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CONCEPT OF MĀYĀ AND AVIDYĀ IN ADVAITA VEDĀNTA

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Abstract

The non-dual character of reality is emphasized by Advaita Vedānta, which is considered to be one of the deepest schools of Indian philosophy. This school of thought declares that the ultimate truth, known as Brahman, is unchanging and absolute. On the other hand, the actual world appears to be both diverse and limited as a result of $M\bar{a}y\bar{a}$ and $Avidy\bar{a}$, two notions that are important to Advaitic thinking and are connected. This is the cosmic illusion known as $M\bar{a}y\bar{a}$, which projects multiplicity upon the unitary reality of Brahman, therefore giving the appearance that the phenomenal world is genuine. Viyāvahārika Satya describes it as anything that functions as an apparent reality, yet it is neither wholly real nor completely unreal. Avidy \bar{a} , also known as ignorance, is a form of ignorance that occurs on an individual level. It obscures the actual nature of the Self, also known as Ātmān, and then leads to the erroneous association with the body-mind complex. Avidy \bar{a} is a personal and subjective experience, in contrast to $M\bar{a}y\bar{a}$, who functions on a phenomenal world. When one achieves Jñāna, also known as self-knowledge, they are able to dissolve Avidyā, which in turn enables them to recognize the illusory nature of Māyā and realize the oneness of Ātmān and Brahman. This is the path to liberation, also known as Mokṣa. Within the context of Advaita Vedānta, this study investigates the philosophical foundations, upon which these notions are based, as well as their consequences for human perception and their respective roles in the process of spiritual emancipation.

Keywords: Māyā, Avidyā, Vedānta, Advaita

Introduction

According to Advaita Vedānta, a school of Indian philosophy that does not adhere to the dualistic system of thought, the ultimate truth, known as Brahman, is absolute, infinite, and beyond all differences. However, human experience is formed by plurality, dualism, and impermanence, which leads to a basic question: if Brahman is the only thing that exists, then why does the universe appear to be so diverse and real? These two notions, Māyā and Avidyā, are extremely important in Advaita philosophy, because they are the ones that provide an explanation for this conundrum. The cosmic illusion known as Māyā is responsible for superimposing the appearance of the phenomenal world onto Brahman. This is what gives the sense that the fleeting cosmos is real, despite the fact that it is fundamentally one. It is accountable for providing humans with the impression of duality, which in turn binds them to the experiences of the world. On a more intimate

level, Avidyā, which is synonymous with ignorance, stops an individual from seeing their actual identity as Ātmān, which is the Self. This, in turn, leads to identification with the body, mind, and ego. In contrast to Māyā, who functions on a cosmic level, Avidyā is open to interpretation and is particular to each individual. The Advaitic road to liberation (Mokṣa), which entails dispelling Avidyā by self-inquiry (Jῆāna) and coming to the realization that the seeming world is an illusion, requires a grasp of these principles, which are essential to attaining this insight. The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of Māyā and Avidyā, as well as their interaction with human perception and the relevance of these relationships in the process of achieving spiritual enlightenment according to Advaita Vedānta.

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Māyā and Avidyā in Advaita Vedānta

The principle of Māyā is the one that, according to Advaita Vedānta, is responsible for producing the illusion of multiplicity in the otherwise non-dual reality of Brahman. The fact that it is referred to as Anirvachanīya, which means "indescribable", indicates that it cannot be classified as either genuine or artificial. Despite the fact that it is experienced in the empirical world (Vyāvahārika Satya), it ceases to exist once the realization of the ultimate truth (Pāramārthika Satya) is achieved. The concept of Māyā is frequently depicted through analogies such as the rope and the snake. In the same way that a rope may be misinterpreted as a snake when it is seen in low light, the world seems to be real because of the ability of Māyā to veil it.

