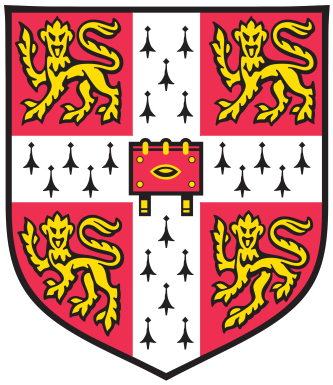
A Modern *Advaita-Vedāntin*: Locating Swami Chinmayananda and His Understanding of Consciousness in the Context of Scripture and the Contemporary World

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Locating Swami Chinmayananda and His Understanding of Consciousness in the Context of Scripture and the Contemporary World

Summary of Dissertation by Varun Khanna

Questions of the nature of the Self and the purpose of life have been of interest to mankind for millennia, culminating in the study of Consciousness in various civilizations. Amidst the milieu of ancient and contemporary theories of Consciousness is the ancient Indian philosophy of *advaita-vedānta*, or the system of non-duality. This dissertation explores the nature of the Self as Consciousness according to the well-known 20th Century philosopher of *advaita-vedānta* and Hindu *guru*, Swami Chinmayananda (1916-1993), drawing upon the core texts of Vedānta, the Upaniṣads, and the works of the chief systematizer of Advaita philosophy and the head of Chinmayananda's monastic order, Śaṅkara (788-820 CE), and locates Chinmayananda and his work within the contemporaneous and ongoing dialogue regarding Hinduism. Understanding that the Upaniṣads are cryptic in nature and that we need a lens through which we can study them, we begin by providing a biography and analysis of the life of Swami Chinmayananda, the lens we have chosen for this dissertation, in the first two chapters. The circumstances in which he was raised, particularly the struggle for India's independence, would influence his interpretation and presentation of Advaita philosophy. We then analyze his interpretation itself in the third and fourth chapters in the form of an intellectual biography, by presenting the philosophy in its traditional sequence, comparing and contrasting Chinmayananda's interpretation with his predecessors, especially Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and Śaṅkara. In the fifth and final chapter we attempt to situate him in the ongoing hermeneutical process of Hinduism by assessing his particular position within three broad strands of research: Hinduism and science, Hinduism and modernity, and Hinduism and diaspora configurations. We conclude that there is something to be learned from the Upaniṣads about Consciousness that augments our contemporary understanding of it, and that the voice of Chinmayananda must not be lost within the dialogue regarding Consciousness, the Self, and Hinduism, for his work has helped to shape the discussion about Hinduism as it stands today.

For Jutin

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Preface

Declarations:

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University of similar institution.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

In 1947, when Swami Chinmayananda – then known as Balakrishnan Menon – was invited to a grand ball in Delhi that included political dignitaries and business tycoons on its guest list, he carefully surveyed the scene, about which he later wrote:

> A roaring welter of unnatural values! Impossible behaviours! Sick and suffering was this generation of hollow, lifeless creatures in the hustle and bustle within those stuffy palace walls. In their studied smiles were dormant tears; in their insincere, made-to-order laughter were sighs of voiceless, deep regrets. Their heartless love concealed stormy hatreds, grudging sympathies and poisonous rivalries. Each suffered and contributed lavishly to the suffering of others.[1]

Balakrishnan, also known as Balan, had spent years using his skill as a conversationalist, journalist, and tennis player to claw his way into the world of the wealthy in Delhi, finally culminating in his being invited to grand balls like the one mentioned above. As a social activist in India, he was searching for a way to bring happiness to the Indian people.

The above excerpt portrays a crucial point in his life when he recognized that even economic prosperity did not guarantee a happy life. He was led to reflect on the nature of happiness, which brought him to the study of "consciousness", the core subject of this thesis. And as the thesis unfolds, we will see from the quotations and excerpts that "consciousness" eventually became a prime concern of his, which is the reason that it is important to focus on the title of this dissertation. But before we proceed, we may ask, can we define "consciousness"?

The study of "consciousness" has been of interest to scientists, philosophers, and laypeople alike for millennia. But the constant struggle to define consciousness has been due to its intangible nature. How can we describe something that we may not be able to perceive with our senses? We can know what it is like to perceive, and what it is like to have consciousness, but it has proven difficult over the millennia to actually pinpoint with a measure of certainty what consciousness actually is. Furthermore, when attempting to study consciousness, the method by which we can study it is elusive. Is it necessarily limited to the philosophical realm? Can there be a

[1] Quoted in Patchen 2006: 27-28.

"science of consciousness"?[2] By current empirical scientific standards, it is difficult to study consciousness objectively and holistically because either we do not know enough about the brain or there are seemingly nonphysical components to consciousness that are rendered totally subjective by the scientific method. But must the methods employed to study consciousness be borrowed from any of the natural scientific disciplines, like biology, chemistry, or physics, or can it indeed be studied by the psychological or philosophical disciplines, with an independent epistemology and methodology?

In the last several centuries, Western philosophers have proposed many theories regarding consciousness, from Descartes (1596-1650) and Spinoza (1632-1677) to Nagel (b. 1937) and Chalmers (b. 1966).[3] Today we have many distinct and arguable philosophies of consciousness. However, the definition of consciousness is itself a challenge because there are different worldviews that all use similar terms to mean different things. Humans may have some common experience of being conscious, but the definition of consciousness and its origin are different based on different philosophies.

For example, according to "substance dualism", there are two distinct substances that cannot be reduced to any common existential ground: matter and consciousness. This means that consciousness is a nonphysical substance. According to "property dualism" though, consciousness evolves as a property of complex physical systems, yet is itself nonphysical. And according to "functionalism", consciousness is just a function of the brain, and is not a separate substance.[4]

However, according to Indian philosophies, there are even more ways to look at consciousness. According to *advaita-vedānta*, or the system of non-dualism, the entire perceived world is an "illusion" (*māyā*) and in fact only "consciousness" (*cit, caitanya, jñāna*) exists; instead of being bodies *with* a consciousness, we are "consciousness" itself, *inhabiting* an illusory body, due to false identification (*adhyāsa*) with the illusory world (*saṁsāra*).[5]

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[2] Here by "science" I mean the word as it is defined in the Oxford Dictionary: "The intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment."

[3] For a comprehensive look at the theories of consciousness proposed by Western philosophers over the centuries, see Velmans 2009: Part I.

[4] Velmans 2009: Part I.

[5] The chief consolidator and systematizer of *advaita-vedānta* was Śaṅkara (ca. 788-820). For a modern exposition of *advaita-vedānta*, c.f. Rambachan 2006.

As this indicates, there are many distinct worldviews that all refer to the same underlying experience of consciousness in different ways. Yet, the common experience is that of "being conscious" – as Descartes pointed out, one finds it very difficult to deny one's own conscious existence. It follows that the study of consciousness is one of the most fundamental studies of humankind, yet its object is highly elusive to systematic enquiry. It is an ancient study, but also a contemporary study. The current popular paradigm within the Western scientific world is that of physicalism, which assumes that only the physical world exists, and that consciousness is some kind of product of brain activity, inseparable from the existence of the brain. But many theories of consciousness have come in and out of fashion, and as Max Velmans says, "being out of current fashion does not mean they are entirely wrong."[6]

It is fascinating that consciousness is at the forefront of modern scientific enquiry today, yet from a philosophical perspective the current methods of enquiry seem potentially incapable of encapsulating the object of their study. This is, in short, because within the current physicalist paradigm of science we are using physical methods to study consciousness, and these methods of enquiry can only reveal physical properties. If there is more to consciousness than electrical impulses and chemical interactions within the brain, then the scientific methods we are currently using to study consciousness will not be able to access that information.

Swami Chinmayananda (1916-1993), the subject of this study, had a professional relationship with the study of consciousness. His teachings from the earliest days of his career as an itinerant *guru* and expositor of Vedānta[7] are principally about the epistemology, methodology, and results of the study of "consciousness" according to the *advaita-vedānta* tradition. There has been little academic work done on his life and teachings thus far, which is surprising, considering the impact he has had on the Hindu[8] community at large. What little work

[6] Velmans 2009: 31.

[7] Vedānta literally means the conclusion (*-anta*) of the Vedas (*veda-*). It is generally interpreted to mean the philosophical culmination of the Vedas. According to *Vedāntasāra*, an influential book by Sadānanda Yogīndra Sarasvatī, "Vedānta is the evidence of the Upaniṣads, along with the *Śārīraka Sūtras* and other books that help in the correct expounding of its meaning." (Translation from Swami Nikhilananda's *Vedāntasāra of Sadānanda*, Advaita Ashrama, 1931, pg. 2.)

[8] I recognize the difficulty in using the word "Hindu", but for the sake of this dissertation I will use it in the way that it is used in Chinmayananda's writings, which is to delineate a

has been done is mainly hagiographical in nature[9] or about his social impact: i.e. his role in attempting to organize Hindus by universalizing *advaita* for a global audience,[10] his involvement with the VHP,[11] or his part in Hindu-Christian dialogue.[12]

Chinmayananda suggests that we take hints from the ancient Hindu texts, the Upaniṣads, to help with the task of understanding consciousness. The Upaniṣads can serve as new reference texts for this field of enquiry, because the nature of reality, which includes the study of "consciousness", is of vital interest to the Upaniṣads.[13] Although studying them is not predominantly in fashion today, he argues that their value in helping us understand consciousness has not diminished. It is the opinion of the Upaniṣads that consciousness is not limited to the physical realm, but rather pervades the physical realm just as space pervades any object with a form.[14] If this is

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group of people that call themselves Hindu. Based on the influence that Vivekananda has on his works, Chinmayananda also uses the word Hindu to describe what he calls "true religion", "a perfect science of *self-perfection*, comprising in it, a complete technique." (*Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 1997: 14). For Chinmayananda's thoughts on religion, cf. *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 1997: Introduction. For a detailed analysis of the problems of defining Hinduism, cf. J. E. Llewellyn 2005: "Introduction: The Problem of Defining Hinduism". For two notable essays by Wilhelm Halbfass and Julius Lipner that attempt to define Hinduism, cf. Llewellyn 2005: "Part I: Definitions of Hinduism".

[9] Patchen (2006). Nancy Patchen is the author of the book, *Journey of a Master*, a hagiographical work on Swami Chinmayananda, which is recognized by Chinmayananda's followers. Though this source is hagiographical in tone, it is accurate for a skeletal outline of Chinmayananda's life. Thus I have relied on this source for overarching details of his life.

[10] Locklin and Lauwers (2009).

[11] Katju (1998 and 2003) and Jaffrelot (2001).

[12] Masih (2000).

[13] Joel Brereton writes, "An integrative vision of things was not the only concern of the Upanishads, but it was a central one… The vision comprehends the world, and by it, people know who they are and where they are. People understand that they are a part of everything, in fact, that they are at the very center of everything, and they know that everything is a part of them… Especially the later Upanishads insist that insight into the true nature of things effects the highest attainment of all, the attainment of a final release from all temporal and spatial limitation… Death cannot affect the true self, nor can anything else, for the self precedes and embraces everything. The person who truly sees the self in this way, therefore, should have neither desire nor fear, for that person knows that no harm can come to the self." (1990: 133-134). As S. Radhakrishnan explains, "[The Upanishads] are said to provide us with a complete chart of the unseen Reality, to give us the most immediate, intimate and convincing light on the secret of human existence… A metaphysical curiosity for a theoretical explanation of the world as much as a passionate longing for liberation is to be found in the Upaniṣads." (1953: 17-18). He continues, "The Upaniṣads describe to us the life of the spirit, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever… They are the teachings of thinkers who were interested in different aspects of the philosophical problem, and therefore offer solutions of problems which vary in their interest and emphasis." (1953: 24-25).

[14] Cf. Chinmayananda's *Ātmabodha* (2003: Verse 68). This text, considered by Chinmayananda to be authored by Śaṅkara, attempts to explain (*-bodha*) the nature of the Self (*Ātma-*) according to Vedānta in a concise manner.

the case, then a research method that reveals physical properties seems incomplete at best when being used to provide answers to questions that may not have physical answers.

In this dissertation, we propose to study what the Upaniṣads say about consciousness according to Swami Chinmayananda. If we are to learn from the Upaniṣadic teaching, we need a teacher, for the texts are cryptic in nature and difficult to interpret. Chinmayananda himself says:

> The necessity of a *guru* in the study of the *Upaniṣad* is unavoidable, mainly because the *Upaniṣad-s*, though written to define and explain the eternal and infinite Truth, have succeeded in doing so only through their word-implications. It does not give so much a definition through the direct meaning of the words used, as much as description of the Truth by the suggestiveness of the words and the terms employed. A mere literal word-meaning, however exhaustive it may be, cannot give the student the true wisdom of the *Upaniṣad-s*. *Upaniṣad-s* do not claim that they define Truth through the finite words employed. But the words have their wealth of suggestiveness and it is by making use of these that the great *Ṛṣi-s* have succeeded in explaining the Inexplicable – in defining the Infinite with finite words. Hence the necessity for a guide to explain to us the exact suggestive import of the words used.[15]

It is desirable to study Chinmayananda as an exponent of the Upaniṣads for several reasons. Firstly, his writings are invariably in English, which makes them more accessible to the lay English reader than writings in other languages. Secondly, he maintains a connection to the original Sanskrit text in his works, allowing the informed reader to analyze his sources directly where necessary. Thirdly, he has written extensively on the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā,[16] so a reader can gain a comprehensive picture from his point of view of the philosophy of these ancient texts without relying on another author. Fourthly, he is acknowledged as a credible author among the Hindu community, being honored with the "Hindu Renaissance Award" for the year of 1992[17] and even being chosen to represent Hinduism at the World

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[15] *Discourses on Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 2008: 13-14.

[16] Chinmayananda claims to follow the *advaita-vedānta* tradition of Śaṅkara in his works. His writings on the Upaniṣads are mostly revised and edited transcripts of his talks delivered on each respective Upaniṣad. There are two versions of his Bhagavad Gītā, one is called *The Holy Geeta* (originally published in 1976), and one is a series of books, which are more detailed than *The Holy Geeta*, based on his talks on each chapter.

[17] "Starting in 1990 *Hinduism Today* has honored one saint each year that has most impacted the faith and spread its vastness, compassion and profundity across the globe." (Source:

Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1993.[18] Fifthly, philosophical lineage is considered very important among orthodox Hindu scholars (*paṇḍita*s), and Chinmayananda's philosophical lineage is that of Śaṅkara, which is widely acknowledged among the Hindu community as a credible and authoritative lineage in the *advaita* tradition. Finally, while we may find a study or a discussion of Chinmayananda's social message or his religious impact,[19] we find almost no academic work that analyzes this influential teacher's philosophical commentaries as such,[20] even though his explanations of certain philosophical concepts from the Upaniṣads or *Bhagavad Gītā* are strikingly clear.

We must pause to make a note here about Chinmayananda's *advaita-vedānta*. It is one reconstruction of and presented as the teachings of Śaṅkara, including works whose authorship may be debatable but are nevertheless accepted by Chinmayananda to be by Śaṅkara, such as the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, as we shall see. It is important to keep in mind that Chinmayananda's *advaita-vedānta* is one particular formulation, albeit a popular one, and is not representative of every formulation of Advaitic or Vedāntic teachings. Keeping this in mind, we continue with our inquiry into the merits of studying through the lens of Chinmayananda.

Why should we learn from the Upaniṣads, according to Chinmayananda? As he explains, "the great scientists of life" (Chinmayananda's way of describing *ṛṣi*s[21]) saw life as "a series of continuous and unbroken experiences."[22] The building block of life, then, is an experience. And just as an atom – the building block of the physical world – can be broken down into smaller components, so can an experience. The *ṛṣi*s broke down experience into three parts: the experienced, or the object of experience; the experiencer; and a certain relationship between the two, called experiencing.

"Hindu of the Year." <http://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=4955>). "This 'Hindu of the Year Award' is given to recognize those 'who make the strongest impact on all Hindus of the world and teach Hinduism's vastness, tolerance, compassion and spiritual depth.'" *Hinduism Today* magazine, quoted in Patchen 2006: 326.

[18] Verma 2009: 190. "Swami Chinmayananda was selected as the President of Hindu Religion by the Hindu Host Committee in the year 1993. The honor was given to him at the Meeting of the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago."

[19] See footnotes 9-12.

[20] In Masih (2000) and Patchen (2006), we find brief recapitulations of Chinmayananda's teachings on different topics, but no critical analysis is provided. Thapan (2005) compiles several articles and excerpts written by Chinmayananda, but the analysis is left to the reader.

[21] *Ṛṣi*s are the ancient seers within the Hindu tradition credited with having the Vedic hymns and spiritual principles of the Upaniṣads revealed to them.

[22] *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 1997: 7.

While, according to Chinmayananda, the Western scientific world has been focused on discovering and manipulating the objects of experience, the "Indian scientific world" was solely focused on studying the experiencer. It is a different realm of study, potentially outside the reach of the methods of study pertaining to only objects of experience. The Upaniṣads, according to Chinmayananda, are the compiled experiments, discoveries, and resulting philosophy of the *ṛṣi*s, attempting to explain the subjective nature of the experiencer as pure existence, consciousness, and bliss (*sat-cit-ānanda*).[23] He says, "In deep dispassion [the *ṛṣi*s] retired into the thick of the majestic forests of the *Ganges* Valleys and there, with a highly developed mind and intellect, scooped their bosom to observe, analyse, classify and conclude the how and the why of the deeper workings of the psychological and the spiritual man in them."[24]

Additionally, Chinmayananda asserts in his works that Vedānta, or the study of the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the *Brahma Sūtra*,[25] has its own complete epistemology.[26] Based on this epistemology, a concrete methodology for studying consciousness is developed, which is radically different from current proposed methodologies, and provides a fresh perspective on the study, as we shall see throughout this work.

