

## Sri Ramanuja and his System of Philosophy.

His Holiness Jagadguru Sri 1108 Sri Anantacharyaji Maharaj, Conjeeveram.

The very first question that one finds himself confronted with while dealing with this subject is: Did Rāmānuja create any new system of philosophy out of his own imagination and establish the same in the world? The answer is a clear 'No'. He did not create any new system, but worked out the *Advaita Siddhānta* (Monistic Philosophy) which had already been accepted by several of his predecessors, even like Śankarāchārya, who worked out the same system which had also been accepted by some of his predecessors.

'इकमेवाद्वितीयं ब्रह्म' and many other similar texts of the Vedas have dealt with the Oneness of *Brahma*. Both Śankara and Rāmānuja established their respective systems of *Advaita Siddhānta* on the authority of such Vedic texts, but the methods they adopted were different. According to Śankara, the Vedānta-Vākyas 'सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म', etc. characterize *Brahma* as only One thing and nothing other than That; but, according to Rāmānuja, the Root 'बृह बृद्धि बृद्धे' with the termination 'मनिच्' included three things in One, which fact is supported by Śrutis and Smṛtis alike. 'बृहति बृहयतीति तत्परं ब्रह्म' is a significant text in the *Rahasyāmnāya Brāhmaṇa* and 'बृहत्वाद् बृहणत्वाच्च तद् ब्रह्मेत्यभिधीयते।' is another text in the *Viṣṇupurāna* also denoting the same idea. These two texts indicate very clearly that That alone is *Brahma* which has the capacity to become big and make others also big. Hence *Brahma* is that in which the existence of one and only one thing is not possible, but there must be other things in It which are also made big by It. This is clear. Rāmānuja says that *Brahma* is One with Three Things in It. Rāmānuja's *Advaita* is Oneness of God qualified by two other Things. Śāstras say the same thing and conclusively prove the same.

'यस्य पृथिवी शरीरं यं पृथिवी न वेद यः पृथिवी-मन्तरो यमयति, यस्य आत्मा शरीरं यमात्मा न वेद य आत्मानमन्तरो यमयति, etc.'

These and similar texts indicate that God is Immanent in both *Atmā* and *Jada padārtha*.

Unlike Śankara, who says that Oneness in *Brahma* is Absolute, Rāmānuja proves that that Oneness is not Absolute but is qualified by two other things, the conscious Soul and the inconscient Matter. *Brahma*, which is thus qualified, indicates what Rāmānuja calls *Viśiṣṭādvaita* or qualified Monism, in which the auspicious qualities of *Satya*, *Jñāna*, and *Ananda* (Truth, Knowledge and Bliss) are the characteristics of *Īśwara* (God Immanent). As Śankarāchārya thought that *Brahma* is only One Thing and that absolutely, it was necessary for him to say that the entire world before our eyes is all unreal. Therefore he had to conceive the idea of Ignorance (*Avidyā*) in *Brahma* which was responsible for making *Brahma* see the diverse unreal world in Itself. When that defect called *Avidyā* is removed, then flashes the light that *Brahma* is only One and that absolutely; but, as Rāmānuja worked out his system on the basis of the fact that *Brahma* is one with three things in It, it was not necessary for him to say that this world which we see before our eyes is unreal, in order to prove the Oneness of *Brahma*. This world is merged in *Brahma* and *Īśwara* is immanent in the world ('तदनुप्रविश्य सच्च त्यज्ञामस्तु, etc.') and that *Brahma* is One. He proved that Oneness of *Brahma* without saying that the world is unreal.

There are three authorities in the world for an act of cognition, viz., (1) Direct perception, (2) Inference and (3)

Revelation, called the Vedas. These Vedas are eternal. They are repeated in every *Kalpa* or cycle in the same order of letters. They are not made and no human origin can be attributed to them. The several defects of the human mind, viz., illusion, doubt, and misinterpretation cannot exist in the Vedas, because they have no human origin. The Vedas are Self-authoritative and, Revelations as they are, no one has a right to sit in judgment over them and say that they are not authoritative. Whenever we see anything in the Vedas which is opposed to direct perception or which is self-contradictory, it is not the mistake of the Vedas, but it is our own mistake in interpreting the Vedas. Our duty in such places is to arrive at the correct idea contained in the Vedas by properly interpreting the Vedic texts and explaining away the so-called opposite character of the texts, *i. e.*, the character which is against direct perception or the so-called self-contradictory nature of the Vedic texts. The *Mīmāṃsā-Sāstra* exists only to lead us to arrive at the exact truth underlying the so-called self-contradictory statements in some places. Every letter and every word of the Vedas is authoritative and the Vedas and Vedānta alone prove the existence of *Brahma*; no other authority can prove the existence of *Brahma*.