Through the concepts of 'Māyā' and 'Avidyā,' the connection that exists between Brahman and the world (jagat) is brought into transparency. The term "Māyā" alludes to the ability of Brahman to manifest in a diverse manner. The example of a rope and a snake, in which a rope is mistaken for a snake, is used to explain this particular concept. There is no possible way for anybody or anything to create the illusion of a snake. It is only "rope" that, due to the fact that it possesses features similar to those of a snake, might potentially give birth to the illusion of a snake. In a same vein, Brahman can only manifest itself as the world of many because of the intrinsic power it possesses. It is not possible for anyone to experience the illusion of a snake when the substance in question is rope. This can be attributed to either a lack of sufficient light or the fact that a person who suffers from fear psychosis regarding snakes has a tendency to slip into the snake-illusion. As a result, the characteristics of the object known as "rope" and the constraints imposed by the observer are both factors that contribute to the formation of illusion. In a similar manner, those who are under the influence of Avidyā (ignorance) are likely to mistake the names and forms for the actual thing sat. It is only when the restrictions of the spectator are eliminated that the true nature of the reality that is being shown, which is rope, makes itself known. In a same manner, when avidyā is conquered via the growth of proper knowledge (vidyā) Brahman, the ultimate reality is revealed in its authentic form. A one who is aware that the names and forms are nothing more than different manifestations of Brahman is not susceptible to falling into illusionistic states. Vidyā is said to be the liberating force that frees one from the shackles of labels and categories. One is bound to a state of servitude for as long as they continue to be aware of the manyness or diversity that exists. Within the framework of Advaita Vedānta, the concept of Adhyāsa serves to provide light on the phenomena known as "illusion". The term "adhyāsa" relates to the process of superimposition, which is the reason why a certain item or reality is experienced as something else (atasmin tadbuddhi). In the case of the snake-rope illusion, the object that is actually there is a rope, but the observer's perception of the snake is overlaid on the snake's perception of the rope. It is because of this that the rope is mistakenly seen as a snake. Real knowledge is achieved when one is able to comprehend the truth in its

natural state. The duality between the Subject (j\(\bar{\eta}\)atā) and the 'object' (j\(\bar{\eta}\)eya) is a presupposition of the concept of 'knowledge'. It is important to highlight that the self, also known as ātmān, who is the subject of all cognitions, is fundamentally identical to Brahman, which is the object of the greatest available knowledge. Therefore, Brahman is both the subject and the object of the highest knowledge we possess. In this way, the peculiarity of knowing Brahman as the object of knowledge is brought to light. Because Brahman is infinite, how is it possible for it to be the object of knowledge, which is finite? Advaitins propose an alternative style of knowing, in which the subject knows the object by becoming the object in order to transcend the division that exists between the subject and the object. This is in contrast to the agnostic approach, which provides room for agnosticism. The only way for the finite to know the infinite is for it to become the "infinite". When one knows Brahman, they themselves become Brahman. The Ātmān is nothing but Brahman, and it is a state of complete silence in every respect. Kşetra and Kşetrajña are two concepts that are mentioned in the Bhagavad Gītā, which is where this idea is graphically expressed. Kşetra is the psycho-physical basis produced by the gunas of Prakṛti and Kṣetraj̄ῆa is the presiding consciousness (ātmān) which dwells in the kşetrajña (self) in dwelling in distinct kşetras are non-different from one another and are non-different from Purusottama (transcendental self). When it comes to the greatest level of knowledge, ethical competence is demanded in the same way that sensory competence is demanded in the case of empirical knowledge. A person must be able to exercise control over their lower tendencies in order to avoid being susceptible to the impact of avidyā. Empirical knowledge, also known as aparāvidyā, is characterized by the independence of both the knower and the known. Discoveries are the foundation of knowledge. However, in the case of Brahman knowledge, the subject goes through a process of transformation in a step-by-step manner, which allows the finiteness of the 'finite' to be transcended and the subject to become perfected upon reaching the state of Infinity. To put it another way, when the Self loses its cover of avidyā, it transforms from being something which has the potential to be infinite into something that is truly infinite. "Māyā" is a term that is used in Vedantic epistemology to allude to the cosmic power of Brahman. Māyā is a macrocosmic concept, but avidyā is a microcosmic concept that refers to the limits that are inherent to the individual or the knower. Self-effort is emphasized by Advaitins as the most important factor in overcoming the influence of Avidyā. To the extent that all the variations of the substance are known via the process of knowing the substance, Brahman is conceived of as that which is known through the process of knowing. Śravana, which means "hearing", manana, which means "reflection" and nididhyāsana, which means "meditation" have been described as three distinct methods that might be utilized to rid oneself of avidyā and achieve the vision of oneness that lies underlying seeming multiplicity. When one is aware, without a reasonable doubt, that the distinctions are discernible and that, deep inside, there is a reality that is not susceptible to change or mutation, then one is freed from the shackles of the plurality. As a result, according to Vedantic epistemology, the concept of "knowledge" has an effect on the "knower". When the unit consciousness, known as anuchaitanya, is transformed into the cosmic consciousness, known as bhumā chaitanya, the subject-object dichotomy is overcome in the holistic awareness.

