

# Ignorance Decoded

By Jayant Kapatker

## Ignorance Decoded

If you are a student of Vedanta, you will hear the word 'Ignorance' very often. The word used in Vedanta is avidya. Vidya means knowledge and avidya means the lack of knowledge or ignorance. Ignorance or avidya is one of the most common words used in Vedanta. This is because ignorance is the cause of all suffering and unhappiness in our daily life, and Vedanta provides a solution to overcome this. Ignorance is the cause of this birth and all future rebirths. Ignorance traps you in this recycle of rebirths because of our attachment to worldly objects. If you go deeper, Vedanta teaches that ignorance is the cause for the duality in this world – the separation of the subject and object. This separation of the subject and object is the underlying cause for the creation of the mind and the suffering thereafter. Also, the form of all the objects in the world is made of ignorance. Trees, stars, living beings and everything in this universe are made of ignorance only. In the famous snake/rope example, ignorance has the power to create a snake, when there is no snake but only a rope. In the same way all the objects in the world are created by ignorance. Ignorance is very powerful. It is so deep rooted, and it has the capacity and capability to do all these things and more. Ignorance or avidya may seem like a simple English or Sanskrit word but it has the power to afflict us in so many ways.

Ignorance is the opposite of knowledge - it is the lack of knowledge. Lack of knowledge of what? In general, ignorance could be a lack of knowledge of anything and everything. Knowledge is all encompassing. Knowledge of Chinese language, knowledge of rocket science, knowledge of golf, knowledge of the mind. We can go on and on, adding topics to this list – we will find that this list is limitless. Knowledge is a limitless trove of subjects and topics. Human minds are limited but it still seems that the knowledge trove for human beings is limitless. There is a much larger trove of knowledge which is beyond the human mind. Against this limitless list, over the years human beings have acquired knowledge of a limited number of topics. For these limited topics also, our knowledge is partial and incomplete, there is always more to learn. Learning never ends. It is quite safe to conclude that we have limited knowledge and more ignorance of anything and everything around us.

All this is the knowledge or ignorance of worldly objects. Vedanta does not talk about this type of knowledge or ignorance. Vedanta talks about the knowledge of our true nature, who we really are. What is our underlying reality? This knowledge is more critical and important than any knowledge about objects. As Vedanta teaches, if you have complete knowledge about yourself, then you have knowledge about everything else in the world. This knowledge about yourself is the source or cause of all the possible knowledge. This is the level of importance.

Unfortunately, our ignorance about this fact is deep rooted. We have limited or no knowledge or even wrong knowledge. All this ignorance plays havoc in our day to day life. So, what is the solution? The only solution is to eradicate ignorance. How? By acquiring knowledge. We just learned that ignorance is powerful, but it must be noted, that knowledge is much more powerful. Knowledge has the power to remove this ignorance. Ignorance has the power to create the snake instead of the rope, but the knowledge of the rope removes the existence of the snake. Knowledge trumps over ignorance!

So, how do we gain this knowledge? To effectively gain knowledge, we need to understand the role of ignorance. This is important because ignorance obscures and hides the knowledge of our true nature. To peel-off ignorance, we need a better understanding about the functioning of ignorance. The more we know about ignorance, the easier would be the job of knowledge to remove the veil of ignorance. Ignorance and knowledge are the two sides of the same coin. To gain the ultimate knowledge, it is critical that we understand the role played by ignorance. If we understand the functioning of ignorance and the role it plays, it will help us in reaching the goal of truly understanding and assimilating the 'ultimate knowledge'.

The focus of this article is to answer these questions. To give a better understanding about ignorance. First, we will try and understand who we are, and how Ignorance obscures this fact. We will then understand how ignorance interacts and afflicts our minds. Finally, based on the teaching of Vedanta we will try and explain how to remove this ignorance.

- Understanding 'Who am I'
- Profile of Ignorance
- Ignorance and the Mind
- Removing Ignorance

## **Understanding 'Who Am I'**

Who Am I? Many people may not ponder about this question, because they are very sure - they are the body/mind complex. They are born with the body/mind and they have grown up with this body, so the association with the body is deep rooted. A simple question to ask is which part of the body are you? Are you the hands or legs, or the eyes? They may answer, we are the cumulative total of all the body parts? If so, what happens to the person, if they lose a hand, leg or vision in some accident. Do they feel incomplete, do they feel only a fraction of the total? They answer, despite losing a body part, they still feel complete. Their self is not a fraction but is always full. This goes to show that they are not the body but something else. But what?

Another way to look at this is to ask yourself the question, are you the tree outside the window? You will look shocked and reply – of course not! Why aren't you the tree? Because you can perceive the tree, you know it is a tree, you are aware of the tree. Since you are the knower, the tree is known to you. It is for this reason, you are not the tree. This logic and reasoning will apply to all the external objects out there. This means that if you know something or you are aware of something, you cannot be that thing. You know it is a car, book, plants, etc., therefore it cannot be you. You are the witness of these objects. You are something other than these objects. It is quite simple and straight forward with external objects in the world. What about our body? Do you know or are you aware of your hands, legs and all the body parts? Of course, you are. So, we can apply the same logic as used for external objects. Applying the same reasoning, you will realize that your body and body parts are external to you. You are aware of your body and body parts; therefore, you cannot be the body. Then you may say you are the mind. The mind is full of thoughts made up of perceptions, feelings and emotions. There is a never-ending stream of thoughts. Once again you are very much aware of what is happening in your mind. You are the witness to your thoughts. There is no thought which you don't know or which you are not aware of. This also means that you are not the mind. As a next step, you may say you are the ego. This maybe close but the ego is only a thought, like any other thought masquerading as the Self. Below, are some of the typical statements made by the ego

- I am a father
- I am a son
- I am a husband
- I am a writer
- I am a meditator
- I am player (of golf)

All the above are the different roles played by the ego. You are aware of each and everyone of these roles. You know you are a son, father, husband, etc. If you are aware of these roles of the ego, then you are a witness of them, so you cannot be your ego.

So, what are you or who am I? As Vedanta teaches there are only two things in this universe. The Self and all the external objects. The universe is that simple. This does seem logical and not complicated. We obviously are not the external objects – not this body, not this mind nor any of the objects in the world. We are the Self who witnesses all the external objects.