The *Vedānta-Sāstra* clearly proves the existence of three things in *Brahma*: viz., (1) the *Jaḍa Palārtha* or Inert Matter, called severally *Pradhāna*, *Prakṛti*, *Māyā*, and *Avidyā*; (2) the Conscious Soul or *Atmā*, which is *Anu* or atomic in size and (3) God or *Īśwara*, who is all-pervasive and all-controlling and who is characterized by the auspicious qualities of *Satya*, *Jñāna*, and *Ananda*. These three things are co-existent in one which is *Brahma*. This is clearly stated in the *Vedānta-Sāstra*. In every body we see there is a conscious inhabiting the body, and the same relation exists between God and soul, on one side, and God and Inert Matter, on the other. In other words, That which is called *Brahma* is none

other than *Īśwara* or God who inhabits both the Conscious Soul and the Inert Matter, proving that the three things together in one is the *Advaita* of *Brahma*.

In this world we see two kinds of living beings: (1) Living beings such as men, animals, birds, etc., possessing larger vital powers and (2) living beings such as stones, trees, etc., with smaller or lesser vital powers. The former class is called *Jangama* (moving) and the latter *Sthāvara* (Immobile), and whatever exists exists always in that Tripartite Combination: no Matter can exist independently of the other two; no conscious soul can exist independently of the other two and no *Īśwara* exists independently of the other two. For example, man means, to start with, a body, and on closer consideration it means the conscious soul which inhabits that body; and the Vedas say that just as this Conscious Soul inhabits the body and controls it, so also God inhabits the soul and controls it. In other words, God is immanent in everything.

According to the varying degree of intelligence in man, (1) man is identified with body, (2) he is inferred to be a conscious soul living in the body and controlling it, and (3) as the result of Vedāntic search after truth 'man' indicates God who is immanent in the conscious soul who lives in the body and sustains the body. The Knowledge of man is proportionate to the depth of his discerning powers. Hence the *Siddhānta* that the body and the soul or *Atmā* which sustains the body and God, who controls and sustains the *Atmā*, all co-existing in One, is the real *Advaita* and every being has these three things in it. There are several Vedic texts to prove this and several ancient *Āchāryas* have accepted this as the only truth. Hence everything in the world is three in one and never one alone. In other words, Vedānta proves *Parināmavāda* or the transformation theory and not the theory of appearance or *Vivarta*.

According to the transformation theory what happens is this. The *Kāraṇa* or the cause becomes *Kārya* or the effect. For example, in a pot mud is the cause and mud is the effect; in other words, the original mud is transformed into a pot. Hence cause and effect must be similar. The characteristics of the cause are also the characteristics of the effect. If we see three things in this world, which is an effect, there must be the same three things in the cause also. The Vedas say that *Brahma* is the cause of this world, which means that the latent Three in one become patent as three in One.

*Parīṇāmavāda* is accepted by the Vedas—'यथा सोमैकेन मृत्विग्नेन विज्ञानेन सर्गं मृत्तव्यं विज्ञातं भवति, etc.' That the cause of the world should be like the world is self-evident. There is similarity between the *Kāraṇa-Brahma* and the *Kārya-Brahma*. The cause becomes the effect. The only difference is that the cause could not be seen except through *Yogajanya Jñāna*, i. e., knowledge born of Yogic perception, while the effect is seen with these mortal eyes. Thus *Brahma*, the cause of the world, is imperceptible inert matter, imperceptible *Chetana* or soul and God, the three existing together. This imperceptible *Brahma*, i. e., *Sūkṣma Brahma* becomes *Sthūla Brahma*, which is the effect or *Kārya*. Thus under transformation the cause becomes the effect and there is no difference in essence between the cause and the effect.

The question now arises whether *Īśwara*, who has Matter and Soul for his body, undergoes the same changes as the several things of this world,—the changes being existence, birth or appearance, transformation, development, decay and destruction. The Vedas say "No"; the *Nirvikāra Śrutis* of the Vedas, which attribute changelessness to God, say 'no' to this question. The word *Nirvikāra* means changeless. A child is born, it becomes adolescent, attains old age, etc.; but the Vedas say that *Atmā* never changes, it is the body alone that changes.

Hence, when *Kāraṇa Brahma* becomes *Kārya Brahma*, there is no change in *Īśwara*, though there is a change in the *Jaḍa Padārtha* or Matter in entirety and the *Atmā* only in its *Jñāna* or cognition aspect, the *Atmā* all along remaining the same in its essence. If at all there may be any change in *Brahma* when It transforms Itself into this world, giving names and forms to the several things of this world, that change can only be the manifestation of the Will of the Lord to become immanent in all the *Sthūla Śarīras*, which change is not at all a defect from any point of view. Thus *Nirvikāra Śrutis* and the theory of transformation of the *Sūkṣma Brahma* into *Sthūla Brahma* are logically perfect. *Advaita* or Oneness is in the essence of *Īśwara*, whose body is the inert Matter and the conscious *Atmā*. Therefore there is no necessity to struggle hard to prove that there is no material world and no conscious soul distinct from *Brahma*. The world is real and all things in the world are real and *Advaita* is real. If somebody says there is a king at Benares and he is one without a second, does it mean that he has no kingdom, no wife, no son, etc. ? In the same manner *Brahmādvaita* means the One *Brahma* having *Atmā* and Matter for Its body and denoting that there is none who is equal to It.