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Vedānta Philosophy-the Concept of Māyā

According to Vedānta, our true essence is divine, which means that it is unadulterated, flawless, and unrestricted throughout all of eternity. Rather than having to transform into Brahman, we already are Brahman and the Ātmān, which is our actual Self, are one and the same.

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The question is, if our true nature is divine, then why are we so utterly and completely oblivious to it?

The notion of Māyā, also known as ignorance, is where the solution to this issue may be found. The curtain that conceals our true character as well as the true nature of the world that surrounds us is known as Māyā. It is impossible to understand Māyā on a fundamental level since we do not know why it exists and we do not know when it first started. Māyā, like every other kind of ignorance, ceases to exist with the dawn of knowledge, which is the understanding of our own divine essence. This is something that we are aware of. Brahman is the ultimate reality of human existence; it is in Brahman that we do not only live but also move and have our being. The Upanişads, which are the books that fall within the Vedānta philosophical tradition, assert that "all this is indeed Brahman". It is possible to draw parallels between the ever-evolving environment that we observe around us and the moving visuals that appear on a movie screen. Without the static screen that can be seen in the background, there would be no movie. In a same manner, the reality of the universe is derived from the unchanging Brahman, which is the foundation of existence, which is situated in the background of this ever-changing world. However, this reality is conditioned for us by time, space, and causality, which is otherwise known as the law of cause and effect. It is like a skewed mirror. By incorrectly identifying ourselves, we further cloud our perception of reality. We identify ourselves with the body, the mind, and the ego rather than with the Ātmān, which is the divine Self. By associating ourselves with the body and mind, we fear sickness, old age, and death; by identifying ourselves with the ego, we suffer from rage, hatred, and a hundred other miseries. This initial misunderstanding causes further ignorance and sorrow, which in turn generates a domino effect. Our true nature, known as the Ātmān, is unaffected by any of these factors.

It is possible to draw parallels between Māyā and clouds that obscure the sun: the sun is still visible in the sky, but we are unable to perceive it because of the dense cloud cover. As the clouds begin to dissipate, we are made aware of the fact that the sun has been present throughout the whole day. We are able to dispel our clouds, which manifest as egotism, selfishness, hatred, greed, lust, anger, and ambition, when we meditate on our true nature, when we engage in actions that are not self-centred, and when we consistently act and think in ways that manifest our true nature. This is accomplished through truthfulness, purity, contentment, self-restraint, and forbearance. Our divine essence is able to show through as a result of this mental cleansing, which drives away the mists of Māyā. The notion of Māyā was explained by Śańkara, a renowned philosopher and wise man who lived in India around the seventh century. He used the example of the rope and the snake to express it. A man is walking along a path that is dark when he spots a snake. His heart begins to beat faster, and his pulse quickens. The so-called "snake" is actually a piece of coiled rope, as was discovered upon closer investigation. At the moment when the illusion is broken, the snake disappears for good. In a same manner, as we travel down the path of ignorance, we perceive ourselves to be mortal beings, and the world of name and form that surrounds us is conditioned by time, space, and the chain of causality. We come to terms with our limits, our enslavement, and the pains we endure. After further investigation, it is discovered that the cosmos and the mortal being are both manifestations of Brahman energy. Whenever the delusion is broken, not only does our morality but also the cosmos itself vanish for all time. When we look around, we see that Brahman is present everywhere and in it.