Who is the Self? What is the nature of the Self? Self is your inner most core, it is beyond your body, mind and ego. Vedanta teaches us that our true self is SatChitAnanda. Let us now discuss what we mean by 'Sat Chit Ananda'.

**Sat:** Sat means 'Real'. According to Vedanta, for anything to be Sat, it must exist and be present in all the 3 tenses – past, present and future. If you investigate nature, you will not find anything which is Sat.

- This universe was born 13.7 billion years ago and therefore it did not exist before that. So, it cannot be Sat, also we know if anything is born it must die. So, Sat must be unborn and anything which is unborn must be uncreated (to make it existent, forever).
- Everything which is born must have a cause. You were born because of your parents and they were born because of their parents. Since Sat is unborn it is also uncaused. No cause created it, it was and it will always be present.
- If anything changes in anyway small, e.g. (atoms have been displaced) or big, e.g. (planetary positions are different), it is not the same as what it was before. Therefore, it cannot be Sat, because Sat is unchanging.

Atma or 'I' or Self is Sat and it is uncreated, uncaused and unchanging.

**Chit:** Chit means 'Awareness'. Many books will also translate this as Consciousness but I feel this is not very accurate. Awareness is a better way to understand this. Shortly, we shall discuss Awareness in more detail.

**Ananda:** Your essential nature is Ananda or Bliss. This term can be confusing because we do get momentary bliss in our day to day lives and this is not the Ananda we are talking about. Our inner core is full and complete. When there are no additional needs or wants, our inner core is at complete peace with itself. This peace and completeness is our inner core, and this is the Ananda we are talking about.

#### **Issues with SatChitAnanda or Brahman**

- The goal is to discover this inner core of SatChitAnanda within us. The other term used for SatChitAnanda is Brahman. According to the scriptures Brahman is the underlying reality of the universe. It is the substratum of the universe. The scriptures then make a connection by saying that SatChitAnanda, which is our inner core is the same as Brahman, the underlying reality of the universe. This is completely correct and the only truth. Unfortunately, I have been studying Vedanta for over 15 years and I find this confusing. This maybe my problem but it would seem that you have to discover another object out there which Brahman is or look within us to discover SatChitAnanda. The connection is not intuitive and not easy to assimilate. They seem like objects but both SatChitAnanda or Brahman are not any objects, it is our inner core. It is our Self. Unfortunately, these terms do not convey this effectively - at least to me.

- The other problem I face, the term SatChitAnanda or Brahman do not convey the inherent awesome power it has. It has the power to create everything in the universe - all the possible objects. It is also the witness of everything in the universe. We discussed earlier that there are only two things in the universe - the witness and all the objects in the universe. SatChitAnanda is both the witness and creator of all the objects. It is both the Subject and Object. Within SatChitAnanda there is no distinction between subject and object. Subject is object and object is subject. This unique relationship and understanding is not very clear with the term SatChitAnanda or Brahman. Sometimes, SatChitAnanda is referred to as Sakshi (Witness) and sometimes it is referred to as creator with Maya Shakti. This unity of Subject and Object is not very explicit with SatChitAnanda. This adds a layer of confusion in this subject matter.
- The source of any mind is SatChitAnanda. Everything comes from SatChitAnanda only, including the mind. We know the mind is powerful. All these powers in the mind is due to the grace of SatChitAnanda only. According to Vedanta, you can breakdown the mind into the following structure.
  - Manas (mind)
  - Buddhi (Intelligence)
  - Sakshi (Witness)
  - Ahamkara (Ego)

Unfortunately, there is no proper discussion in the scriptures on how SatChitAnanda, which is the source of everything, becomes the mind. How a non-dual SatChitAnnada becomes manas, buddhi, sakshi and ahamkara? Why not something else? What is the connection between SatChitAnanda and these 4 parts of the mind? How do these 4 parts interact with each other in the mind to create the universe out there? This lack of proper explanation does cause confusion. It makes the proper understanding of SatChitAnanda or Brahman more difficult and makes the subject matter more mysterious.

Over the years, I have discovered that understanding 'Self Awareness' is a better way to know your inner core or your true Self. If you get a proper understanding of Awareness and the inherent powers within Awareness, it will answer the objections mentioned here and bring clarity to understanding your inner core or Self.

### **Understanding Self Awareness**

To understand Self Awareness, it is necessary to understand what Awareness is. Then again, the pre-requisite to understanding awareness is to analyze the experiences we have. So, let us start

with our experiences. All our perceptions, feelings, thoughts and current thinking are nothing but the experiences we have. When we are awake, there is hardly a moment when we do not have some sort of experience. Experience can only happen in the mind and nowhere else.

**Experiences Decoded:** The following simple equation is a perfect analysis of an Experience.

Experience = Awareness + Form

We are always aware of our experience. We can never say we had an experience, but we are not aware of it. This is simply not possible because awareness is a critical pre-requisite and ingredient of an experience. You are having an experience because you are aware of it. If there is no Awareness, there can be no Experience. We are aware that we have a non-stop and continuous flow of experience. Usually no two experiences are the same, the 'form' part of the experience is always different and keeps changing. Sometimes it is visual, sometimes it is auditory and sometimes it is based on memories. The Forms keep changing, the Experience keeps changing and so does the underlying Awareness, also, keeps changing? Our experience confirms that Awareness will always remain the same. The Form part is superimposed on the unchanging Awareness to complete the Experience.

The common factor in everyone's experience is Awareness. This Awareness seems to be present in everyone's mind. Can there be so many different Awareness's? Is the same Awareness present in everyone's mind? Is your Awareness different from mine and everyone else? These questions will answer themselves once we get a better understanding of what we really mean by Awareness.

Awareness is the most powerful force in the universe and it is the underlying reality of this universe. It has the power to connect with a Form present in the mind and create an Experience which you are aware of. For an analogy, think of the sun. When there is no light from the sun, you cannot see anything but in the presence of light everything becomes visible. In the same way when any form which comes in the presence of the light of Awareness, the experience bulb lights up in your mind and you are aware of the form. If you think about it, even the light of the sun is a form in the presence of the light of Awareness.

