, but still as the truth of knowledge dawns, there is arisen, the feeling of the urge to find a way out of this Māyā. There are two ways of coming out of Māyā - One which gives the bold assertion that all talk about Māyā 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 Swāmi Vivēkānanda 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 Māyā, this nature, this universe."

1. Swāmi Vivēkānanda - Complet works - Māyā and Illusion; Vol.11 P-102
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 1 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 Śvetasvātara Upaniṣhad 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. Śvetas'vara Upaniṣhad. IV.10 369

'Daivi hyeṣa guṇamaṇyāt mama māyā devatayanā
dhīm eva ye propagante māyām etam taram iti.' - Gita. VII.14.