Brahman And Ātmān

Brahman is defined as "sacred learning" and "a divine source", according to the current dictionary definition. The divine essence and source of all existence, from which all created things arise and to which they return, is referred to as Brahman. Brahman is thought to be the Supreme, all-pervading spirit as well as the Soul of the Universe. Although Brahman, in its capacity as the highest Spirit, is not an object of worship in the conventional meaning of the word, those who are devoted to the religion contemplate on Brahman with a great love and respect. In her acceptance of Bhartrhari's concept, Mandana Miśra asserts that Brahman is revealed via language (Śabdādvaita). As a result of the fact that Brahman is awareness and consciousness is the power of speech, Brahman may be understood as the manifestation of Vivarta, which is the speech of the entire universe. Brahman was the primary focus of the Upanişads, also known as the Jñāna Kānda. Jīva is compared to Brahman in the Chāndogya Upanişad, which is titled "Tat tvam asi", which translates to "that thou art". One and the same is the Brahman, which is also known as the Self. Advaita maintains that there is no such thing as duality. The restriction of awareness that is unable to grasp the Brahman as a result of ignorance or Avidyā is represented by elements such as the one and the many, the infinite and the finite, the subject and the object, and so on. There is no term that can adequately express Brahman; it is similar to the phrase "neti, neti", which means "not this, not this". The comprehension of Brahman is beyond the capabilities of the senses; He is the most unadulterated form of knowledge and shines like the origin of light. In addition to being self-existent, Brahman is referred to as "Saccidananda," which translates to "Sat's infinite truth," "Cit's infinite consciousness", and "Ānanda's infinite bliss". The term "Satyam Jŋānam anantam brahma" (Taittirīya Up. II.1) is used by Śańkara to describe Brahman. Brahman is the Truth, Knowledge, and Endless. Brahman is devoid of any distinctions or distinctions of any type from other things. According to the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, Brahman is neither homogeneous (Sajātīġa) nor heterogeneous (Vijātīġa) since there is no other entity that exists without Him. Instead, it is Ekamevādvitīyam, which means that it is one without a second. The Upanişads and the Brahmasūtra are the foundations upon which the Advaita philosophy is constructed. The Upanisads include a number of examples that illustrate the concept that Brahman is synonymous with Ātmān. These examples include Prajnan brahma, which means that consciousness is Brahman (Aitareya Upanişad), 'Aham bramāsmi', which means that I am Brahman (Brhadaranyaka Upanişad), and Ayamātmā brahma, which means that this Ātmān is Brahman (Māndūkya Upanisad). According to chapter 1 of the Samanvaya, harmony 1.1, the Brahmasūtra begins with the phrase "athāto brahma jijāsā". Utilising these examples as examples, the philosophy proposes the novel notion that Brahman is the One, the Whole, and the sole reality. With the exception of Brahman, everything else, including the universe, material objects, and individuals, is something that is not true. Brahman is the ultimate reality that is infinite, omnipresent, almighty, incorporeal, and impersonal; it is thus the divine foundation upon which all beings are built. The Brahman and the other entities in the universe are neither distinct from one another nor separated from one another. As a result of this, when one reaches the turiya condition, they get the feeling of their soul being one with everything else across the universe.

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Ātmān is a term that literally translates to "breath" but some people believe that it is associated with the concept of aham (I), while others believe that it is the opposite of anātmān. From the Vedic period forward, Ātmān is understood to be the breath, the soul, the fundamental principle of life, and feeling. Ātmān is the everlasting essence of the personality that endures after death and either transmigrates to a new life or is liberated from the link of existence, according to Indian philosophy. This definition of Ātmān comes after

the Vedic period. In the Upaniṣads, Ātmān is described as a component of the global Brahman, with which it might communicate or even fuse its existence. According to this interpretation, Ātmān is the centre circle that is associated with Brahma. According to Advaita Vedānta, Ātmān is not seen to be a component of Brahman that eventually dissolves into Brahman; rather, it is understood to be the entirety of Brahman itself. It is necessary to comprehend how the individual soul, which is finite and contains only one soul in each body, can be identical to Brahman. The theory contends that the notion of the self is not an individual one, but rather that the Ātmān is singular and unmatched. In the same way that the same moon seems to be numerous moons on its reflections on the surface of the water that is covered with bubbles, Ātmān appears to be various Ātmān in different bodies.

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The Ātmān is the silent witness to all that is happening in life, and it is free from and is beyond both merit and sin. Additionally, it is autonomous and incorporeal. The transformation of Ātmān into jiva, a living creature with a body and senses, occurs when the reflection of Ātmān results in avidyā, which is the state of ignorance. Every single jīva has the perception that he possesses his very own Ātmān, which is referred to as jīvatman. According to the pragmatic level, the idea of jīva is accurate. The Ātmān is equivalent to Brahman when viewed from the transcendental plane. There are three degrees of experience of the Ātmān, which are awake (vaiśvanāra), dreaming (taijasa), and profound sleep (prajῆa), according to the Advaita Vedānta, which explains the relative and unreal character of the objective universe. It also proposes the Advaita, which means "one without a second".