If you carefully study Awareness, you will conclude that the Awareness is made up of a Subject and Object with the following functions -

1. There must be a Subject, who is Aware of the experience. This subject is the knower of the Awareness
2. There must be an Object, which must be experienced. This object is the known part of the Awareness

3. There must be Intelligence by which the subject gets to know the object. This is the knowing part of the Awareness

Knower, Known and Knowing are the 3 powers of Awareness. It must be clear that

- Awareness = Subject + Object + Intelligence
- Power of Awareness = Power of Knower + Power of Knowing + Power of Known

Awareness is made of Subject, Object and Intelligence, and it has three different powers - Knower, Knowing and Known. It must be understood that the Subject and Object, and the three powers are not something outside in the world, but they are within Awareness and make up Awareness. If any one of them is missing, the awareness will not work and will be incomplete.

- If there is an object to be observed but there is no subject, there will be no awareness, as there is no one to see the object.
- If there is a subject but no object to see, there will no awareness as the subject has no objects to observe.
- If there is an object but the subject has no way of knowing what this object is, no awareness will take place. This knowing must have intelligence.

Wherever there is awareness, the Subject, Object and Intelligence must be present with all the three powers. In the article "Understanding the Mind - Part 1" we have given a detailed analysis of the 3 powers – power of Knower, power of Knowing, power of Known.

- With the power of Known, Awareness has the power to become any object in the universe.
- With the power of Knowing, Awareness has the power to know the content of everything in the universe
- With the power of Knower, Awareness has the power to witness everything in the universe.

**Awareness and Maya Shakti:** Vedanta teaches us that Maya Shakti is the creative power and this creative power is available within Awareness. From our earlier discussion, we saw that Awareness has the following 3 powers:

1. Power of Knowing/Intelligence
2. Power of Knower
3. Power of Known/Objects

Maya Shakti is the total of these 3 powers.

Maya Shakti = Power of Knowing + Power of Knower + Power of Known



**Self-Awareness:** Awareness is the substratum of anything and everything in this universe that you experience every day. It is the knower of everything that is happening in the mind, it can take the form of all the possible objects and has infinite intelligence to give meaning and understanding to any experience.

There must be a Self, who is Aware; someone says, 'I am Aware'. So, who are we? We are the Self, the 'I', who says they are Aware. The Self knows it is Aware or it is Self-Awareness. What does Self-Awareness mean? We could understand 'Self Awareness' in different ways:

1. Self-Awareness means that Self is Awareness and Awareness is Self. There is no separation between 'I' or 'Self' and Awareness. They are one and the same.
2. Self-Awareness means that the 'Self is Aware of the Self' or 'I is Aware of the I'. In this type of statement, it would mean that the Self is the Subject and Self is also the Object.

In Self-Awareness, Self is both the subject and object. Self is the subject or knower and Self is also the object to be known. Self-Awareness is therefore full, complete and non-dual. Since it is the subject and object, it does not need anything else, it is a 'stand-alone', it is self-shining, and it is complete with all the Powers of Awareness (Power of Knowing + Power of Knower + Power of Known). It is like a Self-Shinning bulb of Awareness within the core of all of us. This Self Awareness is the same as SatChitAnanda or Brahman which is within each living being.

If we are Self-Aware, why don't we feel it or know it? The simple answer is ignorance. Let us now try and decode this ignorance.

## **Ignorance and Awareness**

Self-Awareness is full, complete, self-contained and it is the underlying nature of Self. If Self-Awareness is our reality, why don't we know it, why don't we feel it? The simple answer is that we are Ignorant, we are not aware of our true nature. This ignorance has a tremendous impact on Self-Awareness.

With ignorance, we no longer know we are both the subject and object, we do not know that both subject and object are one and non-dual. If we do not know that we are both the Subject and Object, it means that the subject and object are no longer a single entity but are separate and independent entities. The Mind is created due to the ignorance of our true nature of being Self-Aware.

With Ignorance, the Self is no longer the Self, it forgets it is full and complete. The Self is replaced with a self (small s) and this the ego we feel and have.

Mind = Awareness + Ignorance

Mind = Subject + Object + Intelligence + Ignorance

self (ego) = Self + Ignorance

This ignorance is the underlying force which creates the mind with duality from non-dual Self and it also creates the ordinary ego. It is difficult to comprehend but Ignorance has the force to create this separation between subject and object. The unity between subject and object is lost. The mind has duality, therefore has a feeling of subject as being 'in-here' and the object being 'out-there'. This is the experience for most of us.

It must be clearly understood that Self-Awareness does NOT undergo any change. It is unchanging, full and complete. Self-Awareness is pure, and it has NO ignorance. Ignorance gives an impression that it is a changing, non-dual Self-Awareness to a mind with duality and changing the Self into self (ego). In reality, Self or Self-Awareness does not change at all, it only gives an 'impression', 'as though' it has changed.

### **Powers of Ignorance**

Ignorance is extremely powerful, and it comes with three Shakti's or powers:

- A "Veiling" Power
- A "Projecting" Power
- A Power of "Mutual Superimposition"

To explain these powers, the classic example given in Vedanta is the Rope/Snake example. In a dark night with limited visibility, there is a rope on our path but instead of seeing the rope we see a snake. I am sure we all have experienced this at one time or another. If there was no ignorance, we would never see the snake; we would know straight away that there is a rope out there. So, the snake has been created by our ignorance. How does ignorance create the snake?

First, the veiling power of ignorance covers up the rope completely so that the rope is not visible. As a second step, the projection power of ignorance projects the snake on to the rope. Finally, the power of mutual superimposition, it superimposes the rope's qualities on the snake, and the snake's qualities on the rope. The shape and size of the rope are transferred to the 'snake'. The awesome and fearful qualities of the 'snake' are being superimposed on the rope. So, by looking at this superimposed snake in the shape of the rope you get scared and frightened.

We will now focus on the veiling and superimposition aspects of ignorance.

The same veiling power of ignorance covers up 'Self Awareness', your essential nature; you don't know you are 'Self Aware'. You don't know you are 'Sat Chit Ananda', you don't know you are Uncreated, Unchanging, Limitless, Blissful and Self Aware. With mutual superimposition, the qualities of the 'Self' and Ignorance are mutually interchanged. The new entity created is the ego (small self). The Awareness part of the Self is superimposed on Ignorance to make it Conscious and sentient. The nature of ignorance which is always limited and incomplete is superimposed on Self to create the ego. This limited ego is the root and foundation of the mind.

