

Study Guide 4

DVD series vol. 4

Vedanta: Seeing the Oneness of Being Beyond Illusions

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The Wisdom of Yoga

Vedānta:

Seeing the Oneness of Being Beyond Illusions

1. Welcome to the Study of Yoga

Dear friend,

Welcome to volume 4 of The Wisdom of Yoga series.

It is our belief that yoga has a lot to offer to our lives and we are happy to present here the essence of the most important yoga traditions that India has produced throughout its rich history.

Enjoy!

Carlos Pomedá and the Yogakula team

2. How to use this study guide

The purpose of this study guide is to guide you through the study of yoga. Here you will find suggestions that may help you to draw the most out of your study. The DVDs are designed to break down each topic into smaller segments that can be more easily followed in one sitting, although their duration varies.

We advise that you read the study guide first and then apply the steps for each section in sequence. Or, if you want to zero in on only one or two topics, just go directly to those sections. Then watch the appropriate segments and complete any other assignments or recommended exercises.

3. About this DVD series

This series is designed to provide a complete course of study that covers the major systems of yoga in their chronological development.

The first volume includes an overview of the history of yoga, followed by an exploration of the upaniṣadic teachings and practices. The second volume delves into the Bhagavad Gītā and its innovations, followed by the tradition of Bhakti Yoga, the yoga of devotion. The third examines the yoga of Patañjali and his Yoga Sūtras, whereas number four looks at the system of Advaita Vedānta. Finally, volume five explores Tantra and the last one in the series, volume six, takes a look at Kuṇḍalinī Yoga and Haṭha Yoga, completing the historical perspective the series provides.

At the same time, each volume provides practices representative of the particular system of yoga examined in that volume. This design provides the opportunity of focusing on one specific school or exploring the entire spectrum. In either case, we recommend that

you take your time with each volume, considering not only the teachings of each, but particularly their application and practice over at least a period of a month for each system.

4. Invocation

Oṃ. Saha nāv avatu; saha nau bhunaktu; saha vīryaṃ karavāvahai.

Tejasvī nāv adhitam astu; mā vidviṣāvahai. Oṃ śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ

"Oṃ. May He protect us; may He help us; may we attain strength. May our study become luminous; let there be no enmity between us. Oṃ. Peace, peace, peace."

5. Introduction & History

Your objectives for this segment are:

- Understand the historical development of Advaita (non-dual) Vedānta, as well as the cultural atmosphere in which it appeared
- Explore a few of the early aphorisms of Vedānta
- Identify the teachers that put forth crucial elements of Advaita Vedānta before Śaṅkara, and what those crucial elements were
- Form a basic notion of the differences with other schools of Vedānta

Ask yourself:

- From my study of the Upaniṣads, what would I say were their main teachings?
- Given those teachings, what types of interpretations could one expect?

Before you start, look at the notes for this section, below. When you are ready, please watch the segment titled, "Introduction & History". Take your time to pause, write down thoughts, reflexions, questions and any items you may want to record. You may also want to refer to the notes and write down any Sanskrit terms that are not included below, as well as their meaning.

a) Sources

Buddhist doctrines: vijñāna-vāda ("consciousness-doctrine") and momentariness, śūnya-vāda ("doctrine of the void")

Prasthānatraya ("triple foundation"): upaniṣads, Gīta, Brahma Sūtra

Commentaries on those

Prakaraṇa granthas (Upadeśa Sahasri, Vivekacudāmaṇi, Atma Bodha, etc.)

Devotional hymns (stotrams), etc.

6. Life of Śaṅkara

Your objectives for this segment are:

- Distinguish between historical and traditional accounts of his life
- Identify the historically verifiable data regarding Śaṅkara
- Find out the main features of his traditional life narrative

Ask yourself:

- What qualities would be evident in the founder of a major system of philosophy and practice?
- How would a tradition reflect those qualities in the form of folk stories, etc.?

At this point, please watch the segment titled, "Life of Śaṅkara". As you watch, just enjoy the narrative, but feel free to write down any relevant data or stories, as well as any Sanskrit terms that appear on the screen, plus their meaning.