AVIDYĀ AND MĀYĀ

In the main Commentaries that Śańkara wrote, he differentiates between two types of Brahman: Higher Brahman and Lower Brahman. The Higher Brahman, according to him, can only be comprehended by the use of knowledge (Vidyā). He is liberated from attachment, names, and forms; He is Nirguna Brahman. This comprehension is what leads to liberation when it is achieved. The Saguna Brahman, also known as God, is considered to be the Lower Brahman, according to Śańkara. He asserts that this Brahman is regarded from the perspective of ignorance, also known as vidyā. Continuing his line of reasoning, Śańkara poses the question, "When the Higher Brahman is the Absolute, what is the reason for the distinction"? In addition to this, he asserts that the Lower Brahman is the origin of cultural variety. From beginning to end, the Advaita philosophy is centred on the question of how one might comprehend Brahman. For the purpose of comprehending Brahman, philosophers address the challenges that must be overcome. Vidyā, which translates to "knowledge", is the most important quality for comprehending Brahman. A mind that is free of uncertainties and fears is the only condition in which knowledge may be experienced. Learning will continue to be a form of ignorance (avidyā) so long as there is no transparency. In ignorance, Gaudapada refers to it as vikalpa, which means "wrong interpretation", whereas Śańkara refers to it as adhyāsa, which means "superimposition". A demonstration of the relationship between cause and effect is provided by Sāmkhya. The pot is a metamorphosis of the clay; it is and is real. On the other hand, according to Advaita philosophy, everything else, with the exception of Brahman, is nothing more than an appearance because of Avidyā. The pot and the clay, as well as the effect and the cause, become "unreal" when viewed from a "Higher Standpoint" (Paramārthika), but they are "real" when viewed from an empirical perspective (vyāvahārica). According to Gaudapada, the reason why humans are unable to see things from a "higher point of view" is

because they perceive things incorrectly. As an additional illustration of how objects might be perceived differently, he provides the following scenario: a person sees a rope at dusk and interprets it as a snake because of the incorrect interpretation of the senses. According to Śańkara, this incorrect understanding is referred to as "superimposition" (adhyāsa). According to his definition, it is "the appearance, in the form of a memory, of something personally experienced in some other place". It is not feasible to confuse a rope with a snake unless the individual in question has either seen or has the notion of a snake. Similar to the last example, there is a natural propensity to superimpose the characteristics of the object on the subject of the object, and vice versa. "We identify our self-quo seat of consciousness with our self-quo body, mind, memory, and so on", argues Karl H. Potter. "All of these things are objects, not subjects, and therefore have at least one property that the self-quo subject cannot have", according to Śańkara. This type of superimposition is, according to Śańkara, the product of avidyā, which is synonymous with ignorance. Through the cultivation of Vidyā (knowledge), the only way to triumph against ignorance is to flourish.