**Ignorance is Beginningless:** There is no start time for Ignorance. Ignorance is beginningless, it has always been there. There cannot be a beginning for Ignorance, for this will imply that before the beginning, there was no ignorance and if there was no ignorance it would mean there was only knowledge prior to that. This is not possible because once you have knowledge, you cannot have ignorance after that. Once you have knowledge of  $2 + 2 = 4$ , you cannot have ignorance of this fact. Ignorance does not exist once you have knowledge, but it does exist before you have the knowledge. Since we still do not have the knowledge that we are Self-Aware, therefore we always have been Ignorant. This only implies that Ignorance is beginningless and it has always been here. However, Ignorance does have an ending. Once you gain knowledge, then ignorance is gone. This applies to any type of knowledge. So, Ignorance is beginningless but it does have an end time.

### **Types of Ignorance:**

We saw earlier that there are only two things in this universe, the witnessing Self and all external object forms. So, there can be two types of ignorance.

1. Ignorance of Objects
2. Ignorance of the Self (our true nature)

Ignorance of Objects is the lack of knowledge about all the possible topics and objects in the universe. With our limited minds, we have a limited knowledge for limited number of objects and topics. I think it is safe to conclude that there is more ignorance than knowledge. The ignorance of objects only has the veiling power, it does not have the projection power. The veiling power covers the required knowledge of the object or topic and because of this covering, we lack the knowledge on this subject. Therefore, we are ignorant about this object or topic.

Ignorance of the Self is the lack of knowledge about our true Self. As we have discussed in the earlier section, our true nature is Self-Awareness but unfortunately, we are mostly ignorant about this fact. We think we are the ego and this body/mind complex. This ignorance is underlying of all the suffering and unhappiness. This ignorance is much more powerful. It has all the 3 powers, it has the veiling power, projection power and mutually superimposition power.

Cumulative Ignorance = Ignorance objects + Ignorance of Self

**Degrees of Ignorance:** Knowledge and the lack of knowledge (ignorance) has a complicated profile. It is important to understand this profile. It will show that there are different degrees of ignorance. This ignorance plays a central role in our existence.

Let us start by taking an example about the knowledge of Chinese language. If someone has complete knowledge about the Chinese language, he knows everything that is possible, this person will have a 100% knowledge about the Chinese language. On the other end of the scale there are people who are completely ignorant about the language, they are 100% ignorant about this language. Every living being in the universe will fall in between this scale of 100% knowledge to 100% ignorance. So, there is a knowledge/ignorance profile about the Chinese language. Take another subject, say mathematics. Here again there will be a scale of 100% knowledge to 100% ignorance. People will fall somewhere in the scale of 100% knowledge to 100% ignorance. So, there is a knowledge/ignorance profile for mathematics. In the same way, there must be a knowledge/ignorance profile for every possible topic or object in the universe. If we, combine this scale of 100% knowledge to 100% ignorance for every topic, we will get a cumulative knowledge/ignorance profile for all the possible topics and objects. Within this cumulative knowledge/ignorance scale, each person will know their own knowledge or ignorance profile. Each living being has more knowledge on some topics and less or no knowledge on other topics. This will be reflected in the knowledge/ignorance profile for every individual living being. In other words, every being will have their own unique knowledge/ignorance profile.

To the knowledge/ignorance profile of objects, you must also add the knowledge profile of the Self. Here again, the spectrum can be broken down into countless parts and each part will have a different amount of Ignorance. An Enlightened person will have 100% knowledge of the Self, while a completely ignorant person will have 0% knowledge or 100% ignorance.

In this cumulative and complicated knowledge/ignorance profile, if you can imagine there are a countless number of 'pixels of ignorance'. Each 'pixel of ignorance' has its own unique mix of ignorance and knowledge. Each 'pixel of ignorance' represents a single individual living being with their own ignorance/knowledge profile. There are countless number of living beings and each living being has their own 'pixel of ignorance'. You have a pixel of ignorance and I have a pixel of ignorance and in the same way every living being has their own unique pixel of ignorance

**Ignorance is Dynamic:** Each 'pixel of ignorance' is not static, it is dynamic, it is conscious as it is in the presence of Awareness. The profile of ignorance keeps changing. If today, you learn how to play tennis, you now have knowledge of playing tennis, so your ignorance for tennis is gone

or reduced. This will affect your ignorance profile. If you study Vedanta and you get an understanding about Self-Awareness, your ignorance profile will undergo change in a positive direction. Tomorrow you do something foolish and stupid, forgetting you are Self-Aware, your ignorance profile will move in a negative direction. Your day-to-day activity affects your ignorance profile. This pixel of ignorance is like the accounting ledger, it keeps a track of all day-to-day activities and updates your pixel of ignorance on a continuous basis.

**Vasanas and Pixel of Ignorance:** Vedanta teaches us about Vasanas. Vasanas are our tendencies, our strength and weakness, our character traits. It is our personality profile. Our character traits or personality profile really depends upon the knowledge and ignorance we have. The type of knowledge/ignorance profile we have affects our personality traits or Vasanas. We now know that the pixel of ignorance depends upon the knowledge/ignorance profile. So, it is correct to say that the Vasanas as taught in Vedanta and the pixel of ignorance, we are discussing here, are the same. The Vasanas resides within this pixel of ignorance. Vedanta teaches us that these Vasanas is an accumulation of your tendencies which are passed on from one life to another. This pixel of ignorance is your accounting ledger and you carry this pixel with you. You had this pixel of ignorance in your previous birth, you have the pixel in this birth and you will have this pixel of ignorance in all your future births.

#### **Pixel of Ignorance and Causal Body:**

There are a countless number of pixels of ignorance. Each living being has their own pixel of ignorance. We know there is only ONE Self Awareness. This Self Awareness is your inner core, my inner core, our inner core - it is full, complete and self-sufficient. It is the self-shinning bulb of Awareness within us. When these countless pixels of ignorance comes in the presence of self-shinning Awareness, this Awareness is reflected in every pixel of ignorance. How does this happen? The example taught in Vedanta - there are hundreds of buckets filled with water. You keep these buckets outdoor and you will see the reflected sun in every bucket. There will be no bucket without the reflected sun. The sun is reflected in every bucket. In the same way, the bulb of Awareness is reflected in each pixel of ignorance. There are countless pixels and every pixel of ignorance has the reflected Awareness. It must be noted, it is not the 'standalone' Self-Awareness, but the reflected Awareness which is present in each pixel of ignorance. The presence of the reflected Awareness makes the pixel of ignorance conscious and sentient.