Swami Chinmayananda, then, must be our first subject of study. Understanding the teacher will help us to better understand the teaching. The Upaniṣads, through Chinmayananda's eyes, become our textbooks of study and field of research for the topic of consciousness. Since Chinmayananda is in the lineage of Śaṅkara, we specially reference Śaṅkara's writings on the Upaniṣads to crosscheck and critically analyze Chinmayananda's translations. In the remainder of this chapter we shall contextualize Chinmayananda and his times, to study how the child became the father of the man, with special reference to consciousness, the Upaniṣads, and the Bhagavad Gītā.

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[23] *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 1997: 6-7.
[24] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 34-35.
[25] These three – namely the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the *Brahma Sūtra* – are known collectively as the *prasthānatrayī*, and are considered as the cornerstone texts of Vedānta.
[26] This claim is supported by the fact that there are entire treatises on epistemology in the field of Vedānta. For a "compendious yet full treatment of the psychology and epistemology of Advaita Vedānta" in the form of the *Vedāntaparibhāṣā* of Dharmarāja Adhvarin, cf. Sastri (1942).

To comprehend the underpinnings of Swami Chinmayananda's mindset, we must understand the environment in which he was raised. To do this, it is vital to first take a brief look at the history of the state of Kerala, where he was born. Kerala, historically the narrow strip of land between the Western Ghats of India and the Arabian Sea, has had a distinct culture for millennia. The name "Kerala" can be traced back to the middle of the 3rd Century BCE, when in his Second Rock Edict the emperor Ashoka named "Keralaputra" as an independent kingdom.[27] Its name must therefore be even older than that, and the fact that it had a name at all during Ashoka's time indicates that it exhibited regional unity over two millennia ago.

Since that time, the spices of Kerala, particularly pepper, have been desirable to many foreign countries including ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, Persia, and China, and in the modern era, the Portuguese, Dutch, French, Danes, and British.[28] Trade with foreign countries has thus been carried out in the ports of Kerala, exporting spices, and bringing in foreign goods, cultures, and religions for millennia. Until the modern era, trade seems to have been more important than conquest of this region to most countries, so a sense of peace and the influx of new people, religions, and ideas over time have contributed greatly to the evolution of culture in Kerala. Geographically, Kerala is protected from invasion on its eastern side by the Western Ghats, and has thus enjoyed a slight isolation from the rest of the country. For these reasons, a heterodox social system developed in Kerala over the centuries of interaction with foreign cultures.[29] This would play a foundational role in the upbringing of Swami Chinmayananda as Balakrishnan Menon. We will discover later on that his ideas convey this heterodox worldview. Balakrishnan was a known contrarian;[30] his freedom of ideas and expression is partially owed to his being raised in Kerala. George Woodcock gives us some perspective:

> The orientation towards the past is combined with an extraordinary receptiveness to new and alien ideas. In Kerala one soon becomes aware of a peculiarly dynamic relationship between the native and the universal, which arises historically from the fact that for at least two millennia the Malabar Coast has experienced a series of intrusions by sea from the Middle East and

[27] Woodcock 1967: 29.
[28] Menon 1986: 14-18, 395-403.
[29] Woodcock 1967: 29-31.
[30] Patchen 2006: 161-162.

from Europe more varied and more numerous even than those endured by the Punjab…[31]

Here we find a matriarchal family system, where daughters enjoy the benefits of inheritance that sons enjoy in the rest of India, women have "an influence and independence of outlook which one will not find anywhere else in India" (except perhaps Bengal), and widowhood is not "the sordid tragedy which it was – and to a great extent still is – in other Hindu societies."[32]

In the 19th Century, along with their rule, the British brought about a radical change in the education system in India. Particularly in Kerala, where Christian missionaries were very active, Indians took to learning English and Western thought with fervor. Soon the Malayalis (people of Kerala) were the most literate people of India.[33] In the late 19th century, vernacular schools were set up,[34] so that an emphasis on both English and Malayalam was ingrained in students from an early age. This contributed to the early emergence of a local press, starting from the early 1860s.[35] The fact that English was emphasized in schools and a local press had already been established for half a century before Balakrishnan was born meant that he was comfortable with these establishments by the time he was an adult. This enabled him to use them effectively for the purposes of the freedom struggle and for propagating his ideas to the elite community of India as Swami Chinmayananda.

Many changes took place in Kerala over the following several decades. Sri Narayana Guru (1856-1928), a social reformer in Kerala, was born in 1856 in a village to the north of Trivandrum. Though he was born of a low caste, he pursued religious studies despite much difficulty, and eventually made his name as a caste demolisher in Kerala, respected as a holy man by caste Hindus and his own people, the Ezhavas, alike. His motto was "One Caste, One Religion, One God," and this caused a paradigm shift in the minds of many Malayalis of that time.[36]

Thereafter, other castes also followed the example of the Ezhavas. The Nairs created the Nair Service Society in 1914, aiming to break down barriers between the

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[31] Woodcock 1967: 30.
[32] Woodcock 1967: 30. With respect to inheritance of ancestral property: "a daughter and all her children inherit equal shares in such property, but the son only inherits his own share and his children must inherit through their mother's family."
[33] Mathew 1999: 2812-2817.
[34] Mathew 1999: 2813, 2816.
[35] Woodcock 1967: 225.
[36] Woodcock 1967: 228-230.

sub-castes, creating unity within the community. The Nambudiri Brahmins, who were until this time the dominating caste, also realized the need for reform. They formed the Yogakshema Sabha in 1908, aiming, among other things, at allowing "younger sons to marry within the caste and at ending the peculiar kind of purdah that existed among Nambudiri women."[37] By the time Balakrishnan was born in 1916, there had occurred a great shift in the mindset of the common people of Kerala towards a more open society, which would influence the way he saw the world from an early age.

Notably, while in other parts of India the independence movement against the British was underway, these Keralan movements were not aimed at ousting the foreign rulers; rather, they were geared towards making changes within their own society. At this time, the Nambudiris still enjoyed high status in the community, and into one aristocratic Nambudiri family was born Vadakke Kurupath Kuttan Menon. He was born into the Kurupath house, the son of a landowner Nambudiri priest in Trichur. Educated in the British system, he obtained a degree in law, and subsequently moved to Ernakulum where he took up a position as a judge in the local court.[38]

Since he was not the first son, he was to be married into the *kṣatriya* (warrior) caste. The practice at that time was for the oldest son of a Nambudiri family to marry into the Nambudiri caste to carry on the priestly tradition, and for the rest of the sons to be married into families of the other castes. Kuttan's wedding was arranged with Parukutti Menon, known as Manku. Her brother was the Chief Justice of Cochin. After their marriage, they were taken to Poothampalli house, Manku's family home. Here Kouchi Narayani, the eldest woman of the house, received them. The environment they were received into was warm and supportive. After a few years, into this warm and supportive environment was born their first son, Balakrishnan Menon, known later as Swami Chinmayananda.

Balan, as he was called, was born on the 8th of May, 1916, which corresponds to the 26th Mesham, 1091 of the Kollam era, at 7:30 P.M. with Punarvasu on the ascendant in the position of Rajayoga.[39] An astrologer was called to cast his

[37] Woodcock 1967: 230-231.
[38] Patchen 2006: 122.
[39] Patchen 2006: 121.

horoscope. He told the family that because of the positioning of Rajayoga,[40] their son would be a great man, potentially world-famous. This was an occasion of joy for the household, and as the child was a boy, Kuttan had hopes of his son becoming a famous lawyer. At the time, nobody thought that Balan would achieve his fame in the field of spirituality. As we shall see, the changes that were taking place in India at this time would serve as a cause for Balan to choose the path that he did. In fact, just days before Balan was born, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the current popular leader of the Indian independence movement, had created his Indian Home Rule League in Poona.[41] Thus the dreams that Balan's parents had for him, like working for the British government, would not be the same dreams that the new generation of Indians, including Balan, would foster.

A revered yogi and saint, Chattambi Swamigal (1853-1924),[42] who visited the Menon family home often in Ernakulum, happened to be there during the week of the baby's delivery. The swami was said to be a great scholar of many subjects, particularly English, Tamil, Sanskrit, botany, geology, geography, yoga, and medicine. His "encyclopaedic knowledge was the wonder and despair of his erudite contemporary scholars".[43] He played twelve instruments and was an expert in the traditional dance form of Kerala, Kathakali. He was a master of the Sanskrit treatises (*śāstras*) on various secular and religious subjects, and was known in scholarly circles throughout South India as an authority on scripture.

It was Chattambi Swamigal that named the new baby of Poothampalli House. With due ceremony he bestowed the name "Balakrishnan", which means "child Krishna", upon the boy. His full name, according to custom, was Poothampalli Balakrishnan Menon. He was called Balan for short. Balan was brought up in this traditional matriarchal home by his mother, four aunts, and older cousins, surrounded by orthodox Hindu rituals and culture, and by all accounts was a cossetted child.

Chattambi Swamigal returned to Poothampalli House when Balan was two years old. Often the swami would play with Balan, speaking a language unknown to anyone else in the house. When asked what he was saying, he would cryptically reply,

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[40] In Vedic astrology, Rajayogas, meaning "royal combinations", are "specific planetary combinations which promise prosperity, success, and generally fortuitous circumstances." (Dreyer 1997: 176).
[41] Sarkar 1989: 151.
[42] For a more detailed description of Chattambi Swamigal, cf. Menon (1967).
[43] Menon 1984: xiv.

"Don't worry, this is only between him and me."[44] In a later visit, he remarked, "Don't worry, I've taught him everything."[45] It is interesting to note that later in life, Balan took the same path as the Swamigal and became a renunciate monk (*saṁnyāsī*) himself.

A mischievous child, he did not show any interest in family rituals at home. But he was forced to attend the evening worship ritual (*pūjā*) every day. The ritual would last for hours, and in that time Balan would occupy himself by closing his eyes and trying to remember the image of Śiva with all its details. As Chinmayananda he later remarked,

> The crescent moon poised on his broad forehead, the smiling eyes of compassion, the serpent coiled around his blue neck, the beaming mouth that seemed to be ready to speak of tenderness and affection from behind his mustache. This splendid Shiva was the ideal of young Balan's own heart.[46]

This image would stick with Balan through the turbulent years of his early adulthood, ultimately aiding him in returning to his religious foundation. He even commented:

> It was during those days of waiting for the conclusion of the worship service that Swami Chinmayananda was born, in Balan, only a frail child. Somehow Balan had stumbled onto this new game: He would look at the picture of the Lord, then would shut his eyes to see Lord Shiva in the darkness within, exactly as he was in the picture on the altar. This gave Balan a game so sweet and pleasant that it became a habit to call up this picture onto his mental screen behind his closed eyelids at all hours of the day. The picture came readily as soon as it was ordered; his wonder grew at this success.[47]

Unbeknownst to him, he was practicing a particular technique of meditation called *upāsanā* (mental visualization of a deity).[48] As we shall explore, despite his disinterest in religious rituals at a young age, this steeping in spiritual and religious practices gave him a background early on that may have prompted him to reconnect with spirituality in a meaningful way later in his life. But his skepticism stayed with him throughout his formative years, which helped him later as Swami Chinmayananda to write about the topic of spirituality from the perspective of a

[44] Quoted in Patchen 2006: 126.
[45] Quoted in Patchen 2006: 126.
[46] Quoted in Patchen 2006: 143.
[47] Quoted in Patchen 2006: 143.
[48] Patchen 2006: 144.

skeptic. This ability made him as appealing to the skeptics as to the believers, significantly widening his target audience.

As a teenager, Balan was utterly disinterested in religious rituals. In addition to not attending the worship services at home, he criticized the concept of God itself. Thinking himself an intellectual, he rationalized away the "need" for God, and categorized himself as an agnostic. As Swami Chinmayananda, he would later write about Balan's thoughts on religion:

> You see this was what happened to Balakrishnan. He had heard the various spiritual teachers who visited his home describing God. They said if God is the sun, every living being is but a ray of him. If God is the conflagration, the individuals were mere sparks. If God is the Whole, each of us is only a part of the Whole. This set the boy thinking and, in his immaturity of thought, he came to the conclusion that, since even in the best of us there was only a tiny part, scarcely twenty percent, of goodness then what must be the Whole but a huge cauldron of stinking evil. Again, if the various individuals are all different rays of God, then only because of all these people like Balan could there even be a God. In short, Balan was really the source of God, not God the source of Balan. Why then should Balan pray to God? So argued the stupid youth.[49]

Thinking this way, Balan separated himself from any ideas of God. He had a hunch that his logic was flawed, but he strongly opposed any notion of blind faith. He maintained, however, a practice of *japa*[50] in bed.

Even as a self-proclaimed atheist, he did not let go of his personal childhood relationship with Śiva. He would visualize Śiva in the form of Candrakalādhara,[51] repeating the mantra "*Oṁ namaḥ Śivāya*"[52] before sleeping. Along with rejecting God philosophically, however, came the practical rejection of superstitious rituals. He rejected the idea of bathing three times a day, but rather opined that bathing once in the morning was enough for the whole day unless one got dirty.[53] This idea that one should only do things that one thinks are meaningful and reject all others based on

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[49] Quoted in Patchen 2006: 173.
[50] Repetition of a name or mantra as a spiritual practice.
[51] Candrakalādhara is the name of the form of Śiva wearing the moon as an ornament in his hair.
[52] This particular mantra means "*Om*, prostrations to Śiva". For further information about mantras, their uses, powers, and meanings, cf. Chapter 22: "Mantra" by André Padoux in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, ed. Gavin Flood 2003: 478-492.
[53] Patchen 2006: 165.

reason and one's own experimentation was one that would continue throughout Balan's life, even seeping into his works as Swami Chinmayananda, as we shall see. Swami Chinmayananda later said:

> …our enquiry would be interesting and fruitful not only to ourselves, but to the world at large, in case we undertake this work in a pure spirit of research and scholarship. I do not want your devotion for the ancient scriptures to be brought into this *Yajñaśālā*[54] to stultify or colour your poor discrimination. Bundle it up! Come here with a sharp and pointed intelligence, thirsty to know and willing to strive.[55]

This is how he thought of consciousness as well; for, according to him, it was only through his own experimentation that he arrived at his conclusions. Even a meeting with the great seer Ramana Maharshi and an apparently spiritual experience in Ramana's presence would not shake Balan's rationalism. He later wrote:

> When I was again aware of my body and surroundings, I forced myself to get up, wondering what had happened. I shook my head to clear my thinking – 'Nothing has happened to me,' I rationalized. 'This man is a hypnotist.'[56]

In 1942 Balan joined Gandhi's Quit India Movement, leaving Lucknow University where he was a Master's student at the time, to spread awareness of British shortcomings in India through distributing leaflets and giving public speeches to arouse patriotic sentiments in the public.[57] But after he heard that an arrest warrant was put out for Balakrishnan Menon, "a Madrasi",[58] he went into hiding. He traveled to Kashmir and remained incognito there for one year. He had to keep moving at all times in order to stay hidden, but this caused problems in obtaining food. For days at

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[54] A *yajñaśālā* is a room or hall (*śālā*) where the *yajña*, or sacrifice, takes place. In this case it is the hall where the spiritual discourse – which Chinmayananda refers to as the *yajña* – takes place.

[55] *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 1997: 13-14.

[56] Quoted in Patchen 2006: 33.

[57] In 1940, with the Second World War on the brink, India was using the beleaguered British situation to push for its own independence. Constitutional developments were taking place in India. In 1942, Gandhi's famous Quit India Movement took concrete shape, with the "Quit India" resolution being passed on August 8th. This resolution called for "mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale" under Gandhi's leadership. (Sarkar 1989: 388). Cf. Gyanesh Kudaisa's essay, "Foreshadowing 'Quit India': The Congress in Uttar Pradesh 1939-1941" in *Mapping Histories: Essays Presented to Ravinder Kumar*, Anthem, London, 2000, pg. 225-254.

[58] Patchen 2006: 9. Even though Balakrishnan Menon was actually from Cochin, not Madras, the British did not recognize the distinction between the different kingdoms of South India, and instead called people from the south "Madrasis".

a time sometimes, it was difficult to get food. He was unable to ask anyone for help, for fear of being identified as "the Madrasi" that the British were looking for.

Once on his way to Delhi, he accidentally entered a British Intelligence communications center trying to avoid a British officer looking for him. There he quickly assumed the guise of someone looking for a job, intending to stay undercover as a menial task worker until the British stopped actively looking for him.[59] Luckily, a British officer sympathetic to the Indian freedom movement hired him as a machine operator. Subsequently the officer made Balan his personal assistant to keep him safe. Balan's situation changed from desperate to luxurious, as he moved into the military compound and was allowed to participate in the activities that the British officers engaged in, including tennis, drinking imported liquors, cigarettes, and good food.