Now the world is intermixed with *Brahma* and, when we say that *Brahma* is One, it can never mean that there is no world. We have already said that every letter in the Vedas is authoritative and in some places in the Vedas we come across texts speaking of difference as existing between *Atmā* and *Brahma*; in some other places we find texts saying that *Atmā* and *Brahma* are one. Śankara said that texts speaking of *Abheda* or sameness are authoritative, while other texts which speak of difference merely indulge in *Kalpanā* (imaginary difference in *Brahma*) and that *Kalpanā* is not real. Hence he opined that only those Vedic texts that speak of nonduality are really authoritative, while those that speak of difference are not authoritative.

But Śrī Rāmānuja says that both the texts are authoritative and to say that one portion of the Vedas is authoritative and the other is not authoritative is not right, and so he interprets both the texts in such a manner that there could be no contrariety between these texts, just as, when we say man is one, we see that there is difference between his body and his *Atmā*. Similarly, we have to infer that the statement 'Brahma is One' speaks of the Oneness of *Brahma* with *Jiva*, keeping up the difference between *Jiva* and God. Hence these texts speaking of *Abheda* and *Bheda* (Oneness and difference) are not contradictory to each other. *Abheda* texts speak of a group, viz. One with three things in It, while the *Bheda* texts speak of the components contained in It individually and severally. Hence the significance of the *Abheda* texts and *Bheda* texts is different and the former texts are not contradictory to the latter, and there is no necessity to say that one portion of the Revelation called the Vedas is authoritative and the other is not authoritative.

Similarly, we find texts speaking of *Brahma* as *Saguṇa* (with characteristics) and *Nirguṇa* (without any characteristics). These texts also appear to be contradictory to each other; but, when the texts speak of *Nirguṇa*, it means that there are no inauspicious qualities in *Brahma*, and, when they speak of *Saguṇa*, it means that there are auspicious qualities peculiar to *Brahma* which Inert Matter and the Conscious *Jivātma* do not possess—'अपहृतपाप्मा सत्यकामः

सत्त्वसत्त्वः', etc. This idea is greatly strengthened by the fact that in the same Vedic texts it is said in some places that there are no bad qualities in *Brahma* and *Īśvara* abounds in auspicious qualities. Hence when Vedic texts treat of *Brahma* in words that appear to be contradictory, the statements like *Īrvikāra*, etc. refer to *Brahma* as the *Īśvara* cause of the world; while of the texts like the following: "*Jiva* and *Brahma* are different", "*Jiva* and *Brahma*

are one and the same", "*Brahma* is *Nirguṇa*," "*Brahma* is *Saguṇa*," etc., etc., each has got a particular contextual significance and can never become non-authoritative.

Thus Śrī Rāmānuja did not follow the method of Śankarāchārya, as he found several Vedic texts and *Smṛti* texts to corroborate his system, which mainly aimed at proving the authoritativeness of each and every text in the Vedas. There are several Vedic texts distinctly saying that the Inert Matter and the Conscious Soul form the body of God and, just as the soul residing in the body rules the body, *Īśvara* or God resides in the *Jiva* and rules him. Hence, when we say that man is one, we speak of the oneness of man, keeping up the difference between the body and the soul. So also, when we say that God is one, we mean that there is difference between *Jiva* and *Brahma*, *Jiva* and Matter, which are nothing else than the body of *Īśvara*, and there is no contradiction whatever in this. This idea is not contradictory to our direct perception also and there is no necessity to say that the world is simply an Illusion.

This is the *Viśiṣṭādwaita* of Śrī Rāmānuja, which does not allow the twisting and torturing and misinterpreting of any of the Vedic texts and which also does not permit the statement that some portion of the Vedas is authoritative and some others are not. Rāmānuja owes a great deal to the ancients whose great services to the cause of the *Viśiṣṭādwaita* he acknowledged in the very beginning of his *Sri-Bhāṣya*, the great commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras*. He simply followed their method and worked up his own System. The word *Viśiṣṭādwaita*, means nothing other than Real *Adwaita*, named as such by Rāmānuja to indicate very clearly that *Brahmādwaita* is the Oneness of God, who is a Mine of all auspicious qualities and whose body is the conscious *Jiva* and the inert matter.