According to Vedanta, the human body or, for that matter, any living being is made of the following bodies:

1. Causal Body or Karana Sharira
2. Subtle Body or Sukshma Sharira
3. Physical/Gross Body or Sthula Sharira

The Causal Body is also called the seed body because it is very similar to a seed from which a tree, with branches, leaves and fruits, grows. A seed already has the 'potential form' of the tree in it. You could say that the tree in an un-manifest form is present in the seed. From a mango seed only, a mango tree will grow and not an apple tree. In the same way, the causal body contains the human being in its 'potential form'. Your causal body will have your potential form, my causal body will have my potential form. This way every living being has their own causal or seed body. The seed body is the cause for the subtle and gross body. That is why it is called the Causal Body. It is the starting point for any living being.

The pixel of ignorance with the reflected Awareness is this causal body or seed body. This pixel of ignorance or seed body is the source for living out the current life.

- All its tendencies – character traits (called Vasanas) gathered over previous lives.
- The desire to feel complete and full, and achieve Self-Awareness.
- The blueprint of one's life, including all the karmas that one will exhaust in this life.

Under the right conditions, this causal body or seed body germinates and grows to play out the blueprint that is contained within it, using the subtle body and the gross body.

In many of the Vedanta scriptures, there is a reference to the 'heart' or 'cave'. This heart is not the physical heart but they are referring to the pixel of ignorance, which is your causal body. In fact, Ramana Maharshi teaches us that this pixel of ignorance is located two fingers from the center on the right side of your chest. Sri Shankra teaches us that this pixel of ignorance is the knot which connects the living being with Self Awareness.

## **Ignorance and the Mind**

We have just seen that the pixel of ignorance is the causal or seed body. There are a countless number of pixels and each living being has their own pixel of ignorance. Let us imagine this pixel has two ends – the input side and the output side. In the earlier section, we saw that Self Awareness is reflected in the pixel of ignorance. This happens in the input side of the pixel of ignorance. This reflected Awareness, makes the pixel conscious and sentient. We know the content of the pixel is the knowledge/ignorance profile of the individual being. There are two types of profiles, one is about the ignorance of objects and the other is the ignorance of the Self. As we have discussed earlier, the ignorance of the Self is powerful, it has 3 powers – power to cover, power to project and power to mutually superimpose itself. These powers are active in the pixel of ignorance. This power of ignorance, covers up the reflected Awareness, then with the power of projection, it breaks up the 4 parts of the reflected Awareness and projects the 4 components.

We know Self Awareness and the power of Awareness is made up of the following:

Self-Awareness = Self + Subject + Intelligence + Objects

Power of Awareness = Power of Knower + Power of Knowing + Power of Known

It is like refraction. Place a prism in front of light and we can see the 7 different colors on the other side. In the same ways, the ignorance of the Self within the pixel, refracts the reflected Awareness into the following 4 different components.

- Manas – The home of the objects
- Buddhi – The home of the intelligence
- Sakshi – The home of the subject
- Ahamkara (ego) – The home of the self

These 4 components is nothing but the mind. The creation of the mind is the output side of the pixel of ignorance. The mind is the part of the subtle body. So, the ignorance of the Self has that power to create the mind.

Mind = Awareness + Ignorance

It must be understood that nothing happens to Self-Awareness, it is still your inner core. It is full, non-dual and self-sufficient and self-standing. It is the reflected Awareness in the pixel of ignorance, which has refracted into the 4 components which make up the mind. There are a countless number of pixels of ignorance – one for each individual living being. This refraction takes place in each pixel and thereby countless number of minds are created. Each mind would be different, it would depend upon the knowledge/ignorance profile for each pixel. More the ignorance, less efficient the mind. It will have a lower intelligence level. The opposite is also true, lower the ignorance, the mind will be more evolved. A pure mind will have no ignorance.

In the mind because of ignorance these 4 components are sitting in different departments. The Intelligence is sitting in the Buddhi, the objects part is sitting in the Manas, the subject part is sitting in the Sakshi and the Self or 'I-ness' is sitting in the Ahamkara. These four parts are separated but there is a natural tendency for these 4 parts to combine to create Self-Awareness. There is a mutual attraction to come together so that they can achieve its original status of being Self-Awareness. When the subject, object and intelligence are separated out, the self feels incomplete, it feels inadequate and it wants to feel full and complete. The only way self can feel completeness is when the subject, object and intelligence combines into one entity. We have discussed this process in quite some detail in Understanding the Mind – part 2

Here we will try and understand the role ignorance plays in each of the 4 components of the mind

### 1. Ignorance and Manas

2. Ignorance and Buddhi
3. Ignorance and Ahamkara (ego)
4. Ignorance and Sakshi

### **Ignorance and Manas**

Manas is the home of the objects. It has the power of the known. Power of the Known is a power within Awareness. It is the power which deals with objects. It deals with the objects received from the 5 sense organs and the memory. The better way to understand Power of Known is that it is a power to become any object. This power does not create any objects but becomes the object which is superimposed by the 5 senses on this power. A good metaphor to explain this is that it is like a lump of playdoh. You can manipulate the playdoh to any shape. You can make a tree, car, house or a person with the playdoh. In the same way, the Power of Known can be manipulated to become any object in this universe.

We saw that the pixel of ignorance has two things only, the reflected Awareness and the ignorance profile. In the same way, the Manas, which is a derivative of the reflected Awareness, also has only two things, the Power of Known and Ignorance.

Power of Known + Ignorance = Manas

In the Manas, the Power of Known and this Ignorance combines to form a single entity. When they combine, they mutually exchange their powers and capabilities. Power of Known passes on its power to become any object to the Ignorance and Ignorance makes the Power of Known more limited. This way ignorance gains the power to become any objects. So, it is interesting to note that the starting point of all the objects in this universe is ignorance.