These changes, namely going from having no food in Kashmir to living a luxurious life in this military compound, inspired Balan to reflect on the transience of worldly situations. He started to think that there was more to life than just growing, breeding, working, and dying. He would later comment as Chinmayananda in an interview, responding to the question of why he took the Hindu vows of renunciation, or *saṁnyāsa*, "What would you have me do, marry, breed, fight and talk shop until, wrecked with age and sorrow, this body drops down dead?"[60] As we shall investigate later, this was one of the turning points in Balan's life, which would culminate in his taking the sacred vows of renunciation to become Swami Chinmayananda. His subsequent study of the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā would firmly direct his focus onto the study of consciousness.

After eight months of service in the military compound, the sympathetic British officer realized that Balan was uninterested in the work assigned to him. He arranged the paperwork such that Balan could be released. Balan traveled through Punjab, where he encountered several groups of freedom fighters. There, he started advising the groups on distributing leaflets and organizing public strikes. But the "Madrasi" was soon apprehended and imprisoned in Delhi.

In prison, he was interrogated and beaten, and as a result of the overcrowding, lack of hygiene, and poor conditions he fell ill and was on the verge of death. Since the prison was sending so many dead prisoners for cremation, the people of the city were noticing the high death toll. Thus the prison officials started to throw nearly

[59] Patchen 2006: 10.
[60] Quoted in Patchen 2006: 100.

dead prisoners out on the streets so as not to let their death toll swell. In this way, when Balan fell ill with typhus fever and was in a stupor, he too was taken out of the prison and left to die on the road.[61]

An Indian lady whose son was fighting for the British in the Second World War saw him on the side of the street, and was reminded of her son. She picked him up and cared for him, and once he was able to walk around on his own, he traveled to Baroda, Gujarat, to stay with his cousin Achuthan Menon and recover fully. The long period of prison and recovery allowed him plenty of time to reflect on the precariousness of life. He started thinking about death and its significance, since he seemed so close to his own death. He questioned the meaning of such a temporary life. This question stayed with him throughout his career as a journalist, and in due course, led him to the study of consciousness. The close encounter with death and subsequent recovery, along with deep reflection about life and death, would be the crucial experience that turned him from an apathetic, rowdy student into a motivated, persuasive leader.[62]

It was shortly after recovering, while still at Achuthan's house, that he rediscovered the Hindu religion after approximately 15 years of having rejected it. In Achuthan's wife's reading material, a series of articles on Himalayan saints was being published.[63] These Himalayan masters were said to protect certain spiritual teachings that were not taught to the common man. One of the articles was by Swami Sivananda Saraswati, the president and founder of the Divine Life Society. Sivananda would eventually perform the initiation rites for Balan to become Swami Chinmayananda.

But at the time, despite his interest in philosophical topics, he was confronted with the need to get a job. It was only later, after achieving considerable success in the material world and finally being invited to grand balls such as the one mentioned on the first page of this chapter, that Balan would finally leave the life of materialistic pursuits. After making the observations mentioned above about that ball, he would declare:

> This was sufficient for Mr. Balakrishnan Menon. At that ball, he saw what a godless animal life could be, even at the level that most considered to be the best. He decided on the very first day of gate crashing into this 'Palace of

[61] Patchen 2006: 12-14.
[62] Patchen 2006: 14.
[63] Patchen 2006: 17.

> Life' to quit it for good… He decided to seek for himself the lonely path of the Divine Life that promises to lead all pilgrims to the brilliant Domain of Perfection.[64]

He would later teach people that spiritual practices are to be done in the situation in which one finds oneself; one need not run away from life to be spiritual.

In 1947, Balan moved in with an uncle and his son in Delhi, who had taken up residence there for an extended period of time to conduct some business. This way, he could shift his focus from earning enough to survive to his philosophical studies. He first thoroughly studied European philosophical thought, but was unsatisfied with the answers they provided to his questions.[65] At the point when he felt that his questions about life were unanswerable, he turned to the saints of India, such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), Swami Sivananda (1887-1963), Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), Swami Rama Tirtha (1873-1906), and Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950). He read every book he could find by and about these saints. It was the words of these masters that seemed to quench his thirst for answers, and instill in him a new thirst for the experience of the supreme consciousness that he read about.[66]

He maintained spiritual practices privately without changing his external life at all. He was involved in discussions at the local club, which gave him enough information to write the articles he needed to submit to *The National Herald*,[67] where he worked at the time. However, at home, he had discussions about Hinduism with his uncle V. K. Govinda Menon, who was a scholar of Hindu scriptures. When Govinda explained to Balan about a sage that he personally knew called Ramana Maharshi, Balan recalled the meeting he had had with this sage in Arunachala, many years before, in 1936,[68] mentioned earlier in this chapter. At that time, he had rationalized away the experience by concluding that Ramana Maharshi was a hypnotist. At this stage in his life, however, he proceeded to learn and read about various sages, questioning all the while. He wondered whether there was any truth to their arguments, and if there was, why these sages were not fighting for the freedom of the

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[64] Quoted in Patchen 2006: 27-28.
[65] Patchen 2006: 29.
[66] Patchen 2006: 31.
[67] *The National Herald* was a newspaper started in 1938 by Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, with the words "Freedom is in Peril, Defend it with All Your Might" carried on its masthead. The newspaper ceased operations in 2008.
[68] Patchen 2006: 31.

nation along with everyone else. If they were not helping the common man in any way, what was the use of scripture? These doubts plagued Balan's mind.[69]

At this time, his uncle and cousin completed their business in Delhi and moved away, and Balan lived alone for some time. At this point, he decided that he would go to the Himalayas to "expose" the sages that were supposed to be keepers of this great knowledge, but did not seem to be helping at all with the freedom effort. He was clearly conflicted at this stage: he did not know whether to follow the sages or to think of them as frauds and escapists. It would only be later, with continued exposure to Swami Sivananda, that Balan would come to fully surrender to the teachings of Vedānta, immersing himself in the study of consciousness. Two years into his job at the *Herald*, Balan visited Swami Sivananda[70] in Rishikesh.

Sivananda was originally born as Kuppuswami Iyer in Tamil Nadu in September 1887. After doing well in school and attending a Jesuit college, studying the Bible thoroughly and developing an interest in Christ and the Christian mystics, he went on to study medicine in Tanjore, then practiced as a doctor in British Malaya for 10 years. There, he started to learn about Vedānta. In 1923 he came back to India and received initiation from Swami Vishnudevananda, the head of the Kailasa Ashram, and was given the name Sivananda Saraswati.

He started a small ashram in 1934 called Ananda Kutir in Rishikesh. Alongside the ashram, he and his followers opened a small charity hospital to treat the illnesses of the poor and the wandering swamis. Eventually, as the ashram grew in size and popularity, the Divine Life Society was founded, which included new facets like a pharmacy, a printing press, residences for visitors and disciples, a free kitchen, and a magazine called *Divine Life*.

To do further research, Balan visited the Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh repeatedly, and as his trips increased in length, he eventually went to live at the ashram. Throughout this time, he continued to read more by Indian sages, and was influenced especially by the works of Swami Vivekananda. Sivananda taught him the basics of Vedānta, and later Menon expressed the desire to be initiated into the monastic order of Śaṅkara to which Swami Sivananda agreed. On the 25th of Februray, 1949, at the age of 32, P. Balakrishnan Menon was initiated into *saṁnyāsa*

[69] Patchen 2006: 33-34.
[70] For more information about Swami Sivananda, cf. *Autobiography of Swami Sivananda*, 6th ed. Rishikesh: Divine Life Society, 1995.

and given the name Chinmayananda Saraswati.[71] The name "Chinmayananda" literally means "The bliss (*-ānanda*) of consisting of pure consciousness (*cinmaya-*)". It is interesting to note that the study and exposition of "consciousness" was a central focus of Chinmayananda's life. Accordingly, it is the central theme of this dissertation as well.

At this point, Chinmayananda was no longer conflicted. From then on, he was dedicated mainly to the study of consciousness, especially through the philosophy of *advaita-vedānta*, with the goal of experiencing the truth that he was convinced lay embedded within the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and other Vedāntic texts.

Chinmayananda learned more in Rishikesh, but after some time desired to gain the experience of Self-realization that is explained in Advaitic interpretations of Vedāntic texts. When he expressed his desire to his teacher, Swami Sivananda directed him to another revered saint named Swami Tapovan, locally called Swami Tapovan Maharaj, who resided in Gangotri.[72]

Swami Tapovan was born as Subramanyam Nair in 1886 in Kerala. A master of Sanskrit, Malayalam, and English, Subramanyam studied Vedāntic philosophy as a teenager. He eventually took *saṁnyāsa* initiation from Swami Janardhanagiri of Kailasa Ashram, being named Tapovan. He took up residence in the Himalayas after that.[73] Chinmayananda was perhaps sent to study with this teacher because Swami Tapovan was from his home state, Kerala. For the next two and a half years, Chinmayananda learned from Tapovan, traveling between Gangotri, Uttarkashi, and Rishikesh according to the changes in weather, living entirely on alms.[74] The discipline of the *saṁnyāsī* life had begun.

Chinmayananda was only able to learn about consciousness directly from the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gītā* in their original Sanskrit and also express his ideas to India's elite in erudite English because of his foundation in both Sanskrit and English. Before we proceed with his interest in consciousness, let us take a moment to identify how he gained this mastery of both languages. It will be beneficial to explore some of the experiences of his life along the way to understand how his career path developed the way it did.

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[71] Patchen 2006: 67.
[72] Patchen 2006: 70.
[73] For more information on Swami Tapovan, cf. "My Teacher: Swami Tapovan" by Swami Chinmayananda, the introduction to Swami Tapovan's *Hymn to Badrinath*.
[74] Patchen 2006: 84-100.

In 1921, when Balan was five years old, he started attending school formally. He went to Sri Rama Varma boys' school, an English-medium school. Balan's school was styled after the British system of education,[75] in which all the textbook examples, including people, flora, fauna, and artifacts, were English. We will find later in his writings as Swami Chinmayananda that many of his examples seem to be informed by this England-centric paradigm. At the time, in Kerala, there was an emphasis placed on learning English, Sanskrit, and Malayalam,[76] so Sanskrit and Malayalam were offered as elective subjects in Balan's school. He chose Malayalam as his second language elective for the first four years of school. Thereafter he chose Sanskrit, and studied that for five years. This foundation in Sanskrit was crucial in helping the later Chinmayananda to effectively grasp and elucidate the import of the scriptures that he commented on. Over these years, however, he received much attention at school for being the son of the District Judge and the nephew of the Police Commissioner, and as a result, Balan became spoiled.[77] The fact of having been a spoiled child, however, would help the future Swami Chinmayananda identify with and reach out to those very types of people in his talks.

As a teenager, his personal interest in religious rituals was minimal. He would ridicule those who went to the temple, while never going himself. This attitude of defiance would perhaps go on to manifest in Swami Chinmayananda, when he criticized the way Hinduism was being taught and propagated by the swamis and priests to the laypeople of India.

After failing in science, Balan agreed to his family's desire for him to pursue a course in Law at Lucknow University. At age 24 he went to Lucknow to pursue a Master's degree in English Literature, while taking a secondary course in Law.[78] But while his course was still underway, like many other students of his age, he joined the Quit India Movement in 1942. Since one of his roles was to deliver public speeches to arouse nationalistic sentiments in his audiences, he developed oratory and persuasion

[75] In 1834 Lord Macaulay, then a member of the Supreme Council of India, was responsible for setting up the system whereby Indian education could "create a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern… Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect." (Macaulay, Thomas Babington. "Minute on Indian Education." 1835.)
[76] Woodcock 1967: 224-225.
[77] Patchen 2006: 160.
[78] Patchen 2006: 176.

skills, which would become useful for the future Chinmayananda to convey his interpretation of *advaita-vedānta* to the educated public of India.

After the incident of entering the British Intelligence center in Delhi that we mentioned above, he started working as a personal assistant for a British officer. Since he had few duties as a personal assistant sitting at a desk all day, he studied for his MA English exams in Lucknow. He intended to go back as soon as he could.

Later, once he arrived at his cousin Achuthan Menon's home in Baroda, Gujarat, Balan began his career as a journalist. He started writing under the pseudonym "Mochi", or cobbler:

> Along the pathways that skirt the streets of cities, the *mochi* sits under a tree. With bits of string and a simple metal punch, he repairs shoes in exchange for a few pennies. Consigned to a life of poverty, he can only hope to earn enough to buy food for his family each day.[79]

Balan wrote from this perspective to promote the necessity of socialism[80] for a society in which the majority of the population was poor. His articles started being published regularly in Indian nationalist newspapers. Later on, as we shall see, Swami Chinmayananda too was wedded to the ideal of socialism in India, even as he commented on the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. His interpretation of how to apply the study of consciousness for the creation of a perfect society reflects this worldview.[81]

When Balan was healthy enough, he left Baroda. He rejoined Lucknow University to finish his MA in English Literature with Honors, taking several

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[79] Quoted in Patchen 2006: 16.

[80] Balan promoted a form of socialism called "democratic socialism". This is a type of socialism that favors grassroots-level movements for the creation of decentralized economic democracy. Cf. David Schweickart, "Democratic Socialism." <http://orion.it.luc.edu/~dschwei/demsoc.htm>.

[81] In his 1992 address to the United Nations, entitled *Planet in Crisis*, Chinmayananda said, "Through individual perfection alone can world perfection be aspired." (1994: 8). About creating a societal change, he said:

> Wedded as I am to the socialistic viewpoint, I do believe in the idea of the present necessity of distribution of wealth – but it should originate in the producers themselves, spontaneously. They should not be forced to part with their profits, but should be educated morally to appreciate the glory of distribution, the joy of sharing, the philosophy of oneness. They should be made to feel they belong to one family, bound together with a common culture, with a common religion, with a common scripture. Then alone will there be a spontaneous response that is more fundamental and deep – one not subject to corruption and the other malpractice [*sic*] that go along with it.

Quoted in Patchen 2006: 301-302.

journalism courses on the side as well. These courses taught him how to write and communicate on a more popular level, which he would later use to his advantage in expressing himself as Chinmayananda. After finishing his degree he started working as an editor at a local newspaper, but soon was called to work for the *Free Press*[82] newspaper in Bombay. In 1945, he became a sub-editor of the *National Herald* in Delhi. At this time his foremost concern remained the Indian freedom movement and the changes it would bring to the nation. He was aware that "freedom" did not simply mean the withdrawal of the British; social and economic equity for the people of the nation would also be necessary. Through the *Herald*, he voiced these opinions on India's problems.

In 1947, a new series was started called "The View from the Footpath" by Mr. Tramp – Balan's new pseudonym used to write from the perspective of the poor – in which he drew on his experiences living in the streets of Kashmir to write in the first person about the plight of the underprivileged. It was after this series gained recognition that Balan was invited to the grand ball mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. As we observed, he made the decision at this time to stop pursuing the "Palace of Life" and start seeking the path of the "Divine Life".[83] We may now proceed with Swami Chinmayananda's work after taking up the *saṁnyāsī* life.

At some point during his learning phase with Swami Tapovan, Chinmayananda was inspired by the thought of the river *Ganga* (Ganges) flowing down from the Himalayas to the plains below. In a similar fashion he decided to take the knowledge he had learned in the Himalayas and bring it down to the common people below in a format they could understand.[84] He first toured the temples and ashrams of India by foot to understand the way Hinduism was being portrayed and taught throughout the country. About this journey, he said, "I was miserably disillusioned and disappointed at the working plans of all the ashrams and temples, at the stuff that was doled out as the best of Hinduism."[85] He then started giving talks on the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the Upaniṣads in many places throughout India, which he

[82] The *Free Press of India* was a nationalistic newspaper started in the 1920s by Swaminathan Sadanand during the British Raj. It was the first newspaper owned and managed by Indians. It stayed operational for a decade before shutting down due to poor management. It was revived briefly from 1945-1947.
[83] Patchen 2006: 28.
[84] Patchen 2006: 111.
[85] Quoted in Patchen 2006: 102.

called "*Jñāna Yajña*s" (sacrifices of knowledge). About these *yajñas* he said, "This is a *Jnana Yagna*[86] [*sic*] wherein we offer oblations of our own wrong notions and values of life into the well-lit fires of our own discrimination and will."[87]

A unique feature of these *yajña*s was that he taught directly from the scriptures. Many other spiritual teachers would simply speak about their experience or give self-help type advice, but Chinmayananda had the distinction of bringing scriptural knowledge directly from the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the Upaniṣads to the layperson.[88] His mission, in his words, was to "convert Hindus to Hinduism."[89] The first *Jñāna Yajña* in Poona was 100 days long, but as Chinmayananda began to travel more and the demand for his presence grew in several places around India, the *yajña*'s length shortened to 7 days.

In 1953, a few attendees of a *Jñāna Yajña* in Chennai felt the need for something that lasted longer than the *yajña*s so that they could continue to practice what they had learned during the *yajña* and learn more even after Chinmayananda had left their city. They started a group that would meet regularly to discuss what had been taught. They called this society the Chinmaya Mission, and only after it was formed was Chinmayananda asked to recognize and permit such a society. Despite his initial hesitation at having a society named after him (he was assured that it was named "Chinmaya" based on the Sanskrit meaning of the word, "consisting of pure consciousness", not his name), he agreed. In some time, branches of this society emerged in different cities, and the organization as a whole was called Chinmaya Mission. By 1964, there were over 100 centers in India.[90]

In 1965, Chinmayananda began traveling abroad at the invitation of people who were settled abroad but had attended *Jñāna Yajña*s in India. Due to the popularity of his talks in the United States, there was a demand for an organization similar to Chinmaya Mission there as well. Chinmaya Mission West was formed in Piercy, California in 1975.[91] Over time, in this manner centers were established in many countries around the world. There are currently over 350 centers worldwide.