7. Advaita Vedānta

This is the main segment in terms of teachings and information about the system. Therefore, your objectives are:

- Identify the main teachings and features of the system
- Gain a clear understanding of those teachings so that you can explain them in simple terms
- Remember analogies, quotes and other devices that will help you both in the understanding and the articulation of those main teachings

Ask yourself:

- If everything, including myself, is one single reality or principle, how can we explain duality and multiplicity?
- In what way can the individual and the supreme be identified as one? In what ways, if any, are they different?
- What is the source of those differences?

At this point, you might want to take a look at the notes below, before you watch this third segment. This will acquaint you with some of the main terms discussed in it. When you are ready, please watch the segment titled, "Advaita Vedānta". As you watch, take your time to pause, write down thoughts, reflexions, questions and any items you may want to record. You may also want to write down the Sanskrit terms that appear on the screen, as well as their meaning.

a) Teachings

Creation, evolution and illusion (satkārya vāda vs. vivarta vāda)

Māyā

Individual counterpart: avidyā or ignorance

Brahman, both with and without attributes (saguṇa and nirguṇa), personal and impersonal

Saccidānanda

Characteristics of disciple (adhikāra):

Viveka, vairāgya, ṣaṭ sampat, mumukṣutvā

ṣaṭ sampat: śama (mental restraint), dama (sensory restraint), uparati (giving up sensory enjoyments or prescribed works, rituals), titikṣa (endurance of pairs of opposites), samādhāna (mental concentration) and śraddhā (faith)

8. Practices of Vedānta

As you prepare to explore the Practices of Vedānta, your objectives for this segment are:

- Understand the connection between the teachings laid out in the previous segment and the type of practice described here
- Find out the dynamics of that practice and how they serve the purpose of Vedānta

Ask yourself:

- If the fundamental problem is one of perception, what should the practice do to address that issue?
- If the fundamental problem is one of avidyā or ignorance, what is the connection between practice and liberation? How does it work?

When you are ready, please watch the segment titled, "Practices of Vedānta". As you watch, take your time to pause, write down thoughts, reflexions, questions and any items you may want to record. You may also want to write down the Sanskrit terms that appear on the screen, as well as their meaning.

9. Meditation

Choose a quiet place where you can follow the meditation instructions from the DVD and also sit comfortably for meditation.

As you follow the instructions, be ready to either pause your DVD player or stop it at the end of those instructions. Otherwise, the DVD will return to the main menu and the background music may distract you.

Meditate as long as you wish (anywhere between 20 minutes and 1 hour is a good duration) and allow yourself plenty of time to come out of meditation gently.

Then, take a few moments to reflect on your meditation process and experience, and take a few notes reflecting what worked, what was challenging, what you learned, what you experienced, what insights you had, etc.

10. Session Recap

Watch the final recap segment and contemplate the following:

- What do I take from this session?
- How can I summarize the teachings of Vedānta?
- What can I say about Śaṅkara's life?
- What is the process of practice in Vedānta?

For further study and practice, you may want to continue with the study suggestions given below.

11. Q&A

Take look at the Q&A submenu and explore any or all themes you may be interested in, for additional information.

12. Study Suggestions

Reading Assignment: Read Nikhilananda, Swami (tr.). *Vedāntasara of Sadānanda*. Vedanta Press. (Entire book)

Items for reflection:

- How do I see myself with regards to the requirements of the student laid out in the text?
- How do I experience the doctrine of superimposition? Any examples from daily life?
- How can I relate the teachings on the Absolute (Brahman) to my own experience? How can I make sense of it in my own terms?
- How do I understand the state of the Jivanmukta, liberation? How can such a state coexist with modern life?

Practices:

- Take one of the qualities of the student and practice for a day or longer, then evaluate the results in terms of your state, what you have learned, future application, etc.
- Practice each one of the three steps to self-realization (pp. 104-116) and note down the results: what does it teach you about practice? how does it help you to take your practice of yoga deeper?
- Practice meditation on the three aspects of the absolute: Existence, consciousness and bliss (sat-cit-ānanda) and note down the results: what does it teach you about practice? how does it help you to take your practice of yoga deeper?