So how does it work? The subtle version of the 5 sense organs – eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin pick up their respective inputs from the external world. All this happens in the mind, so we are talking about the subtle version of the sense organs and the subtle version of the objects. The inputs from the 5 sense organs encounter ignorance in the Manas. This ignorance in the Manas has the power to become any object. The 5 sense organs tell ignorance what object it must become. If the input from the eye sense organ is a tree, this will combine with the ignorance in the Manas to create a tree waveform. Please note that the tree waveform is covered or made up with ignorance only, nothing but ignorance. Since it is covered with ignorance, the Manas does not know that it has to become a tree. Why? Because the waveform is covered by ignorance. The waveform made of ignorance has the potential to become the tree. In the same way, all the input from the sense organs combine with ignorance and create their own unique waveform made up of ignorance.



Manas needs help in decoding what the ignorance waveform represents. The Manas can become the object only after it knows what object is present. It must gain the required knowledge before it can act.

### **Ignorance and Buddhi**

Buddhi is the home of the Intelligence. It has the power of Knowing, knowledge or intelligence. It is one of the powers of Awareness. This power allows intelligence to know anything and everything that is present in the mind. If something is presented, this power will have the complete knowledge about this object. It has that decoding power. This Power of Knowing is within Buddhi.

The source of Buddhi is the pixel of ignorance and the reflected Awareness. Based on this, Buddhi is made up of the following two parts:

Power of Knowing + Ignorance = Buddhi

The power of knowing and ignorance combines into a single entity to become the Buddhi. Like in the Manas, the combined entity exchanges their characteristics and powers. The power of knowing is passed on to ignorance and ignorance is superimposed on to the power of knowing. So, Buddhi has the power of knowing but is limited by ignorance. It is not fully ignorant. We saw earlier that the pixel of ignorance has a unique knowledge/ignorance profile for each individual living being. This pixel is not 100% ignorance but has a mix of knowledge and ignorance. This profile of knowledge/ignorance is present in the Buddhi.

Buddhi has the intelligence and the power of knowing but is covered with the ignorance profile from the pixel of ignorance. When we are born our buddhi is covered with ignorance. The ignorance/knowledge profile is present in the buddhi, but it is not fully activated or is in a 'potential form'.

There is no denying, buddhi has ignorance but it also has the power of knowing or intelligence. This power of knowledge can overcome ignorance. We have seen earlier that knowledge always triumphs over ignorance. Let us see how this works. In the previous section, we saw that the manas has the object waveforms covered with ignorance. The manas has no clue what these objects are. The manas forwards these waveforms of ignorance to the buddhi for decoding. The ignorance in the buddhi has inherited the power of knowing or intelligence. With this power, buddhi decodes and removes the ignorance from the object waveform. It gets some knowledge about the object. With this knowledge about the object, the ignorance about this object is removed (usually reduced) in the buddhi. The complete eradication of ignorance may not take place at one go. The knowledge may not stick in the buddhi or the knowledge gained is partial. The is because ignorance is deep rooted. The repeated process of decoding the ignorance from

the object waveform helps in establishing the knowledge of the object firmly. If you think about it, this is how the learning process takes place in the mind. Repeated effort is needed to establish knowledge and to remove the ignorance permanently. The more effort and practice done the firmer and better established is knowledge. Once knowledge is established, there is less ignorance in the buddhi. With every new knowledge that has been gained, buddhi learns a new trick. The buddhi is learning on a continuous basis.

It is interesting to note that the knowledge profile which comes from the pixel of ignorance is a help. The skills or knowledge are much easier to establish than something which must be learned from scratch. That is why we see people who have inherent talent or skills for certain things. Zakir Hussain was able to play tabla at the age of 3. Bach was able to compose music at a very young age. We have so many examples of this inherent talent. If you keep practicing a certain skill or piece of knowledge with great intensity, it will affect your pixel of ignorance, which is your seed body. So, when you are reborn, this skill or knowledge level is present in your causal body and you can take advantage of this in your next birth. Basically, your sincere effort for any endeavor is never lost!

The incoming waveform from the manas is made of ignorance. When the decoding by buddhi is complete, the outgoing waveform is made up of intelligence or knowledge. The output waveform made up of intelligence is called Vrittis or mental waves. This mental wave is now made up of knowledge. Buddhi is like a CPU, it converts the input made up of ignorance, to an output made up of knowledge. The waveform is made up of knowledge. Please think and reflect upon this. Knowledge is the substance of the waveform.

### **Ignorance and Ahamkara (ego)**

Ahamkara means the maker of 'I'. It is the self or ego within us. We saw earlier that there is a Self within Self Awareness. This Self is also present in the reflected Awareness in the pixel of ignorance. This Self is then refracted to become the self (with a small s). This self is the Ahamkara or ego. The small self is the combination of Self and Ignorance:

Self + Ignorance = self (ego)

Like in manas and buddhi, the Self combines with ignorance to become one entity and they also exchange their powers and characteristics. The 'I' ness in the Self is passed on to ignorance and ignorance makes the Self into a limited being. The Self in Self Awareness, is full, non-dual, complete and blissful. Due to ignorance, this Self is now limited, it is ignorant of its true Self, it is feeling limited and incomplete.

Since the pixel of ignorance is unique to each living being, it is logical to expect that the ego is unique to each living being. Every living being has their own ego.

The ego has forgotten its true Self, it is ignorant, but it is still looking for complete happiness. It wants that complete peace, not momentarily but on a continuous basis. What does the ego do? It starts looking for this peace and happiness in the world out there. We just saw, that the buddhi decodes these objects from the 5 sense organs in the manas. These objects are presented to the Ahamkara or ego. What does the Ahamkara do with these object waveforms. The ego has a very clear goal – it is looking for continuous happiness. It evaluates the object waveform against this key criterion. If the ego thinks this object can provide that happiness, it will like that object. If the ego thinks that object will not provide that happiness, it will dislike that object. In Vedanta this is called Raga(like)/Devesha (dislike). The ego will run towards the object it likes and run away from objects which it dislikes. This is how the ego interacts with the object waveform presented by buddhi. The ego updates the object waveform with its likes/dislikes.

### **Ignorance and Sakshi**

Sakshi is the witness and is the home of the subject. It has the power of the knower. Sakshi is the subject which sees, hears, tastes, smells and feels the object waveform which is presented by the buddhi. Sakshi has the power of knower and ignorance:

Power of the Knower + Ignorance = Sakshi

Like in the manas and buddhi, the Power of Knower and Ignorance combine to form Sakshi and in the process exchange their powers and features. The power of the knower is passed on to ignorance and ignorance is added to the power of knowing.