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[86] In India, it is common practice to write "gn", "gy", or "jn" in place of "jñ", perhaps due to lack of available diacritic marks.
[87] Patchen 2006: 211.
[88] Thapan 2005: xi.
[89] Patchen 2006: 114.
[90] Patchen 2006: 246-255.
[91] Patchen 2006: 289.

In addition to the Chinmaya Mission centers, where regular study group classes are held for adults and cultural and spiritual education classes, called "Bala Vihar" classes, are held for school-aged children, there are six centers for intense Vedāntic learning in India, all of which are called "Sandeepany", named after the sage Sāndīpani, who according to tradition was a renowned teacher in the time of Krishna, even supposedly teaching Krishna himself. In these Sandeepany centers students, living as *brahmacārin*s (celibates), are taught the core Vedāntic texts in the *gurukula*[92] style for two and a half years. In the first such Sandeepany *gurukula*, Chinmayananda started training *brahmacārin*s that would go out and do the same work he was doing. They would learn for two and a half years, and at the end, if they chose to, they could receive initiation into the monastic order. These *brahmacārin*s would then be assigned to a particular center or group of centers and head the spiritual and cultural activities there. Over time, a large network of *brahmacārin*s has formed, and they are responsible for the day-to-day upkeep of each Mission center.[93]

In 1993, Chinmayananda was to have been honored with Hinduism Today's "Hindu of the Year 1993" award and a Lifetime Service award at the Global Vision 2000 conference.[94] He was also chosen to represent Hinduism at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in September of the same year, on the 100th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's historic speech in Chicago at the same conference. But on the 3rd of August, 1993, Chinmayananda died in San Diego, California of a heart attack.

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[92] *Gurukula* means "family of the guru". This style of education includes several years spent living at the home of the teacher, as a family member, and learning under direct supervision of the teacher.

[93] Chinmayananda was interested in more than just teaching the scriptures, however. His aim was to develop a society holistically, through the development of individuals. In order to develop individuals, there were many projects relating to the material world that needed to be undertaken, which continue to this day. These are schools, colleges, training courses in nursing, free food centers, slum renovation programs, institutes of management, hospitals, old-age homes, *gośālā*s (cow sheds), vocational training institutes, youth centers, social and welfare organizations, rural development programs, research and publication, construction and management of temples, and more. Two of the major branches of Chinmaya Mission are CORD, the Chinmaya Organization for Rural Development, and CIF, the Chinmaya International Foundation. CORD is responsible for the sustainable economic, social, and infrastructural uplifting of over 400 villages in and around Sidhbari, Himachal Pradesh, and has achieved success in several villages in Orissa, Tamilnadu, and Andhra Pradesh. CIF is a research institute located in Veliyanad, Kerala, centered around the supposed site of the maternal ancestral home of Śaṅkara. This institute is for Sanskrit research and publication.

[94] Source: "Chinmayananda: 1916-1993." <http://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=1176>.

After his death, his disciple Swami Tejomayananda began to head the Mission, and its activities continue to grow today.

It is important that we consider one other topic to avoid any misunderstanding about the subject of this thesis. Over the years, Chinmayananda had a vision of uniting the highly disorganized branches of Hinduism under one banner, for which he invited several Hindu leaders and representatives to start what was called the Vishva Hindu Parishad, or the World Hindu Council, in August 1964.[95] Although Chinmayananda, the subject of this study, was involved in founding the VHP, which has recently been criticized in the media as being a right-wing extremist group, he was not a right-wing extremist. His leadership role faded within the group over the years as it became more politically oriented, and he gradually went back to heading the Chinmaya Mission full-time, a non-political organization. In an interview with the scholar Lise McKean, he said, "After I started the VHP, I returned to my own mission as spiritual teacher of Vedanta."[96]

Indeed, he was even known to encourage people of other religions to become stronger in their own faith, and did not advocate conversion or the superiority of Hinduism. Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, an eminent scholar of Islam and an ardent disciple of Swami Chinmayananda, says in his book *Son of Karbala*:

> There was never any glorification of Hinduism or any other 'ism.' He always spoke about the One and opened for me windows and doors to tawheed (the Oneness of God). When I met Chinmaya I was not a practicing Muslim, but a ceremonial one – praying only the Friday prayers or prayers for other special occasions. I was not in the grip of the rituals of Islam. It was he who nudged my return towards them. Every time I arrived in his presence, he would almost shout out to me, *La ilaha ila'll'ah!* (There is no god but God) or *Assalamu alaykum!* (Peace be upon you). Unknown to me at the time, every such exuberant greeting by the master was turning me to my own heritage and traditions.[97]

At its beginning stages, the VHP was an organization geared simply at unifying the "Hindu" population under one banner without a political agenda.[98] In fact, at its first meeting, several spiritual leaders were present, including the five

[95] Patchen 2006: 266.
[96] McKean 1996: 102.
[97] Haeri 2006: 139.
[98] Katju 2003: 26.

Śankarācāryas, Jain and Sikh leaders, and also the Dalai Lama.[99] At this meeting, delegates were invited to "meet, discuss and discover the needs and difficulties for the maintenance and revitalization of Hindu culture."[100]

Once the VHP started expressing a political agenda, Chinmayananda removed himself from the organization and no longer associated with it. When his goals and the goals of the VHP significantly diverged, he stopped playing a leadership role within the organization. Even on the website of the VHP, his name is not mentioned within the "Historical Background" section, despite the fact that he was elected as the original president of the organization.[101] This topic will be taken up in more detail in the fifth chapter of this dissertation. It is important to note that my interest in Chinmayananda is not political, for in fact politics was not his major concern during his life as a *saṁnyāsī*.

For this project, I will be looking at Chinmayananda's translations and explanations of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and of the following Upaniṣads (listed in chronological order according to his lecture itinerary): *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Māṇḍūkya*, *Īśāvāsya*, *Praśna*, *Taittirīya*, and *Aitareya*. I found these materials through the Central Chinmaya Mission Trust in Mumbai, and have been given full access to the materials existing there. I will be referencing Śaṅkara's commentaries on all of these texts as well, for as we have noted, Chinmayananda was initiated into his philosophical lineage, and therefore the connection of the two philosophies will be of interest. I will read his works in chronological order, to assess the development of his thoughts on consciousness from the beginning of his public speaking career to the end of his life (1951-1993).

Since Chinmayananda was especially influenced by Vivekananda during his study of the scriptures, it is worthy of note that for nearly a century Vivekananda had been equated with Śaṅkara, but as Anantanand Rambachan points out in his book *The Limits of Scripture*, Vivekananda's emphasis on *anubhava* (direct experience) as superior to *śruti* (the Vedas and Upaniṣads) is radically different from Śaṅkara's view that *śruti* is the ultimate valid source of knowledge about *brahman*.[102] Keeping this in mind, it is imperative that we realize that even though Chinmayananda claimed he

[99] Smith 2003: 189.
[100] Patchen 2006: 266.
[101] Degvekar 2010: <http://vhp.org/organization/org-the-origin-and-growth-of-vishva-hindu-parishad>.
[102] Rambachan 1994: 3.

was following Śaṅkara's philosophical lineage, we shall investigate whether he deviated from it when talking about *śruti* and *anubhava*, especially since he was particular about keeping "scientific" methods of experimentation and observation. We shall critically analyze how closely Chinmayananda actually followed Śaṅkara's philosophy on the study of consciousness, and how influential Vivekananda may have been in this regard.

In this dissertation we shall analyze what Chinmayananda says about "consciousness" in detail. From his earliest writings, he maintains that the Upaniṣads espouse a "scientific" methodology of approaching the study of consciousness, a topic that shall be taken up in great detail later. About the *ṛṣis* he says in his discourses on the *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad*: "I can almost assure you that so far no greater scientists had ever come to work in the world of science, at once so sincere and rational, as these great scientists, who dealt with life as such and recorded their observations in their Truth-declarations."[103]

He argues that both Western science and Vedānta are "sciences", but have two different fields of enquiry. While modern Western science investigates the world of objects, or the "experienced" world, the *ṛṣi*s are concerned with the world of the subject, or the "experiencer." He says, "Thus, both being scientists, the only distinction between them is in their fields of enquiry and in the methods of their respective sciences."[104] He even goes on to assert that "…the ancient methods of the *ṛṣi*s were certainly much more perfect than the modern methods of the scientists of our own times."[105] We shall comment on the validity and the basis of these statements in this work.

Chinmayananda was of the opinion that Hinduism had reached a time of great decadence, the result of which was that the philosophy of Hinduism was lost in the shadows of pure ritualism and resulted in confusion of the masses. He says of the *ṛṣi*s, "Their approach was logical and their methods scientific," but of the modern man he says, "There is nothing mysterious in religion, nothing stupendous, nothing meaningless; and yet, a modern man of our times, when he thinks in terms of religion, is rather confused."[106] According to him, the modern iteration of Hinduism, which is

[103] *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 1997: 6.
[104] *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 1997: 8.
[105] *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 1997: 8.
[106] *Discourses on Kaṭhopaniṣad* 2006: xi.

termed "religion", consists of "the sapless activities of temple-going, flower-throwing, money-giving, [and] *paṇḍita*-feeding."[107]

But despite the superficiality and confusion of what he perceived Hinduism to be at the time, he maintained that "true religion"[108] was still living underneath these sapless activities, and that a proper understanding of its philosophy could revive it and make it applicable to daily life. "To consider that religion is divorced from life is to hoot high our ignorance of religion."[109] This indicates that he was committed to the idea of religion, and as we shall see, he spent much of his *saṁnyāsī* life reconciling "religion" with "science" and establishing the interdependency of the two. As he was acquainting the Indian masses with the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā, in introducing these texts he almost always claims that the study of "consciousness" through "true religion" is scientific, a claim we shall examine as well. Though this debate is currently popular in a Eurocentric context, this dissertation will provide a distinctly Hindu perspective on this debate.

[107] *Discourses on Kaṭhopaniṣad* 2006: xiv.
[108] "True religion" is a term that Chinmayananda ascribes to the universal teaching and philosophy contained within the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the Upaniṣads, as influenced by Swami Vivekananda, which we shall see more in the coming chapters.
[109] *Discourses on Kaṭhopaniṣad* 2006: xiv.

Chapter 2 – Chinmayananda and Pramāṇa: Sources of Knowledge and Their Application

In the introductory chapter we have provided the setting of Swami Chinmayananda, his upbringing, and his training as these bear on our focus of his treatment of consciousness in *advaita-vedānta*. We have already adverted to the fact that he will focus on *jñāna* (consciousness) as the most important part of his message that he will give as a teacher. Since it is through knowledge that we realize who we are, it is through knowledge that we can share in the wisdom of the human race, and so unite the human race, which was a stated goal of Chinmayananda.[110] In this chapter we shall bring his focus on *jñāna* to the fore in certain contexts, that is, the angle from which he approaches knowledge, namely *advaita-vedānta*; the sources from which he gets his knowledge, namely the Upaniṣads; the way he understands knowledge; what his various goals are; and the people who influenced him to have these goals.

Swami Chinmayananda has not been studied in depth before, especially with regard to a central notion of his, which is the notion of consciousness (*cit*; *caitanya*; *jñāna*). He has based this central notion of his to a large extent on the notion of *jñāna* in the principal Upaniṣads according to the Advaitic tradition, and appears to use the words "*jñāna*", "*cit*", "*caitanya*", and "Consciousness" in an interchangeable manner. His understanding of consciousness ranges across all these terms, but it is also present throughout all his teachings because, as we will see, his understanding of consciousness does not allow for a direct, empirical definition of Consciousness.[111]

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[110] In his *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad*, Chinmayananda says, "The cynical desperation with which the day's thinkers are gasping today at the scheme of things in the world, before it takes roots, and spoils the beauty of the generation's character, it will do good to bring this idea within the understanding of the world." (2007: 49). When he says "this idea", he is referring to knowledge of the Self. Clearly here he believes that knowledge is the key to the harmony of the human race.

[111] This is also why, in some ways, this dissertation has taken the shape that it has. We find that due to the fact that Consciousness, according to Chinmayananda, cannot be empirically defined, yet is at the center of all of his teachings, his language takes on an allusive or suggestive mode throughout most of his texts when describing it. Here, in this dissertation, following Chinmayananda's style, our language also becomes suggestive when discussing Consciousness in order to do justice to the study of Chinmayananda as our lens. Aside from the fourth chapter, where Consciousness is thoroughly discussed in a philosophical manner, we will allude to Consciousness many times but the reader may find it difficult to precisely pinpoint a definition of Consciousness from the text. This is perhaps because, according to Chinmayananda, to empirically define Consciousness is not our objective, a point we shall expand on later.

Advaitic material can be found elsewhere too, such as in texts like *Vedāntasāra* by Sadānanda[112] and others, but Chinmayananda mainly focuses on the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, with additional commentaries on selected other texts. Though he has commented on quite a number of Upaniṣads, the chief Upaniṣads for his point of view, as stated in the first chapter, are (in the order that he first commented on them): *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Māṇḍūkya*, *Īśāvāsya*, *Praśna*, *Taittirīya*, and *Aitareya*; he has also commented substantially on the *Bhagavad Gītā*.[113] This order will help us understand whether, if at all, his viewpoint changed with regard to *jñāna* over time. We will draw upon his commentaries on these Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gītā* as our references. We will see that even though some parts of the Upaniṣads that are considered by the Vedāntic theologians Rāmānuja (1077-1157) and Madhva (1238-1307) seem non-Advaitic, Chinmayananda still has a way of justifying these portions from an Advaitic perspective, and we will explore this when we come to it.

His main eastern influences were Śaṅkara (788-820) and Vivekananda (1863-1903), and a major western influence of his is Aldous Huxley (1894-1963). Though Descartes (1596-1650) and Hume (1711-1776) appear to have influenced his thought from more traditional philosophy, and Aldous Huxley, John Woodroffe (1865–1936), and a few others gave him a more recent perspective, nevertheless the three main influences that we will draw upon are, from the Indian tradition, Śaṅkara, because he comes first chronologically, and Vivekananda, who is connected to Śaṅkara, as we will show, and from the west, Huxley. Though Chinmayananda was an *advaitin*, or a

[112] Not much is known about Sadānanda Yogīndra Sarasvatī. He probably lived during the mid-15th Century CE. Cf. Nikhilananda (1931).

[113] It is important to keep in mind throughout our analysis that Chinmayananda's commentaries on the Upaniṣads were actually discourses given by him, which were later transcribed for publication. As a result, the exact dates of these discourses are unknown, and the published versions may be a mix of discourses he delivered over time. But we can say, with certainty, the first time Chinmayananda actually gave the discourses on each of the Upaniṣads and the different chapters of the *Bhagavad Gītā* (for he taught one chapter at a time), the order of which helps us to evaluate the evolution of his views, if at all they substantially evolved over time. This is the order in which the Upaniṣads are listed. The time period in which they were all commented upon by Chinmayananda for the first time is from 1951-1955. He commented upon each of the chapters of the Bhagavad Gītā for the first time from 1955-1958. It is also important to note that in the published versions of Chinmayananda's discourses, the diacritical marks for Sanskrit words were provided by transcribers that may not have known Sanskrit. This explains why some of the spellings of Sanskrit words may not be technically correct in our quotations from these books. In the interest of accuracy, I will maintain the original versions of these marks found in the books when quoting them directly.

follower of the *advaita-vedānta* worldview, we will see how he was influenced by Śaṅkara and Vivekananda in an Advaitic, but universalizing approach,[114] and Huxley, who can be seen as a crypto-*advaitin*, as we will also try to demonstrate. We will also examine his treatment of a proper *adhikārin* (a fit student) of Vedānta, whether we need a *guru*, and whether he sees himself as a *guru*.

We have noted in the first chapter that the subject of this enquiry is an *advaitin*, but he is a modern *advaitin*, engaging in dialogue with modern religious traditions and what he regards as science. This is not unlike the traditional debates between Hindu schools of thought. In the traditional systems of Hindu thought (*darśana*s),[115] a thorough understanding of epistemology was imperative, as an essential component of religious development was discussion and debate. Two debaters, both facing each other in a style known as *pūrvapakṣa*,[116] would first establish the premises upon which to base their arguments. Then, having established what were considered the accepted means of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*), they would argue.[117]

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[114] Śaṅkara is more particular about who can study *advaita-vedānta* and the means of attaining liberation, among other aspects of *advaita*, whereas Vivekananda is a Universalist in that he emphasizes the ability of everyone to access the Veda and the fact that liberation can be gained through any means, and this is what influenced Chinmayananda. He drew upon ideas from both of them, the extent of which we shall explore throughout this dissertation.