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Māyā

In the Rk Veda and in a few Upanişads, the word "Māyā" is mentioned under the heading of "mysteries". These allusions may be found in the Rk Veda. In its understanding of the word "Māyā", Advaita Vedānta also utilises the same meaning as the other schools of thought. Not only does Gaudapada employ the term "Māyā" on several times to refer to the ability of seemingly generating things, but he also uses it to refer to the objects that may have been produced. One can find examples of this sort of use in Buddhism. The Buddhist tradition has had an impact on Goudapada in this regard. When it comes to avidyā, he does not associate Māyā with it, but Śankara does. Although Śankara uses the term avidyā to refer to the entity that is responsible for the creation of the world of Māyā, also known as name and form, he does not use the term avidyā to refer to the world itself. It has been brought to Joshi's attention that Śańkara is inconsistent with regard to this matter. However, it is clear that Śankara makes use of avidyā when he is talking about superimposition, and he makes use of Māyā when he is talking about prakruti or nāmarupa. According to what Karl Potter has written, "Śankara makes it known that superimposition does not require a cause because it is already beginning less". Avidyā is not for the empirical items that exist in the world; rather, it is for the erroneous perception of those tangible things. The similar usage of avidyā and māyā is called into doubt by a few academics. These scholars contend that if ignorance is owned by jīva, then it is the property of Brahman. Māyā is the ability that God possesses to create the illusion of the world. There is no such thing as an individual ego or jīvas, according to Advaita Vedānta, and all is Brahman. This is the central idea of the religion. In the event that this is the case, then ignorance is known as Brahman. A question that emerges is, "What exactly is avidyā?" According to Maṇḍana Miśra, ignorance is anirvacanīya, which means that it serves as neither real nor unreal. The fact that avidyā is not real, as Sureshwara explains, means that it does not have any effect on Brahma. Nevertheless, the jīva is the one who is stupid since it is the jīva that accepts avidyā for genuine. Śańkara emphasises that "Avidyā and Māyā are causing us to experience (superimposition) the thing that we do, which is to give it a positive function beyond that of merely veiling Brahman." This is despite the fact that Sankara does not have a specific language to differentiate between avidyā and Māyā. Māyā possesses a complicated illusory power of Brahman, which leads the Brahman to be perceived as the material world of distinct forms instead of the physical universe. Māyā serves two

purposes: the first is to "hide" Brahman from the ordinary human perception, and the second is to present the material world in its (Brahman) place. Māyā is also said to be indescribable, although it is possible to say that sense data that enters one's awareness through the five senses is Māyā. This is because the fundamental reality that lies beneath sensory perception is completely hidden. There is a lack of certainty over whether or not Māyā is considered to be genuine. However, Māyā does not have any effect on Brahman. On the other hand, it is comparable to a magician who is unaffected by his own tricks. Māyā and avidyā are both there for a short time. To victory against avidyā, it is not required to do any action. In a natural way, it is eliminated by the opposite of Vidyā, which is knowledge. The ability to know requires intention and is dependent on the agent. To provide an example, in order to milk a cow, one needs both the animal itself and the knowledge of how to milk it. On the other hand, if one has a mistaken understanding, it is possible to rectify it by receiving accurate information; for example, if one obtains the knowledge that a rope is actually a snake, then the mistaken understanding that they had about the rope is corrected. Through one's own tenacity in the pursuit of knowledge, one can acquire knowledge. The realization of the truth may be accomplished on two levels: the first level involves studying the great Scriptures under the direction of a Teacher (guru), and the second level involves analyzing one's own perception of the things and circumstances that one has encountered. The process of self-examination begins with the individual examining their own perception of the present and the experiences they have had in the past. It is necessary to investigate the factors that lead to the erroneous interpretation and to become aware of the 'higher' knowledge that is guided by nothing but the truth. For example, how is it that the snake is wrapped around a rope? Do you think it's because you're afraid of snakes or because your senses aren't able to recognize them correctly? Is there a distinction between the types of rope and snake? What is the reason for superimposing one of these two separate items on top of the other if they are so? Truth is the result of having clarity in one's knowledge. In other words, knowledge is the truth.

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Conclusion

When it comes to explaining the seeming duality that exists in the universe, Advaita Vedānta places a significant emphasis on the ideas of Māyā and Avidyā. On the other hand, Avidyā is the individual ignorance that conceals the knowledge of the Self (Ātmān), whereas Māyā functions on a cosmic level, generating the illusion of multiplicity and change. Saṃsāra, which is the cycle of birth and death, is the outcome of attachment, pain, and the sense of a world that is different from Brahman. Together, these factors lead to the perception of a world. Advaita Vedānta, on the other hand, maintains that this illusion may be destroyed via the practice of self-knowledge, also known as Jῆāna. Avidyā may be conquered and the realization that the Self is none other than Brahman can be attained via the practice of profound meditation (Nididhyāsana), contemplation (Manana), and the study of scripture (Śravaṇa). After coming to this realization, the individual is able to achieve Mokṣa, which is the freedom from ignorance and suffering. Māyā's illusion finally loses its hold on the individual. At the end of the story, Māyā and Avidyā provide an explanation for why the world seems real despite the fact that existence is a singular entity. The journey of Advaita Vedānta is one of awakening, in which the seeker advances from ignorance to knowledge, from illusion to truth, and from bondage to ultimate liberation in the realization of non-duality which is referred to as Advaita.

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