When the object waveform made up of knowledge comes in the presence of sakshi - magic happens. Awareness happens. We have seen earlier that Awareness is made up of subject, intelligence and object. The originating waveform is from manas - the home of the objects. This waveform is decoded by buddhi – the home of intelligence. When this waveform comes in the presence of sakshi – the home of the subject, Awareness is created. The mix of object, intelligence and subject creates Awareness. This Awareness converts the waveform made up of knowledge into the gross world we see out there. It must be understood that there is no projection. The subtle waveform in the subtle mind becomes the gross object in the gross mind. How many thoughts do we have every day? Countless. This process is repeated for every thought we have.

We have just seen the multifaceted role ignorance plays in the mind. In manas, it acquires the power to become objects. In buddhi, it acquires the power to know the objects. In ahamkara, it acquires the power of 'I' ness or self/ego. Finally, in sakshi, it acquires the power to perceive the objects. It does seem that ignorance has created the world out there. The source of all the objects is ignorance. This ignorant ego is then trying to find complete and continuous happiness

in this world. The success rate to find this permanent happiness is virtually nil. We may get momentary happiness but never continuous happiness. We have been unsuccessful, but we continue to try and find complete happiness in the world out there. We have to try something different!

## Removing Ignorance

The only solution to remove ignorance is knowledge. Knowledge is the only antidote to ignorance. We are not talking about the knowledge of objects but the knowledge about our true nature, our inner core. Removing this ignorance is not easy. It is deep rooted. This ignorance has accumulated over so many rebirths. Lots of effort and dedication is required. Removing this ignorance is a two-step process:

Step 1: Purification of the Mind.

Step 2: Direct Knowledge.

### Step 1: Purification of the Mind

To remove ignorance and gain the knowledge of Self-Awareness, the first step is to purify the mind. This is critical and important. Vedanta teaches us that the student must be a prepared student. If the student is not a prepared student, this knowledge of Self Awareness will not be acquired easily. We must purify our minds, so that the knowledge of Self as SatChitAnanda can be properly understood. This purification of the mind is important and is the only way to remove ignorance. Sri Sankaracharya, who is a very important figure in the Hindu tradition, explained the following steps, which will help us in this purification process.

1. Viveka – Discrimination
2. Vairagya – Dispassion
3. Sama – Quietude
4. Dama – Self Control
5. Tiksha – Tolerance
6. Samadhana – Well Placed
7. Mumuksutva – Desire for freedom

Let us discuss how these steps can help us in purifying our minds.

**1. Viveka – Discrimination:** Viveka means discrimination, but in Vedanta, it means the discrimination between the Real and Unreal. We think the world is real but Vedanta teaches us that this is wrong and this misconception is the root cause of our suffering.

The definition of Real according to Vedanta is that it must pass the test of the 3-time periods – past, present and future. It should be unchanging in all 3-time periods. If an object undergoes any change in any one of the 3-time periods then that object is not real, it is unreal. Our body was born a few decades ago and will perish in the future, so it does not meet the requirement of Real. This applies to any object in the universe, it was not always available in the past and will perish in the future. Even this universe was born 13.7 billion years ago and it was not available before that and we know it will come to end in the future.

So, nothing in this universe is Real, everything is Unreal. Everything we perceive and experience is unreal. So, the question is - where is the Real stuff? This must be discovered. We must find out and realize what is Real. Awareness is the underlying reality of any experience. It is substratum of any experience. This Awareness is the only Real stuff, everything else is unreal. This Awareness has been there in the past and will be there in the future. This Awareness is unborn, unchanging, uncreated and is the only Real thing and provides continuous bliss and happiness.

We have also discussed earlier that the Self is nothing, but Awareness and Self Awareness is nothing but Self. The 'I' within you is the only Real thing in this universe, everything else is unreal.

This understanding can come only by applying Viveka or discrimination on a continuous basis to all our experiences.

**2. Vairagya – Dispassion:** Vairagya translates as dispassion or detachment. Vairagya is born out of Viveka. Once you understand what is real and what is unreal, your approach to the unreal objects and experiences in this universe will undergo a change. You need dispassion and detachment toward objects and experiences of the world. The question is how to develop this dispassion and detachment towards these objects.

The best way to start is to understand the value and function of all objects and experiences we interact with. We like ice cream and we think that ice cream gives us happiness. If you look at the ingredients of ice cream, you will not find happiness as one of the ingredients of ice cream. So, where does the happiness come from? We think that ice cream provides us with happiness. What if we have a bad throat - the ice cream is not going to give us any happiness then – it'll make us sick! Actually, the happiness is within us but we think happiness comes from the ice cream. This wrong conclusion is the source of the problem. By applying Vairagya, we can reach the proper understanding that ice cream is not the source of happiness.

People have a strong conviction that money and wealth provide happiness. There is no doubt that if you want to survive in this world, you need money. You cannot do without money. Money has an inherent value which will allow you to buy and sell goods but happiness is not a

quality of money. Money can be a source of unhappiness, too. When you spend money, you feel sad. If money is lost in the stock market, it creates unhappiness and anger. Money is money, happiness, unhappiness or sadness are our superimposition on money.

The same logic can be applied for all objects and experiences. We must learn to understand the actual value of any object or experience, and not add our own superimposition or commentary.

Vairagya does not mean we give up objects we like, or, conversely, run away from our responsibilities. Vairagya means understanding that the world and its objects are incapable of providing permanent peace and happiness. We must interact with objects with that attitude and approach. You should see this limitation again and again, every time you encounter any object or experience. This constant practice is important to help develop Vairagya in our daily life style.

**3. Sama – Quietude:** Sama means a quiet mind. Sama is born out of Vairagya. When you have understood Vairagya and implement it whenever you interact with an object. This would mean these objects do not trouble you anymore.

If you want a certain thing in life and you don't obtain it, you might be frustrated and irritated. With the attitude of Vairagya, it doesn't matter if the desire is fulfilled or not. It's okay either way. This does not mean inaction but the acceptance of the outcome. This approach gives peace of mind which is called Sama. With this quiet mind, it is possible to interact with anything in the world and not be affected by the outcome. You take all objects and experiences at their face value.