[115] The traditional systems of Hindu thought, also called *darśana*s (literally, "visions" or "perspectives"), the core sutras of which were written between the 5th century BCE and the 4th century CE, are: Nyāya (2nd Century CE), Vaiśeṣika (2nd Century BCE), Sāṁkhya (5th to 2nd Century BCE), Yoga (4th Century CE), Pūrva Mīmāṁsa (3rd to 1st Century BCE), and Vedānta (4th Century CE). As M. Hiriyanna points out, "A striking characteristic of Indian thought is its richness and variety. There is practically no shade of speculation which it does not include. This is a matter that is often lost sight of by its present-day critic who is fond of applying to it sweeping epithets like 'negative' and 'pessimistic' which, though not incorrect so far as some of its phases are concerned, are altogether misleading as descriptions of it as a whole… It was forgotten that they do not stand for a uniform doctrine throughout their history, but exhibit important modifications rendering such wholesale descriptions of them inaccurate. The fact is that Indian thought exhibits such a diversity of development that it does not admit of a rough-and-ready characterization." (1932: 16). He adds, "The ancient Indian did not stop short at the discovery of truth, but strove to realize it in his own experience. He followed up tattva-jñāna, as it is termed, by a strenuous effort to attain mokṣa or liberation, which therefore… was in his view the real goal of philosophy." (1932: 18).

[116] *Pūrvapakṣa* is a style of debate in which two opponents confront each other, and before positing their own views or rebuttals, are required to give a thorough recapitulation of the opponent's (*pūrva-*) view (*-pakṣa*) to prove their own understanding of it. Only then, based on the previously agreed epistemological premises (*pramāṇa*), may they provide an argument.

[117] B.K. Matilal writes, "The Nyāyasūtra classification of debate was more systematic and hence carried more authority in philosophical circles… It notes three kinds of debate, *vāda*, *jalpa*, *vitaṇḍā*... [The first kind] must have the following characteristics: (1) There should be a thesis and a counter-thesis mutually opposing each other… (2) Proving, i.e., establishing, and

The question that an accepted *pramāṇa* is meant to answer is "How do we know?"[118] To the debaters, it was essential to agree on how they could know what they knew. Based upon these accepted *pramāṇa*s, they would articulate their arguments.[119] Often, the loser of the debate would accept the viewpoint of the victor as his own, for it was illogical to hold on to an argument that could be defeated. A classic example of this is the well-known story of Śaṅkara's debate with Maṇḍana Miśra, where the condition of the debate was that the loser would become the disciple of the victor. As a result of Śaṅkara's victory in the debate, the story goes, Maṇḍana Miśra was initiated by Śaṅkara into his monastic order and renamed Sureśvara.

Each school of traditional Hindu thought has a set of accepted *pramāṇa*s. For example, the *Nyāya* system of thought accepts four:[120] direct perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), comparison (*upamāna*), and verbal testimony (*śabda*).[121] Verbal testimony has two levels: verbal testimony by other people regarding worldly matters, known as *laukika śabda*, and the authority of the Veda (*śruti*) as the means of knowing about non-worldly matters, such as *dharma* (righteous duties) and *mokṣa* (liberation), known as *alaukika śabda*. *Advaita-vedānta*, however, accepts two additional *pramāṇa*s, namely postulation (*arthāpatti*) and non-apprehension (*anupalabdhi*). Since an understanding of what constitutes a valid means of knowing something is so fundamental to Vedānta, we will treat the topic of *pramāṇa* with some level of depth in this chapter.

Traditionally, *pramāṇa* is the "instrument (*karaṇa*) of valid knowledge (*pramā*)".[122] To this end, Swāmī Satprakāshānanda provides an eloquent explanation of the word "*pramāṇa*" in the *darśana* context:

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disproving either of the theses, should be based upon evidence (*pramāṇa*) and argument (*tarka*). (3) Each side should mention the standard five steps in the demonstration of one's reasoning… (4) The reasoning should not entail contradiction with any tenet, or accepted doctrine." (1985: 12).

[118] Satprakāshānanda 1965: 15.

[119] Rambachan 1991: 15.

[120] "The word 'Nyāya' is commonly understood as meaning 'argumentation' (literally 'going back'). It indicates the method followed in the system which is predominantly intellectualistic and analytical; and the fact is borne out by the other designations like hetu-vidyā or 'the science of causes' which are sometimes applied to it. It is this characteristic that accounts for the special attention paid in the system to questions of formal logic, with which it is in fact ordinarily confounded." (Hiriyanna 1932: 225-226).

[121] Hiriyanna 1932: 252-261.

[122] Satprakāshānanda 1965: 35.

> By 'instrument (karaṇa)' is meant the special cause which, being operative, produces a specific effect. In visual knowledge, for instance, the organ of vision and the mind [*manas*][123] both are operative; as such both are its causes; but the organ of vision and its operation constitute the special cause (karaṇa). In audition the organ of hearing being operative produces the knowledge, so this is its special cause (karaṇa). In perceiving an object by a particular sense-organ the mind is not the special cause (karaṇa) of the knowledge, because its operation is common to all cases of external perception. Thus, pramāṇa is the special means by which some kind of right knowledge (pramā) is attained. The implication is that each pramāṇa has a characteristic way of conveying knowledge and presents a distinct type of knowledge; and it is not in the nature of one pramāṇa to contradict another.[124]

As stated earlier, *advaita-vedānta* accepts six types of *pramāṇa*. The first of these is called *pratyakṣa*, or direct perception. It is the fundamental basis for the next four *pramāṇa*s, namely *anumāna* (inference), *upamāna* (comparison), *arthāpatti* (postulation), and *anupalabdhi* (non-apprehension), because these four all rely on some type of previous perception for their own ends. For example, in order to make the inference (*anumāna*) that there is fire on a mountain, when all one can see is smoke, one must rely on prior perception of fire being associated with smoke, such as in a kitchen. Only on the basis of the previous perception is *anumāna* valid.

According to *advaita-vedānta*, for any direct perception to take place, there are four elements involved: the object (*vastu*), one of the five sense organs (*indriya*s), the "mind" (*manas*), and the knowing self (*ātman*). Of this quartet, *ātman* is the only factor that is inherently luminous, being of the nature of *cit* (consciousness). The other

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[123] The definition of Manas, according to Christopher Bartley in his *Indian Philosophy A-Z*, is "Manas (mind or inner sense): according to *Nyaya-Vaisheshika*, the soul or self (*atman*) is a non-conscious principle of continuity. It becomes conscious whenever it is associated with thoughts, feelings and acts of will belonging to a particular embodied life. It is a matter of natural fact that sensory receptors (*indriya*) transmit a range of information about the objective environment to a physical faculty called *manas* which operates as a central processor coordinating that information and selecting what is relevant. In conjunction with the principle of identity or soul, the *manas* is instrumental in the conversion of some stimuli into feelings, the translation of some items of cognitive input into conscious thoughts with practical applications (storing some as memories), and the transformation of some affective responses into acts of will. Thoughts, feelings and intentions thus become temporary properties attaching to the soul-principle and a subject of knowing, agency and experience is created. Intelligence, feelings, memories and volitions are generated in the psycho-somatic complex whose unity over time is guaranteed by the enduring presence of the principle of identity". (2005: 86).

[124] Satprakāshānanda 1965: 35.

three are within the realm of "known". The *manas*, an internal sense organ in this scheme of things, in connection with both the object and the external sense organ, serves as the location of "knowledge", and this entire process is illuminated by the *ātman*. A direct perception, then, is when the *ātman* illuminates a connection between the world of objects and the *manas* using the sense organs. The *manas* is the location of the inner faculty called the *ahaṁkāra*, or the ego, where the notion of "I" is located. Hence, the illumination of the connection between the notion of "me", within the *manas*, and the world of objects, through the senses, by the *ātman*, is called the process of direct perception in *advaita-vedānta*.[125] [126]

Now we come to the most significant means of valid knowledge – at least for *advaitin*s – called *śabda*, or verbal testimony. *Śabda* operates on two levels of existence – the mundane, known as *laukika śabda*, and the suprasensible, known as *alaukika śabda* or *pāramārthika śabda*. Since a *pramāṇa* is supposed to deliver knowledge that is not contradicted by any other means of valid knowledge, according to *advaita-vedānta*, it stands to reason that: (1) at the worldly level, any information that is testified to verbally by any trustworthy testifier (*āpta*) is valid knowledge, provided that it is not contradicted and has not also been obtained – though it may be obtainable – by any other *pramāṇa*; and (2) at the suprasensible level, is the only means of valid knowledge. This is the most important *pramāṇa* for the *advaitin*s,

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[125] There is great discussion on the topics of *pramāṇa*, but for simplicity we have limited our discussion here. For a detailed account of each *pramāṇa* and a lucid discussion of how Vedānta describes perception, etc., cf. Swāmī Satprakāshānanda's monumental work, *Methods of Knowledge* (1965). For a more concise yet still articulate description of each *pramāṇa*, cf. Rambachan 1991: 23-29.

[126] We will be dealing chiefly with *alaukika śabda pramāṇa*, so it is appropriate to give a brief account of the next four accepted *pramāṇa*s here in a footnote. Thus we may analyze *alaukika śabda* in the context of the *pramāṇa*s as a whole within this chapter. *Anumāna*, or inference, while dependent on direct perception, is slightly more complex than one might suppose. Satprakāshānanda states, "Like the English word 'inference' the Sanskrit term anumāna also denotes inferential knowledge, but is generally used in the sense of its method or process" (1965: 143). The next valid means of knowledge is *upamāna*, or knowledge of similarity, often translated as "comparison". This is the knowledge gained by comparing a previously observed object with a presently observed object. *Arthāpatti* is defined as "postulation". *Arthāpatti* occurs when a person is presented with some data whose connection needs to be explained. The means of explanation is called postulation. The fifth means of valid knowledge is known as *anupalabdhi*, or "non-apprehension". It is the method for gaining knowledge about the absence of a thing. *Anupalabdhi* is special because it is the basis for the negative versions of all the other means of valid knowledge, just as *pratyakṣa* is the basis for the positive versions of *anumāna*, *upamāna*, *arthāpatti*, and *laukika śabda* (verbal testimony about worldly matters, dealt with later in the chapter).

because *śruti*, or the Veda, is the only way to gain knowledge of *brahman*, the supreme substratum of everything and the very essence of Self.

It is interesting to note that *advaita-vedānta* maintains that all the means of knowledge except for *alaukika śabda* are based on "ignorance" (*avidyā*). But it is also the case that so long as the suprasensible has not been realized by an individual, for him or her, all the mundane means of knowledge are still valid. In other words, from the perspective of the absolute, everything other than knowledge of *brahman* is illusory. Thus anything based on this illusion – that is, anything at the worldly level – is called "ignorance". But from the perspective of the worldly, knowledge of the world is, of course, "knowledge". Satchidanandendra Sarasvati clarifies the matter:

> No doubt the upanishadic doctrine maintains that all play of the empirical means of knowledge with their objects is based on Ignorance. But in this doctrine it is not the case that the visible realm is merely reasoned away by negative dialectic, as in the case of the teaching of the Buddhist Nihilists. For recourse is had to two standpoints in regard both to action and knowledge – the worldly standpoint and the Vedic standpoint. Until the worldly standpoint has been contradicted and cancelled on the strength of direct realization of the truth of the higher Vedic standpoint, the secular means of knowledge, such as perception, inference and the rest, all have validity in their respective fields, as do the Vedic passages dealing, for instance, with injunctions and prohibitions and also the portions of the Veda dealing with liberation.[127]

Here we should consider Swami Chinmayananda's stance on *alaukika śabda* to construct a framework for our own understanding. Chinmayananda seems not to make a concerted effort to explain the concept of *pramāṇa* or its equivalent in his commentaries on the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Nevertheless, *śabda* is the only accepted means of knowing *brahman* according to *advaita-vedānta*, so we must take a moment to critically analyze Chinmayananda's relationship with it. He is not a traditional epistemologist; instead, he seems to put these epistemological arguments aside and uses the vocabulary of *pramāṇa* to communicate his ideas. He attempts to use reasoning more in his works than to try and inspire faith in *śabda pramāṇa* first to his audiences. This could be because he knows he is talking to novices and skeptics, so to start with reasoning is more effective than faith in scripture, but it could also be

[127] Sarasvati 1989: 7.

because of Vivekananda's influence on him.[128] But in and throughout his reasoning, he seems to take *śabda* as a given *pramāṇa*; that is, he assumes it while writing, which we shall revisit later in this chapter. Epistemology is not his game, since he does not need to convince his audiences of the validity of the *śabda* (Veda). He is not explicitly arguing with Buddhists on particular issues like Śaṅkara, but rather seems to be trying to create a framework from scratch.[129]

We may preliminarily investigate whether Chinmayananda mentions *pramāṇa* anywhere in his writings. We find very few direct references, but an explanation does exist in his commentary on the second stanza of the *Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotram*:

> Applying the main ideas of this stanza to the general confusions created by the various schools of philosophy at the time of *Śaṅkara*, we can detect a new import in the opening two lines. The materialistic school of philosophy (*Cārvāka*-s) recognises only one source of knowledge and that is "direct perception" (*pratyakṣa*). The *Kāṇāda*-s and the Buddhists (*kṣaṇika-vijñāna-vādin*-s) over and above "direct perception", accept "inference" also as a source of knowledge. *Sāṁkhyan*-s accept more than "direct perception" and "inference", "testimony of the wise" (*āpta vākyam*) also. The *Naiyyāyika*-s (*Gautamika*-s) accept "upamāna" also, over and above the other three. *Prabhākara*-s, a sect among the *Mīmāṁsaka*-s, accept "*arthāpatti*", while *Bhaṭṭa*-s, another school in *Mīmāṁsaka*-s, consider "*Anupalabdhi*" (*abhāva*) as another source of knowledge. The *vedāntin*-s accept all the above six sources of knowledge. *Paurāṇika*-s consider two more as acceptable in their philosophy and they are "*sambhāva*" and "*aitihyam*" (tradition).[130]

Here he briefly lists all the types of *pramāṇa*s. It appears to be of little interest to him to give his audiences the full explanation of *pramāṇa*, but he is certainly aware of

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[128] Vivekananda praises Buddha by calling him courageous for saying that if the Vedas agree with him, then so much the better for them, for he valued his experience over the teachings of any scripture. (Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, Volume 7, "Inspired Talks", Wednesday, July 10, 1895). It seems that this contributed to Chinmayananda's viewpoint that reasoning based on experience, at least at the outset, is more valuable than trying to inspire faith in scriptural revelation. He did, however, try to reconcile common experience with what the Upaniṣads have to offer, but only after his lengthy introductions using logic and reasoning to convince the audiences of the importance of the study.

[129] In his introductions to all the Upaniṣads, it is clear that he believes his audiences to be complete novices (which is not entirely unjustified, given the historical hoarding of Hindu scripture by the brahmins). He makes it clear that he is trying to "convert Hindus to Hinduism", which is his way of saying that he is not arguing with other religions, but rather giving a revitalized framework to Hindus themselves. (Patchen 2006: 114).

[130] *Hymn to Dakṣiṇāmurty* 1994: 29.

them. He mentions it again in a somewhat humorous context, when discussing the qualifications of a *guru* to be those of being well-versed in the scriptures (*śrotriyatva*) and being established in the experience of *brahman* (*brahma-niṣṭhatva*):

> The Scholar *Pundit-s* of *Banaras* are apt examples of *Guru-s* who are *Śrotriya-s*, but are not *Brahma-Niṣṭha-s*. Once, this *Sādhu* approached a lordly *Pundit* in *Banaras* and at the end of the day's lessons asked, '*Punditji,* the *Śāstra* is insistent that once the Nescience-created mind is annihilated, Truth is realised in its own effulgence. But can really one stop the mind through meditation?' The reply of the *Punditji* was callously open and pointedly sincere. 'My boy' said he, 'if you want to know that and really yearn to gain an initiation into the ways of living the *Upaniṣad-s*, leave *Banaras* and seek a Master in the *Himālaya-s*. How can we say whether the *Śāstra-s are true in practice?* We only believe in the *Śāstra-pramāṇa*. But we have not so far tried to sit at a place and try to calm the mind and enjoy even for a moment the promised bliss of the hushed-mind, and so cannot answer you or guide you.'[131]

But later on in the same chapter of his *Kenopaniṣad* he says, "The reverse is also true… In short, a real *Brahma-Niṣṭha*, unless he be also a *Śrotriya* (well-versed in the *Śāstra-s*), cannot be a full teacher to all classes of students."[132] He seems to in fact be emphasizing the importance of the authority of scripture here. Though this is in a humorous context, nevertheless, he affirms the concept of *pramāṇa* through it.

We mentioned earlier that we will be focusing on an *advaitin*. Traditionally, *advaita-vedānta* can be located in its master systematizer and synthesizer, Śaṅkara (788-820). According to Śaṅkara, the following are the salient features of *advaita* with special reference to consciousness or *jñāna*, the chief focus of our enquiry. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, there is ultimately one reality without a second.[133] That One Reality is known as *brahman*,[134] and is identical with the *ātman*, another word for the principle underlying the individual self.[135] Secondly, *brahman* cannot be described in words. It is *anirvacanīya*, inexpressible, and as Śaṅkara explains, it is something that is "intimated (*lakṣyate*), not plainly expressed (*na*

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[131] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 54.
[132] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 55.
[133] Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.2.1, *ekam evādvitīyam*.
[134] "And *brahman*, which derives from *bṛ*, *bṛhati* = to grow, increase, means 'the Great One'". Lipner 1997: 311.
[135] Lipner 1989: 168.

tūcyate)".[136] Yet it is not completely unknowable, for it is of the nature of consciousness (*jñāna*) and reality (*satya*).[137] Thirdly, the perception of the dualism between "myself" and the "other" is based on *avidyā*, or ignorance of the reality and non-duality of *brahman*. When an individual pursues enlightenment, then *vidyā*, or knowledge of the non-dual nature of *brahman* dispels *māyā*, or the illusion that enshrouds the individual ego and liberates one from the bondage of *saṁsāra*, or the illusory world, removing any notion of "myself" and the "other". The individual is left with only the perfect identity of *brahman* and *ātman*.[138]

Chinmayananda seems to value the knowledge of *pramāṇa*, but this knowledge is essential only to be a *guru*. He seems to consider the experience of the Ultimate Reality to have greater value in general, however. Thus, he mainly focuses on explaining how to experience that Reality in his writings. But in order to be a *guru*, he maintains, one must also have knowledge of the *śāstra* (scripture). The relationship between the knowledge of the *śāstra* and the experience of the Ultimate Reality, essentially the *pramāṇatva* (authority) of the scripture in achieving the Absolute Experience, in Chinmayananda's writings is influenced by both Swami Vivekananda and Śaṅkara.

When analyzing *pramāṇa* in the light of Swami Chinmayananda's understanding of "Consciousness",[139] it is important to keep in mind that according to *advaita-vedānta*, the means of knowing about Consciousness that is *brahman* (as the inner essence of the self) is *śabda*, or the Vedic scripture.[140] Thus this chapter will focus mainly on *śabda*, its application towards understanding Consciousness, and various other points of enquiry with respect to Swami Chinmayananda's relationship with *śabda*, focusing primarily upon the Upaniṣads. For him, as an *advaitin*, *śabda* is clearly the most important *pramāṇa*, for it reveals what the Supreme Being is, whose nature is Consciousness. However, he will do it in a way that is distinctive to himself,

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[136] Lipner 1997: 313-314.
[137] Taittirīya Upaniṣad II.1.1, *satyaṁ jñānam anantaṁ brahma*.
[138] For a well-articulated account of the salient features of *advaita-vedānta* according to Śaṅkara, cf. Lipner 1989: 168.
[139] To distinguish between common conceptions of the word "consciousness" and Chinmayananda's teaching of it as being equated with *brahman*, we will refer to Chinmayananda's conception as "Consciousness" with a capital "C" from now on.
[140] Cf. Rambachan 1991: Chapter 2. He writes, "The special nature of *śabda* for *Advaita*, therefore, lies in its function as a means of knowledge for ultimate reality." (1991: 31).

synthesizing the arguments of his two most famous predecessors, as we shall see throughout the rest of this dissertation.

Before we finally inquire into Chinmayananda's views on *pramāṇa* and *śabda*, let us examine how Śaṅkara was influential in shaping Chinmayananda's views on *pramāṇa*. Śaṅkara is mainly interested in proving that *śabda* is the only valid means of knowing the Ultimate Reality, so does not focus on empirical means of knowledge to this end. As Satchidanandendra Sarasvati states with reference to Śaṅkara:

> Nowhere in the Sūtras or the Commentary of the Vedanta school do we find any examination of the operation of the empirical means of knowledge. In this school, it is accepted that all practical experience of the objects and means of empirical cognition is based on superimposition. And the purpose of the Upanishads is to communicate the Absolute, which is eternally pure, conscious and liberated, by the negation of superimposition. It is agreed that, when one studies this or that system, one usually follows a method of enquiry into the means of knowledge agreeable to that school, according to the maxim 'One follows the opponent's view where it does not conflict'.[141]

Śaṅkara acknowledges the "reality" of empirical means of knowledge, so long as knowledge of the Ultimate is not attained. He maintains that empirical means of knowledge only arise due to superimposition (*adhyāsa*).[142] He qualifies, "Without self-identification with the body and senses expressed in feelings of 'my' and 'mine' [which is an example of superimposition] there can be no empirical knower and so the process of empirical knowledge cannot begin."[143] But epistemologically, for Śaṅkara this is a form of ignorance from the perspective of the Ultimate Reality; instead, *śabda-pramāṇa* is the chief source of knowledge in our journey through the world. All the other *pramāṇa*s have to do with worldly knowledge and experience, which Śaṅkara accepts, as long as there is no conflict between them. There is a famous statement by Śaṅkara that says:

> Surely, even a hundred Vedic texts cannot become valid if they assert that fire is cold or non-luminous! Should a Vedic text say that fire is cold or non-

[141] Sarasvati 1989: 438.
[142] As we saw in Chapter 1, according to *advaita-vedānta*, "the entire perceived world is an 'illusion' (*māyā*) and in fact only 'consciousness' (*cit, caitanya, jñāna*) exists; instead of being bodies *with* a consciousness, we are 'Consciousness' itself, *inhabiting* an illusory body, due to false identification (*adhyāsa*) with the illusory world (*saṁsāra*)."
[143] Quoted from Sarasvati 1989: 439.

> luminous, even then one has to assume that the intended meaning of the text is different, for otherwise (its) validity cannot be maintained; but one should not assume its meaning in a way that might contradict some other valid means of knowledge or contradict its own statement.[144]

Thus we must provide some other interpretation because the aim of *śabda* is different from the aim of the other *pramāṇa*s. The impact of Śaṅkara can be very clearly ascertained in Chinmayananda's writings. For example, in his introduction to the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, Chinmayananda refers to this statement:

> Though both *Vedāntin* and *Mīmāṁsaka-s* accept that the scripture in itself is certainly a great argument to believe and that the authority of the scripture is unquestionable, yet they both have also accepted the other canons of interpretation of *Śruti*. Of them, the major canon of interpretation, accepted by both, is called *upapatti* (*logical reasoning*). Even if many *Śruti*-texts repeatedly declare with all the authority of a truth "Fire is cold," it will not make the fire tame. In such places we have to understand that the style is metaphorical and a reasonable meaning is to be given to the text.[145]

Therefore Śaṅkara is mostly concerned, when he does discuss *pramāṇa*, with proving the validity and uniqueness of *alaukika śabda* as a means of knowing the Absolute. Interestingly, Śaṅkara's viewpoint of *alaukika śabda* being the unique means of knowledge for the Ultimate Reality is something that Chinmayananda seems to take almost for granted at times, and at times seems not to accept at all. But there is yet a peculiar coherence in his writings, which we shall examine throughout the course of this dissertation.

It seems that Vivekananda's direct effect on Chinmayananda was also profound. We can see evidence of this in quotes like "Wake up! Arise! Awake! Stop not till the goal is reached. This in short is the fundamental cry of all Religions."[146] We see part of the exact same quote in several of Swami Vivekananda's works.[147] This may help us understand why Chinmayananda, whose goal it was to convey the

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[144] Quoted from Gambhirananda 2000: 758. The original quote by Śaṅkara can be found in his commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā, 18.66. He says, "*na hi śrutiśatam api śīto'gnir aprakāśo veti bruvat-prāmāṇyam upaiti. yadi brūyāc chīto'gnir aprakāśo veti, tathāpy arthāntaraṁ śruter vivakṣitaṁ kalpyaṁ, prāmāṇyānyathānupapatteḥ, na tu pramāṇāntara-viruddhaṁ svavacana-viruddhaṁ vā*."

[145] *Discourses on Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 2010: 17.

[146] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 6.

[147] Such as in *Swami Vivekananda's Rousing Call to Hindu Nation*, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IV, "The Education that India Needs", and several other places.

message of *advaita-vedānta* to an audience that knew relatively little or nothing about the minutiae of philosophical debate, did not dwell on *pramāṇa* as a separate topic, but rather took the ideas in place about *pramāṇa* in the *advaita-vedānta* fold as a given.

As Anantanand Rambachan clearly points out in his PhD thesis and other works,[148] Vivekananda sees the scripture differently from Śaṅkara. We know from the previous chapter that Chinmayananda read and was influenced by Vivekananda before he was introduced to Śaṅkara, since he read Vivekananda while at his cousin Achuthan Menon's house, and was only later initiated into Śaṅkara by his *guru*s, Swami Sivananda and Swami Tapovan. As a result, his view is more complex than Vivekananda's. While he implicitly tries to incorporate Vivekananda's view that the Upaniṣads are valid, "scientific", non-dogmatic texts, and should be used for verification of one's experience of the Ultimate Reality (which necessarily goes beyond the Vedas), he also feels the need to be true to Śaṅkara, whose lineage he claims to be a part of, and who says that the scripture (*śabda*) is the only means (*pramāṇa*) of knowing the Ultimate Reality, attaining liberation (*mokṣa*), or the aforementioned experience. It is important while studying Chinmayananda to remember that Vivekananda attempted to universalize *advaita-vedānta* by making it available to the public, by talking about it in scientific terms, and by bringing it to the West, and that Chinmayananda is the inheritor of this way of thinking. Thus, he adopts and builds on it. We will see some examples of this complexity throughout this dissertation as well.

As we mentioned in the first chapter and at the beginning of this chapter, Chinmayananda has written commentaries on several Upaniṣads. The question that arises now is: During these discourses on the Upaniṣads, with respect to our chief focus, which is Chinmayananda's view on *jñāna*, did he substantially change his views? We can answer that he did not. Incidentally, he may explain things in different ways, but substantially, his viewpoint remains constant throughout his discourses, as we shall indicate in the passages that follow. We will also address one or two of his other texts in our discourse on consciousness, such as the texts referenced above, *Meditation and Life* and his commentary on the *Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotram*, because this

[148] Cf. Rambachan (1984 and 1994).

will also give us insight into his views. He does not substantially deviate from his original viewpoint in these texts either.

The overall questions we will consider are: How does Swami Chinmayananda see the teaching of the Upaniṣads? What is the role of *śabda*, according to Swami Chinmayananda, in understanding Consciousness? What, if anything, is needed beyond *śabda* to understand Consciousness? Can we circumvent the necessity of *śabda* as a *pramāṇa* to get to this understanding? This will lead us to a greater understanding of Chinmayananda's approach to scripture, which is a necessary step in examining Chinmayananda's understanding of Consciousness.

In his treatment of *jñāna* in the Upaniṣads, but also in his treatment of the Upaniṣads as a whole, certain issues come to light. Firstly and almost most importantly for our discussion on *pramāṇa*, he wants to show that they are "scientific", and we shall see what this means in the coming pages. Secondly, they are a very important source of *jñāna*. Thirdly, he is clear that they are not to be read without guidance; one needs guidance to study the Upaniṣads. Fourthly, he is attempting not only to impart the knowledge of *advaita-vedānta* to his audiences, he is also trying to unite the different people of India. Here we see a Universalist interpretation of the Upaniṣads at work. Fifthly, he is also keen on synthesizing different *yoga*s, namely *bhakti yoga* (*yoga* of devotion), *karma yoga* (*yoga* of action), and *jñāna yoga* (*yoga* of knowledge). And sixthly, he wants to show a continuum within the different Vedāntic schools. Let us tackle each of these issues in turn.

1. The Upaniṣads are "scientific".

A very strong indicator of the tradition in which Chinmayananda finds himself is Chinmayananda's dialogue with science, our first point of enquiry. In the first chapter we defined "science" as the Oxford English Dictionary defines it: "The intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment." But now let us take a look at Chinmayananda's definition of science:

> The Scientists are, we all know, trying to increase the happiness in life by *reordering* and *controlling* the *world of objects*, while these Scientists of life - the great *Ṛṣī-s* - living in retirement and perfect detachment, *experimenting* with man as he lives his life, came to take up '*the individual*' as their field of enquiry. This is quite reasonable too, perhaps, more reasonable than the material scientists; for, however, [*sic*] elaborately and wonderfully well we

> may *organise* our little world, unless we, who are to live in it, know our selves - *organise* ourselves - we cannot, out of that arrangement of things, gain for ourselves *any happy and satisfactory experience*.[149] (Emphasis added.)

We see from this very important quotation – which in one way or another has been repeated again and again, as we shall clearly see in the following passages – what really lies at the heart of his understanding of science: Science is an approach that, as we have shown, reorders and controls the world of objects, experiments, and organizes in order to arrive at a definite result. This is not an arbitrary or meaningless definition of science, and helps us greatly in ascertaining what he understood by science. This is why he said, even though it does not exactly adequate with our daily understanding of science, that *advaita-vedānta* espouses a scientific approach.

This understanding of science in western thought already had some antecedent in the 19th century. Vivekananda too used this kind of universalizing language, especially the language of science, to promote the study of *advaita-vedānta* in the west. As Vivekananda himself said, in a letter from America to a fellow monk in India:

> You should know that religion of the type that obtains in our country does not go here. You must suit it to the taste of the people. If you ask [Americans] to become Hindus, they will all give you a wide berth and hate you, as we do the Christian missionaries. They like some of the ideas of our Hindu scriptures – that is all… A few thousand people have faith in the Advaita doctrine. But they will give you the go-by if you talk obscure mannerisms about sacred writings, caste, or women.[150]

It is certainly clear from this quote that Vivekananda was adapting his teachings to suit the western mindset, especially in America. Mark Singleton writes:

> To a large extent, popular postural yoga came into being in the first half of the twentieth century as a hybridized product of colonial India's dialogical encounter with the worldwide physical culture movement… The launching of the popular physical culture self-instruction genre and the staging of the first modern Olympics coincide chronologically with the appearance of Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* (1896), which ushered in a new phase of yoga's long history… Transnational anglophone yoga was born at the peak of an

[149] *Discourses on Kaṭhopaniṣad* 2006: xv.
[150] Quoted from Elizabeth De Michelis 2004: 120.

> unprecedented enthusiasm for physical culture, and the meaning of yoga itself would not remain unaltered by the encounter.[151]

Vivekananda's teachings were then taken back to India in the form of manuscripts of his letters and speeches, which then influenced Indian leaders of the twentieth century, ultimately leading to the influence of Vivekananda's westernized Hinduism on Indian Hindus. De Michelis demonstrates:

> The scholar and onetime president of India, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, one of the most successful propagators of a polished form of Neo-Vedānta in the twentieth century, was deeply influenced, along with many others before and after him, by Vivekananda's thought and example. Reminiscing about his student days he affirmed that it was the Swami's "humanistic, man-making religion that gave us courage". As the nationalist spirit gathered momentum, the Swami's letters were circulated in manuscript form among the students, to great effect: "The kind of thrill which we enjoyed, the kind of mesmeric touch that those writings gave us, the kind of reliance in our own culture that was being criticized all around – it is that kind of transformation which his writings effected in the young men in the early years of this century."[152]

As we mentioned earlier, Chinmayananda is the inheritor of this way of thinking, and the impact of it is clear from his definition of science and comparison with *advaita-vedānta* in the passage above.

When analyzing Chinmayananda's definition of science, we must consider that his hermeneutical backdrop is that of a Western-styled education. Throughout his career as a journalist, he projected himself to have absolutely anti-dogmatic views. This was in part due to Vivekananda's aforementioned cyclonic effects in the West, which were by this time coming back to India through Western idealist authors like Aldous Huxley, whom Chinmayananda claimed to be his favorite author.[153] At least indirectly, then, Chinmayananda seems to be trying to connect his background with his endeavor of teaching the Upaniṣads, for his own experience as a youth trained in Western ideals may be guiding him.

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[151] Singleton 2010: 81.
[152] De Michelis 2004: 128.
[153] Cf. Chinmayananda, *Meditation and Life*. We see examples of Huxley's influence on Chinmayananda's writings in several places. To give one example, Chinmayananda says in his *Discourses on Kaṭhopaniṣad*, "If God is defined God is defiled." (2006: 94). Though not said in exactly these words, this topic is clearly elucidated in Huxley's *Proper Studies* (1927: 202-206). It is possible that, since Chinmayananda's favorite author is Huxley, he gained this idea among others from Huxley's works.

It is worthy of note here that Aldous Huxley's imagination and interpretation of the utility of science, especially in his book *Brave New World*, but also in his plethora of essays on science and its relationship with mysticism or the "visionary experience", may have further influenced Chinmayananda's definition of science.[154] Huxley, in *Brave New World*, uses scientific language to show how the "new world" would look if science were to progress to what he thought was its logical conclusion, namely perfect production and distribution, and perfect conditioning of men and women to be happy with limited freedom. Ultimately, for a human being from outside this community, called "the savage", it is too much to handle, and this protagonist's suicide is just an indicator of the faulty philosophy upon which the "new world" is built. George Orwell, in his book *1984*, portrays a totalitarian government that claims, "War is Peace". Ultimately, this scheme, too, is a total failure. T. R. Banerjee writes in her article "*Brave New World* and *Island*":

> Over the years, Huxley's growing interest in eastern philosophy and mysticism fostered the belief that the nightmare of science could be moderated through them… Although skeptical of scientific progress, he had a wide grasp of cultural alignments and found a course which affected a whole generation of poets, philosophers and musicians searching for the Ultimate Truth.[155]

These works have an apparent impact on Chinmayananda's version of science as well. He writes, in his introduction to *Iśāvāsya Upaniṣad*, clearly referring to Huxley and Orwell, if not others as well:

> The attempts at establishing peace through war have been proved completely to be but a madman's mid-summer day-dream!! The melodramatic attempts at bringing about a greater happiness to man merely by a scheme of greater production and better distribution is the most modern experiment which has already been realised as a failure by all subtle intelligent observers. It is waiting for the common man's discovery. The cynical desperation with

[154] As we stated earlier, we would try to show how Huxley is a crypto-*advaitin*. Here, we will quote U. Narasimhan in her article "Huxley, Russell and Mysticism": "In Huxley, it is not the Western concept as much as the Indian point of view that seems to have a conceptual mature effect… Thus Huxley seems to feel that 'Ultimately reality cannot be understood except intuitively through an act of will and affections.'" (Roy 2003: 102). Here we see clearly that Huxley pictures the Ultimate Reality in the way that *advaitin*s picture it, saying it "cannot be understood except intuitively", which in *advaita-vedānta* is called *anirvacanīya*. This is also exactly what Chinmayananda says about Consciousness, as we will see in the coming pages.
[155] Roy 2003: 50.