**4. Dama – Self Control:** Dama means self-control. You need to control the 5 sense organs and the 5 organs of action. If these organs are drawn towards the objects of the world, it means you are drawn away from your true nature of Awareness. You would need to apply your will power to willfully restrain the sense organs to move towards sense objects. If you truly want to avoid eating harmful sweets, then, if walking in front of a sweet shop, restrain your eyes by not looking at the sweets, restrain your hands and legs by not walking into the shop.

Sama is effortless and is born out of understanding. Dama requires will power and willful restraint. If you do not have Sama and are unable to cultivate Vairagya, then you require Dama or self-control.

**5. Tiksha – Tolerance:** Tiksha means tolerance, enduring any pain or hardship without complaining about it. This does not mean you do not try to change the situation. You must. If it is not possible to change the situation, you should accept the pain with tolerance. On a cold winter day, if the window has been kept open, it does not mean you accept this suffering from the cold -you should go and shut the window. However, even after you shut the window, if you

continue feeling cold, you just tolerate it and accept the situation with equanimity. This attitude of equanimity in both good and bad situations is Tiksha.

**6. Samadhana – Well Placed:** Samadhana could mean meditation but the correct interpretation would be - a mind which is 'well placed', always and under all circumstances. The idea is to keep directing the ahamkara (ego) towards our true nature of Awareness – Sat Chit Ananda. This is not easy but requires constant practice. For example, your boss makes some nasty remarks, in such a situation instead of getting angry, you try and think that you are SatChitAnanda, you are full and complete. If you have this feeling, then you will be able to forgive your boss for making these nasty remarks and understand, maybe, he is having a rough day. This attitude keeps the mind in the right place. More the practice, better the chance of achieving this goal of purifying your mind.

**7. Mumuksutva – Desire for freedom:** Mumuksutva means the desire for Moksha, to be free from bondage or suffering. There is no denying that the goal for everyone in life is to have continuous happiness. We want to be free from suffering in our day-to-day life. Vedanta teaches us that when the ahamkara identifies with the body, mind and external world, we are bound to go through cycles of happiness and suffering. We have seen that none of the objects of the world are a source of permanent happiness. We think it is and this wrong identification only leads to bondage and unhappiness. We need to train our minds to identify with Self-Awareness or SatChitAnanda. We can do this if we have a desire to achieve this goal. Instead of having the desire for external objects, we must have the desire for SatChitAnanda. Focusing on this goal will take us a long way in controlling the mind.

## **Step 2: Direct Knowledge**

Once we have started the process to purify our minds and we have studied the scriptures under the guidance of a well-established guru, we should have a good understanding about our true nature as Self-Awareness or SatChitAnanda. Usually the knowledge we gain at the beginning is indirect knowledge, it is not direct knowledge. Indirect knowledge means that we are told by scriptures and teachers that the underlying reality of everyone is Self-Awareness or SatChitAnanda. We have the knowledge but we have no experience of Self-Awareness. Knowledge is more theoretical. You are told you are Self-Aware or the inner core of every living being is SatChitAnanda. All this knowledge is second or third person knowledge. It is still remote and it seems it is the knowledge of something out there. This knowledge is not related to me. What we must gain is direct knowledge – knowledge of my Self-Awareness, my SatChitAnanda/Brahman. Knowledge which is not remote but part of you.

Scriptures can only teach you indirect knowledge, you can convert this indirect knowledge to direct knowledge. The only method to convert this indirect knowledge to direct knowledge is by

self-enquiry. Self-enquiry is something you must do yourself. A guru or the scripture can guide you but self-enquiry must be done by the self.

How do you do this self-enquiry to convert from indirect to direct knowledge? Many scriptures teach us to focus on the Mahavakya's like Tat Tavm Asi (That You Are) or Aham Brahmasi (I Am Brahman). Ramana Maharshi told us to focus on 'Who Am I'. In chapter 7 of Panchadasi written by Vidyanaraya, a detailed analysis is given on how to convert indirect knowledge to direct knowledge. I guess there are many paths and you choose the option which is best suited to you. I find the following two-step method most convenient for me

1. Look for Awareness in every Experience
2. Focus on the Feeling of 'I' within you

### **Look for Awareness in every Experience:**

Experience = Awareness + Form

We are always aware of our experiences. There can be no experience which we are not aware of. However, whenever we have an experience our focus is on the form. The tree, the music, the taste of sweets, the smell of flowers, etc. It is always on the form. We must shift our focus from the form to the Awareness part of the experience. We are aware of the tree, we are aware of the music, we are aware of the taste of sweets, we are aware of the smell of flowers. Focus on the Awareness part of the experience. You will realize and understand that the Awareness part is always present in every experience. Look for Awareness in every experience. Where does this Awareness come from? It is coming from within you because it is part of the experience you have. So, Awareness is your inner core. Understanding how the mind functions and the role Awareness plays, all this helps in cementing our understanding that Awareness is our inner core.

**Focus on the Feeling of 'I' within you:** Since we are born, the 'I' is focused externally. It is focused on your body, mind and all the external objects. This is root cause for all the unhappiness. We must change direction and focus on the feeling of 'I' within us. Please note this is not thinking about 'I' but the feeling of 'I'. Thinking of 'I' means we are thinking of 'I' as an object. When you focus on the feeling of 'I' or 'me', you are then Aware of the 'I' within us. You bring awareness to the feeling of 'I'. If you can focus on this feeling of 'I', without any distractions or disturbance, that experience is 'Self-Awareness'. You are aware of the feeling of the pure 'I'. This is your inner core, this is your Self-Awareness. The problem is that this focus does not last very long.

Ramana Maharshi teaches that trying to focus on the feeling of 'I' is the only direct method to gain knowledge of Self-Awareness. If you want to meditate then meditate on the feeling of 'I'.



If you want to contemplate, contemplate on the feeling of 'I'. If you want to pray, pray on the feeling of 'I'. Ramana Maharshi teaches that meditating on some object or praying to an external object is not very effective. It is distracting, taking you further away from the true objective to discover the feeling of 'I'. I agree with this completely. So, my sadhana these days is to focus on the feeling of 'I' within me. Whenever I have free time, I try to focus on the feeling of 'I'. Ignorance is deep rooted, it still takes the mind to the external world. Practice and more practice is the only solution to overcome this ignorance, so that you can remain on the feeling of 'I' on a continuous basis. 24/7/365.

Ignorance can be conquered. First gain indirect knowledge about Self-Awareness and then focus on converting this indirect knowledge to direct knowledge.