> which the day's thinkers are gasping today at the scheme of things in the world, before it takes root, and spoils the beauty of the generation's character, it will do good to bring this idea within the understanding of the world [*sic*].[156]

In this passage it is clear that he is referring to his previously mentioned western influences, and believes that *advaita-vedānta* is the answer to the problems they see in the world. He completes this passage with a call to action: "This great mission can be accomplished only by an awakened *Hindustān* that has grown strong in her morality, firm in her ethics and devoted in her spiritual strength."[157]

This only further fuels his desire to posit the Upaniṣads as a science, calling religion the "science of life". In almost every introduction to the Upaniṣads, he makes a point to say that the Upaniṣads are scientific:

> The declaration of the *Science of Life* and the descriptions of the technique of living together constitute the contents of the *Upaniṣad-s*. There is no *Upaniṣad* which does not contain both these vital aspects: the "statement of the goal" and the "description of the way".[158]

Furthermore:

> After a full study of the modern available literature on the personality of man, when a serious student turns his gaze to the wealth of details available in the *Upaniṣad*-s, he discovers with relief that though the language may be unfamiliar and the style of expression rather tedious, in the descriptions of the *Upaniṣad*-s there is a complete analysis indeed more scientific than a science could ever be. According to his conclusions, he declares man as nothing but a Spiritual Existence, as it were, enveloped with concentric circles of Matter with various degrees of intensity. He claims to prove that the innermost layer is the subtlest while the outermost is the grossest Matter-envelopment around the Spirit.[159]

He uses a similar tone for religion as a whole, beyond just the Upaniṣads:

> Religion is the remedy to the particular *unrest* felt by man even when he is fully equipped with all the best in life. Religion is the technique by which an individual gets his mind and intellect trained to grasp and understand the larger themes of the universe and his own exact place in it.

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[156] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: pg. 49.
[157] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: pg. 49.
[158] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: xvii.
[159] *Discourses on Kaṭhopanishad* 2007: xxiii.

> To the materialists… there is no perceptible need felt within, and so, they need no intellectual theory, spiritual surroundings, or divine endeavours for the satisfaction of their sense of spiritual unrest. Religion serves mainly the evolved-ones who have the intelligence to watch life as a whole… To the seekers, religion points out the way; and in this sense the *Hindu* religion is a perfect science of *self-perfection*, comprising in it, a complete technique.[160]

In these passages he is attempting to demonstrate the universal application of the Upaniṣads by calling them "scientific", a word that was commonly used to indicate validity and a rigorous and systematic method.[161] The Upaniṣads are almost like a lab notebook of previous scientists to be followed by current researchers in their quest for Truth. This sounds acceptable and effective to the modern ear, which is precisely the reason why Chinmayananda uses the language of modern science to convey the message of the Upaniṣads.

As stated before, Chinmayananda was not debating with his audiences. But he was trying to convince them of something nonetheless. His audiences were not scholarly people, not opponents to be encountered in the *pūrvapakṣa* style. But they were of a different variety. They placed value in "science". Thus, to gain their appreciation, he had to use language that they could understand. Moreover, he had to convince them of the scientific nature of the Upaniṣads. Luckily for him, since he was generally the first one to expound their meaning to his audiences, his saying it would have been enough.

To add to the complexity, while on one hand he maintains that the Upaniṣads are a science and should be approached as such, on the other hand, he calls the Upaniṣads revelations too:

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[160] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: 14.

[161] In his *History of Modern Science*, Stephen Brush makes the point that one of the major themes of what he calls the "Second Scientific Revolution" (a period from around 1800-1950, which is relevant to our subject) was "the quantification of everything" (1988: 17). He quotes Lord Kelvin (1824-1907) to make his point: "I often say that when you can measure what you are speaking about and express it in numbers you know something about it; but when you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meager and unsatisfactory kind: it may be the beginning of knowledge, but you have scarcely, in your thoughts, advanced to the stage of Science, whatever the matter may be." (1988: 17). Clearly, unless something is quantified, it is not "Science", but rather is some primitive form of knowledge according to this paradigm. "Science" then becomes the key term indicating validity of knowledge. This is, indeed, a paradigm from within which Chinmayananda was working, for he too tries hard to show that there is a certain rigor in his method that can withstand the contemporary scientific methodology, calling *advaita-vedānta* the "Science of Life" among other things, as we have seen and will see in the passages that we quote.

> The *Upaniṣad-s* are revelations, not the products of the individual mind and the intellect. By a long process of practice, control and discipline, the mind and intellect are trained to soar into the higher realms of greater subtleties and to remain there in angelic poise and grace. In their very lightness, at such *dizzy* heights of seeking and soaring, they seem to roll off into a vaporous nothingness! This is the fulfillment of all *Yoga-s*. When thus the mind is sublimated, the faculty called *intuition* is awakened in man, and Truth is realised intuitively by the Seers and Sages. The Absolute-Truth is not imagined or rationally determined. It is *intuitively experienced*. It is ascertained.[162]

These descriptions all fall together in the introductory portions of each of Chinmayananda's commentaries. We can see that this still fits in with his definition of science, as the *Ṛṣi*s took "the individual" as their "field of enquiry", and within that field they performed "experiments", incorporating "intuitive experience". In this sense, he may be justified in calling the Upaniṣads scientific, and yet at the same time revelation. In other words, though the Veda is "revelation" – not the product of the human mind – it is revelation in the sense of being received and then understood "scientifically". It stands up to scientific scrutiny. This is a very important point, and we shall examine it in much greater depth in the following chapter.

As we saw before, Chinmayananda asserts that the teachers of the Upaniṣads all reach the same goal, having the same divine experience. He presents this sameness of experience of the "Teachers" as a reason to believe in the authority of the scriptures. In his own way, he is asserting their authority based on the seemingly scientific nature of the scriptures, with the idea that they reproduce data. The teachers of the Upaniṣads all come to the same "Divine Goal", and thus are evidence of a method that can reliably be followed by anybody to reach that goal. To further fortify this idea, he makes sure to mention "Science" and "Religion" together in his texts: for example, he writes, "When we watch the motives behind science and religion, we clearly see that both of them have almost something very similar and common between them; both of them have been striving sincerely to serve the state, or the generation, with the maximum quota of happiness in life."[163]

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[162] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 36.
[163] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: 3.

By calling Vedānta the "Science of Life", "Science of Truth", "Science", etc., he is attempting to reinforce the idea that Science and Vedānta are related, or are at the same plane of Truth and believability. He is keen on showing that Vedānta (or just "Religion", as he calls it, or "True Religion") is a science, perhaps because his target audiences were made up of those individuals that valued science. We find many such examples:

> Thus from teacher to the taught, the Knowledge Supreme has come down, in each succeeding Master, the Self-Science gaining in authority and wealth of detail. These Master-minds were so selflessly true to their pursuit after Truth that they, in the thrill of their divine adventure, ignored even themselves! We have rarely any identity of these men left to us in the body of the *Upaniṣad-s*. In almost all the *Upaniṣad-s* their authors are unknown; they, as it were, forgot to add their signatures to their masterpieces.[164]

Or, when explaining the meaning of the word "Upaniṣad":

> The word is made by combining the suffix Upa with the word nishad, Upa means near, and nishad, to sit. Thus, the very word indicates that this is the science that one should learn at the feet of the master because, if you read with the help of an encyclopaedia, the true import of the scriptures will be completely lost sight of.[165]

We will examine these claims throughout this thesis to gain insight into whether we can potentially take some hints from this "ancient science" to augment present studies on consciousness.

Before we move on, we must appreciate Śaṅkara's views on this topic. What is an Upaniṣad according to him? In his commentary on the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, he defines the word in detail:

> The word *upaniṣad* is derived by adding *upa* (near) and *ni* (with certainty) as prefixes and *kvip* as a suffix to the root *sad*, meaning to split up (destroy), go (reach, attain), or loosen. And by the word *upaniṣad* is denoted the knowledge of the knowable entity, presented in the book that is going to be explained.[166]

He defines it several times in different ways in the same section, stating, "It (viz knowledge) splits up, injures, or destroys the seeds of worldly existence such as

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[164] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 35.
[165] *Discourses on Praśnopaniṣad* 2005: 13.
[166] Gambhīrānanda 1957: 97.

ignorance etc…"[167] "Or the knowledge of Brahman is called *upaniṣad* because of its conformity to the idea of leading to Brahman, inasmuch as it makes the seekers after emancipation, who are possessed of the qualities already mentioned, attain the supreme Brahman." [168] In other words, for Chinmayananda, like Śaṅkara, the Upaniṣads are a valid source (*pramāṇa*) for the "scientific" study of Consciousness.

2. The Upaniṣads are a very important source of *jñāna*.

So how does Swami Chinmayananda see the teaching of the text? We shall now elaborate on our second point, that of the importance of the Upaniṣads – namely the ones we mentioned at the start of this chapter – as sources for *jñāna*. Let us gain an overarching perspective from the Swami himself. What are the Upaniṣads? In one of his first lecture series, which he delivered from December 31, 1951 to April 8, 1952, he states:

> The contents of the *Upaniṣads* are the esoteric spiritual knowledge recorded for the purposes of reflection and contemplation, and, therefore, the deeper a man can dive into the significances of the passages during his meditation upon them, the greater shall he discover their hidden meanings. Mere superficial readers cannot be fully catered to with such philosophical literature which are discourses upon Pure Truth, challenging the authority and authenticity of the fields of the mind and intellect… In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* we find that the *Vedas* are described as breathed out (*niḥśvāsitam*) by the Supreme Lord… in the sense that if there be no *Veda* then the concept of God also will end; no breathing, no existence is the inexorable law of life… [The Upaniṣads] contain the fiery declarations of realised Truth, made by Masters, who had tried to capture the Infinite in a web of finite words.[169]

It would seem at first glance that according to Chinmayananda, the Vedas are an irreplaceable component of gaining knowledge of God, Consciousness, *brahman*, *ātman*, etc. But upon further reading, we find that his view is more complex than this orthodox reading. We shall come back to this point to address the complexity when discussing his views on the teaching of the text a little later.

Later, in a lecture series delivered from March 6-29, 1955 in Kozhikode, Kerala, he gives us a chronology of the development of the Vedic corpus as a

[167] Gambhīrānanda 1957: 97.
[168] Gambhīrānanda 1957: 98.
[169] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: 51-52.

progression from the hymns, or *mantra*s, to the rituals of the *brāhmaṇa*s to the philosophy of the Upaniṣads:

> Any intelligent reader of scientific temperament, if he were to read these three, with some understanding, can easily perceive that a healthy creative revolt against *Mantra-s* gave birth to the *Brāhmaṇa-s*, the ritualistic portion, which in its own maturity put forth the glories of the *Upaniṣad-s*.[170]

This was a common view among Western orientalists at the time. We find in A.B. Keith's *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads* an explanation of "The Beginnings of Vedic Philosophy":

> Philosophy in India shows its beginnings as often in the expression of skepticism: the normal belief in the gods here and there seems to have been questioned, and it is not unnatural that the questioning should have arisen in the case of the most human of the gods, him whom the seers most closely fashioned in their own likeness, the vehement Indra.[171]

It appears, then, that Chinmayananda's views are informed also by Western academia, a point we will revisit many times.

As an *advaitin*, he is interested in the *jñānakāṇḍa* portion of the Vedas, or the portion of the Vedas dealing with Knowledge of the Absolute. This portion is in the form of the Upaniṣads, and thus he bestows the most value upon them. We will see time and again these kinds of persuasive statements in his writings. He is often the first one to deliver knowledge of the Upaniṣads to his audiences, and thus several points of academic debate, such as this one, are commonly swept aside and replaced by an affirmative statement. For example, he affirms the revelatory nature of the Upaniṣads in the passage we quoted earlier in this chapter from his *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* without providing any second opinion or even the fact that there is debate about the subject.

These descriptions all fall together in the introductory portions of each of Chinmayananda's commentaries. But there is complexity here, too; he brings in scholarly points of debate from time to time, as we can see in his reading of the *Īśāvāsya* Upaniṣad. He makes sure to mention in this case the different recensions of the text, namely the *Kaṇva* and *Mādhyandina* recensions.[172] The complexity does not end with his knowledge of differences within Indian schools of thought regarding the

[170] *Discourses on Aitareya Upaniṣad* 2004: 8.
[171] Keith 1925: 433.
[172] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: 57.

Upaniṣads, either. He also seems very knowledgeable about Western philosophical scholarship and often mentions the names of Western scholars and their philosophies regarding similar topics in his writings.[173]

Since Chinmayananda does not mention *pramāṇa* directly more than a few times in all his prolific writing, we must dig deeper to find the answer to our question: what is Chinmayananda's view on *pramāṇa*? Though it is hidden, in his words and tone, he unmistakably assumes the *pramāṇatva* of the Upaniṣads when he teaches. He is evidently trying to instill a feeling in his audiences that the texts are authoritative without getting caught up in the tedious explanations that inevitably accompany the concept of *pramāṇa*. So he can declare: "We shall also observe that the Teachers, though they vary in their expressions, in their lines of arguments and their modes of approaches, all of them, without even a single exception, reach the same Divine Goal."[174] Now we come to the question: did he consider himself a kind of *pramāṇa* for his audiences? This leads us into our third point of discussion.

3. We need guidance to study the Upaniṣads; they are not to be read alone.

With regard to our third point of discussion, Chinmayananda also clearly mentions that the Upaniṣads are not to be read alone. They should be read under the guidance of a teacher because of their cryptic nature. Traditionally, a *śāstric* text first describes the student who is fit to learn the particular knowledge therein. When describing who is fit to learn Vedānta, Chinmayananda at some points differs from Śaṅkara in his approach. He says:

> When I say *adhikāris*, I am not repeating the word in the connotation in which it has come to be used by the orthodoxy, who made use of it to keep us all, including themselves, in complete darkness regarding the sacred wealth of knowledge contained in our scriptures…

[173] For example, he quotes the British colonial historian John Sydenham (1878-1960) on page 119 of *The Bhagawad Geeta: Chapter I & II*, "Sydenham says: 'You, Hindus, are the heirs of all ages, if you will but accept your inheritance! And you can be true worthy leaders of thought in India if you will learn to study your great faith for your self and, overcoming mental inertia of taking your beliefs readymade, think out your religion for yourself and form concepts and cherish convictions which, while illuminating the abiding meaning of life, have a more vital present day significance.'" On page 121 of the same book, Chinmayananda quotes British Orientalist John Woodroffe (1865-1936): "John Woodroffe in this connection declares: 'An examination of the Vedic thesis shows that it is in conformity with the most advanced philosophic and scientific thought of the West, and that where this is not so, it is the scientist who will go to the Vedants and not the Vedants to the scientist.'" We see such examples in many places in his writings.

[174] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 36.

> It is the tradition of ignorance that gave power to a priest-class to decide who are fit for spiritual life and who are unfit. Certainly, this is an absurd proposition. It is not in the hands of one ignorant, imperfect mortal to judge the mental and intellectual qualities of a seeker and come to measure his spiritual thirst. All of us, educated in the modern colleges, who have the capacity to think for ourselves, have an *awakened* intellect, a heart of abiding emotions, a balanced character, and an adventurous spirit to live the higher values of life, are fit *adhikāris* to enter the spiritual kingdom.
>
> An atom-bomb secret certainly needs an army with all its ammunitions to guard it; but such guardians are not needed for the eternal wisdom of the *Upaniṣads*. It is neither your nor my responsibility to guard it. Mother *Śruti* Herself guards every *Jñāna Yajñaśālā*.[175]

We can see a "modernist" tendency in Chinmayananda's writing here. Whereas Śaṅkara is against the teaching of the *śruti* to *śūdra*s,[176] Chinmayananda is intent on allowing into his *yajñaśālā* anyone who wishes to study. Clearly, he is against the idea of the knowledge being hoarded by the few. Apparently, he is advocating that the teaching be available to the public. He sees himself as part of his own category of "modern", for he uses "us" to refer to people educated in "modern colleges". Perhaps this is a technique to connect the speaker to his audiences, but it also conveys a sense of belonging to the "modernist" approach to the text. We have already seen how he sees the Upaniṣads as "scientific", how he wants the teaching to be available to the public, and how he values independent thinking. He is doing away with hierarchical authority, which is another "modern" tendency.

At the same time, again, we find an apparently more qualified view even in his earliest writings – in fact, his very first discourse, on the *Kena Upaniṣad* – where he outlines the four qualifications traditionally looked for in a student of Vedānta, namely *viveka* (discriminatory power between Real and unreal), *vairāgya* (detachment or dispassion), *ṣaṭsampatti* (six-fold qualities), and *mumukṣutva* (desire for liberation).[177] But he makes sure to put the audience at ease immediately afterward:

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[175] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: 16-17. The "*Jñāna Yajñaśālā*" is Chinmayananda's term for any hall where discourses on the scripture take place.
[176] Cf. Śaṅkara's commentary on Brahma Sūtra I.1.34-I.1.38.
[177] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 18-19. This same four-fold qualification can be found in Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*, I.1.1. Thus Chinmayananda got this idea from

> As in every branch of study, the student of *Brahma Vidyā* also must have certain preliminary qualifications if he is to enter the *Vedānta* Hall, to hear the discourses with benefit, and profit by them. This is nothing new. But when it is put under the grave term, '*Sādhana Catuṣṭaya*' – (the four qualifications necessary for a student) we are apt to feel surprised and uncomfortable. On a little closer analysis we shall find that we all, already, have these qualifications.[178]

This interpretation of the four-fold qualifications necessary for a student strengthens the view that everyone can and in fact should study Vedānta. He reinterpreted the view that Śaṅkara held, which was that only the privileged few, who had these qualifications, could study. To Chinmayananda, everyone is capable of studying Vedānta. Thus the "apparent" qualification was only apparent. Here we see more universalization at work. He has not changed his views substantially, as we mentioned earlier on, but rather has kept this universal worldview, while still mentioning and then going beyond Śaṅkara's qualifications.

He is keen to deliver this teaching to the average householder. He wants to remove the stigma that this knowledge belongs to ochre-clad *saṁnyāsin*s. He goes on to say that everyone can benefit from this teaching, not just the few. It is not a divorce from life that the Upaniṣads prescribe but a calm attitude towards life. They never say you have to go up into the Himalayas to achieve this truth. They may prescribe some isolated quietude for a short time to engage in higher thinking but only for a specialized few and that too for a fixed period of time:

> It is not a fact that the Bibles of the world had ever sanctioned for man such a divorce from life. It may recommend a temporary retreat and advise the individual to have a quieter place for the higher contemplation. Even this is only for a few specializing ones, and that, too, for a fixed time.[179]

But when it finally comes to learning the text, he is very clear that the Upaniṣads are not to be read alone, nor are they to be read literally. If one does so, he claims, then one will get lost in what could seem like meaningless babble. Instead, one must be aware that the words have a separate suggestive meaning aside from their literal meaning.

Śaṅkara, but changed some of the implications of these qualifications to include everyone, rather than some highly accomplished few.

[178] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 18.

[179] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: 46.

> …words have got not only their literal meaning but, by usage, they gather a suggestiveness of their own, stored up in themselves as their special flavour.
>
> The inexpressible Infinite Truth is thus indicated by these words of the scriptures. It is not openly and directly expressed. This is true in almost all other religions when the Prophets are in extreme ecstasy of their own mystical experiences. But, in *Hinduism*, we find that throughout the *Upaniṣadik* lore almost every word of it is used to express the suggestive case.[180]

He means that by simply studying the words of the Upaniṣads literally, one may distort or at least not gain the full meaning of the text. The meaning is hidden between the lines, as it were, and this cannot be extracted by consulting a dictionary. Thus, he is especially against reading the Upaniṣads with the eye of a grammarian. For him, this is the worst possible way to read a text.

> …the Upanishad study cannot be undertaken merely with the help of the sledge-hammer of language-knowledge, or the pickaxe of word-meanings. Equipped with these instruments when the grammarians and dictionary-muggers reach the Upanishads they hack down the glory of the Eternal Knowledge and make them as bald as the profit-mongering contractors have done to our sacred Himalayan slopes… In fact, the word-hacking pundits have done, perhaps, more harm to the cultural heritage of the country than the sceptics, who have left, in their dread and disgust, the sacred books intact.[181]

He is also clear that since we should not read these texts without guidance, we need the help of a *guru* to understand the meanings of the Upaniṣad *mantra*s (i.e. verses, according to Chinmayananda).

> *Upaniṣad Mantra-s* fulfill their functions only through their pregnant 'suggestiveness'. They do not directly and openly express or explain: but with their 'indicative meaning', in their secret 'import', in their meaningful 'suggestiveness', they simply guide us to the very presence of Truth.
>
> Hence we always need the interpretations from a *Guru* to understand fully the meaning of the *Upaniṣad-s*. Any amount of mere reading would not reveal to us their fuller and ampler wealth of meaning. These *Mantra-s* are jealous, shy and secretive by their very nature.[182]

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[180] *Discourses on Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2006: 2.
[181] *Discourses on Praśnopaniṣad* 2005: 12-13.
[182] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 40.

We discussed the qualifications of a *guru* according to Chinmayananda earlier in this chapter. But about his own status as a *guru*, he declares that he is not one:

> During these days of the *Yajña*,[183] I should request all of you not to consider me as a special creature with special powers or dignities! I am no *Guru*, nor are you my disciples. We both are fellow-students in the Halls of Wisdom, trying together to make a brotherly research into the great Wisdom of the *Ṛṣis*. At best, we are only equal and sincere seekers trying to do the pilgrimage together in a spirit of loving brotherhood and friendly companionship.[184]

To use a Buddhist term, this is Chinmayananda's *upāyakauśalya*. His "skill in means" is to present his material to his audiences in such a way that they may understand and relate to his teaching. By calling himself not a *guru*, he immediately, but paradoxically, removes doubt as to the authority of the text, since it is simply an exploration to be done by everyone together, and not a dogma to be accepted blindly. By being a fellow seeker, he makes the text available to everyone, and does not appear to hold the key to the answers therein, *even though in reality for his audience he is indeed acting as that key*.

In an interview in Australia in 1984, he clearly sees Vedānta as a teaching whose hermeneutical techniques evolve with the times, an explanation that will be valuable to consider in our next point of enquiry as well. Like Vivekananda, he believes that the way the texts should be taught changes with time naturally, and should not be stopped. In the interview he says:

> Somehow there is this intrinsic vitality in this culture, that at the last lingering moments, a great master or a great leader is thrown up who uplifts it. Thus the Vedic culture was dying, Vyāsa was thrown out. The Paurāṇic culture came up. The Paurāṇic culture also decayed, a great Hindu rose in revolt against it called Buddha. Buddhism maintained for some time; by the seventh century Buddhism also decayed, split into small small groups. Great Śaṅkarācārya came. Śaṅkara's answer also is not permanent. Eighth century if Śaṅkara revived, 11th century Rāmānuja had to come. 15th century Madhva had to come. 19th century, that is British rule, people lost their self-confidence. They will not do anything. The great Vivekananda came and

[183] As mentioned in an earlier footnote, "*Jñāna Yajña*" is how Chinmayananda refers to discourses on the Upaniṣads. In this case, "*Yajña*" is just an abbreviation for "*Jñāna Yajña*".
[184] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: 2.

> revived it. So our culture is maintained even today only because of its own intrinsic vitality through the right type of person, at that crucial moment, who could answer the weaknesses of that time, correct it, and give it a new push, new life.[185]

Here we see that he acknowledges and even accepts that Vyāsa, Buddha, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Madhva, and Vivekananda are all steps in the evolution of Hinduism, and come about to restructure and restate the message for the people of their times. With this mentality, he allows himself the position of an evolver, rather than a reciter of Hindu thought.

The idea expressed in the previous passage by Chinmayananda is a strikingly clear echo of Vivekananda, who explains:

> …sect after sect arose in India and seemed to shake the religion of the Vedas to its very foundations, but like the waters of the seashore in a tremendous earthquake it receded only for a while, only to return in an all-absorbing flood, a thousand times more vigorous, and when the tumult of the rush was over, these sects were all sucked in, absorbed, and assimilated into the immense body of the mother faith.[186]

For Chinmayananda, as discussed in our first point, the present age that we live in is the age of science.[187] Thus, as a guide to understanding the Upaniṣads in a modern context, he sees his role as that of connecting the Upaniṣadic teaching with modern science.

In spite of Chinmayananda's ostensible humility and seemingly unassuming words, nevertheless we can see in the above passages if we are so inclined, that he has placed himself in this lineage of *guru*s or teachers as a new teacher that has come to elucidate the "science of Vedānta" to his audiences of the present age. Though he

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[185] Source: *Australian Interview of Swami Chinmayananda* 1984: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrxGTXadYpE>, 18:34-21:08.

[186] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume 1, pg. 16.

[187] See Chinmayananda's detailed description of science and religion in the sections of his *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* (2007) called "Science and Religion", "Time Passed On", and "Sans Faith, Sans Prejudice", pages 3-7. In these sections, he suggests that science and religion started with the same motive, which is to serve the state by bringing the maximum quota of happiness to the people. But where religion used to serve the state, time passed on and a new age dawned – the age of machines. There, science joined the company with the same motive of serving the state. As science progressed with the times, religion stayed behind and did not evolve, so a tussle between the two began. Now, we are in a place in time where science and religion must communicate again. Chinmayananda claims that the *ṛṣi*s of old had perfected the "science of life", and their works could be used as a way for religion to dialogue with science.

never explicitly says he is the *guru*, he uses passages like the above ones to say that he is, in fact, the *guru*. It may be a modest way of saying it, but it is a way of saying it nonetheless. There are no grounds to claim that he was a deceitful *guru*, however, for when we look at the above passages as humble ways of saying "I am also part of this process", we see that the humility comes in on the one hand when he implies that "I will also come and go." On the other hand, it is important to note that he is still saying, "I am here."

4. The study of the Upaniṣads can help unite the people of India.

With regard to our fourth point of discussion, Chinmayananda is attempting not only to impart the knowledge of Vedānta to his audiences, which deals with the nature of Consciousness, but he seems also to be trying to unite the different people in India, where he begins his work. Perhaps residually from his days as a freedom fighter, journalist, and rabble-rouser, he is intent on showing an underlying sameness of all religions, with the intention of uniting the people of India that follow them as "Indian". This is in no small part due to the influence of Vivekananda's philosophy of religion on his thinking. We find quotes in Chinmayananda's works like, "The paths advocated by all Religions are the same - renounce the false ego and its consequent variations. The sorrows and sighs belong to the ego-phantom…"[188] and later in the same chapter, "The methods of eliminating this ghost within us are the processes advocated by all religions. Every spiritual practice is an attempt at the total elimination of this shadow-nothingness within us. All *Śāstra-s* serve only to teach us the *unreality* of the *non-existent*."[189] These are direct echoes of Vivekananda's writings. For example:

> Vedanta says that it is true that the Absolute or the Infinite is trying to express itself in the finite, but there will come a time when it will find that it is impossible, and it will then have to beat a retreat; and this beating a retreat means renunciation, which is the real beginning of religion. Nowadays it is very hard to even talk of renunciation. Yet it is true that that is the only path of religion. Renounce and give up. What did Christ say? 'He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.' Again and again did he preach renunciation as the only way to perfection.[190]

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[188] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 5.
[189] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 8.
[190] Vivekananda, *What Religion Is: In the Words of Swami Vivekananda*, pg. 57.

But there is also certainly a reference here to Śaṅkara's ideas, such as his description of the purpose of studying an Upaniṣad. Śaṅkara says, "[The] knowledge of *brahman* is expressed by the word *upaniṣad*, because it completely dissipates this world of provisional reality and its cause for those who are devoted to it, for the [root] *sad* prefixed by *upa* and *ni* has this meaning…"[191] With this description, it becomes obvious where Chinmayananda gets his inspiration. As stated earlier, Chinmayananda tries to maintain a balance between Śaṅkara's teachings, that is, the tradition, and modern ideas of Vedānta.

Even with this attempt, however, there is still clearly a Universalist approach in Chinmayananda's exposition of the Advaitic philosophy. Having been initiated into Western education, he is aware of the modes of thinking that are prevalent in the West. He takes care to acknowledge the communication between different cultures due to globalization. He also makes sure to show due attention to the similarities between his tradition and others such as Christianity, which is another characteristic that he shares with Vivekananda, exemplified in the passages above. In his *The Holy Geeta*, the name of the book itself being a play on the Christian idiom, "The Holy Bible", he makes sure to provide Biblical references from time to time. For example, when discussing Kṛṣṇa's appeal to Arjuna, "Get up and act" in the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā, he mentions in a footnote, "On a similar occasion, Christ said to Job [*sic*], 'Gird up your loins like a man,' Bible: Job-38:3."[192]

Chinmayananda seems to see Religion as a whole, and differences between religions as just superficial. But he appears to proclaim that the core import of each religion is the same, and that core import is the message of Vedāntic texts. This is clearly influenced by Vivekananda, who stated at the Parliament of World Religions in 1893, "To the Hindu, then, the whole world of religions is only a travelling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal." At the same time, he emphasizes Vedānta as somehow standing out, unique. Since he is teaching Vedānta, and perhaps to avoid the question, "If all religions are the same, why should I study Vedānta?" he seems intent on showing the uniqueness and superiority of Vedānta over all other religions. Or to put it another way, he seems intent on showing that Vedānta underlies all other religions. He elaborately but in a semi-roundabout manner describes the uniqueness

[191] Quoted from Lipner 2010: 52-53.
[192] *The Holy Geeta* 2008: 60.

of Vedānta, calling it the "Religion of Detachment", in a section of the introduction to the *Kenopaniṣad*.[193]

5. The study of the Upaniṣads can help synthesize the different *yoga*s.

Pertaining to our fifth point of discussion, Chinmayananda does not end with wanting to unite the people of India and different religions. He is also keen on synthesizing the different *yoga*s listed even within Hinduism. If not synthesizing, then at least he is keen on making them somehow complementary, not opposed. "All *Yoga-s* end in eliminating the ego in the *Sādhaka-s*. The *Yoga-s* advocate different methods to suit different temperaments, yet their aim is the same — Self-realisation."[194] He states more elaborately in his commentary on the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*:

> Though the four paths look to be different, they are only different in their early stages of application. In fact, all the four paths meet at one and the same junction, technically called as *pratyāhāra*… Having reached this stage of mental dexterity in its withdrawal and application, all the students of every *yoga* thereafter walk hand in hand in the spiritual path covering the same stages in their pilgrimage known as *dhāraṇā* (concentration), *dhyāna* (meditation) and *samādhi* (the final realisation).[195]

6. There is a continuum within the different Vedāntic schools.

He proceeds, not satisfied with just uniting the *yoga*s. According to our sixth point of discussion, he also wants to show a continuum within the different Vedāntic schools of Madhva, Rāmānuja, and Śaṅkara. The quote above from his Australian interview in 1984, where he gives a brief explanation of why Rāmānuja's and Madhva's commentaries were a necessary addition to the Vedāntic corpus, clearly illustrates this point.

On pages 12-14 of his *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* he describes the schools, and then says:

> It must also be clear to you that all three schools of Hindu Philosophy are not competing and contradicting theories, but that each explains a necessary

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[193] Cf. "Vedānta: The Religion of Detachment" in *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* (2004: 6-12). Also cf. Julius Lipner's article "Religion and Religions" in *Radhakrishnan: Centenary Volume*, from which one can clearly determine that Chinmayananda's views are reverberations of Radhakrishnan's ideas regarding different religions. Radhakrishnan says, "We tend to look upon different religions not as incompatibles but as complementaries, and so indispensable to each other for the realization of the common end." (Quoted from Lipner 1989: 142).

[194] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 9.

[195] *Discourses on Kaṭhopaniṣad* 2006: xxi.

> stage we must pass through in our slow pilgrimage to the Peak of Perfection. It is only intellectual *Pundit-s* who quarrel and seek to establish one or the other declaration and fight over them. In fact, the moment we step onto the Path of Spiritual *Sādhanā* we realize that these three are three way-side inns for spiritual pilgrims to rest and proceed ahead. Every pilgrim must first visit *Madhava* [*sic*], from where he proceeds to worship *Rāmānuja* and then alone can he reach the portals of *Vedānta* and recognize himself to be no other than *Śrī Śaṅkara*[196] himself.
>
> Let us, therefore, stop our quarrels. Let us act. Let us embark on the pilgrimage, and see for ourselves what is our relationship with the Absolute.

From this we can also glean that he is keen on action, on actually embarking on the path, rather than just talking about it. It is worthy of note that although he seems to ignore and perhaps even "remove" the quarrels with Madhva and Rāmānuja followers ("Let us, therefore, stop our quarrels"), saying they are on the path to *advaita* (which is the only path he calls "Vedānta" in this passage), in a way he is also fueling a quarrel by proposing a hierarchy of development with Madhva at the bottom, Rāmānuja in the middle, and Śaṅkara at the top. But one message is still clear: "Let us act."

What is the purpose of reading the text, according to Chinmayananda? For Chinmayananda to make an impact with laypeople, he could not just say "liberation" is the goal, for that would not have made sense to the people he was speaking to. In the Western paradigm, success is measured by monetary value. He had to clarify that success in the spiritual world is not measured by money.[197] The passage above that details his definition of science drives home this point.

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[196] When Chinmayananda says "*Śrī Śaṅkara*", we can interpret this in two ways. One is to say that the spiritual seeker sees oneself as being one with the divine Śaṅkara, which is the goal of *advaita-vedānta*. The other is to say that the spiritual seeker sees the Upaniṣads in an Advaitic light through the eyes of the 8th Century philosopher, Śaṅkara. If we take any indication from the previous part of the passage, where he seems to be naming the great Upaniṣadic philosophers in order, then logically to complete the trio (along with Madhva and Rāmānuja), he must also name Śaṅkara. Therefore, we can conclude that the correct interpretation is the latter of the two.

[197] The section called "Secular or Divine" on page 55 of his *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* (2007) makes it clear that Chinmayananda sees the teaching of the text to be done with the purpose of achieving happiness. He is intent on giving people a reason to be happy, and it is evidently not important to him to *prove* that it comes from the Upaniṣads, or that they are the greatest texts. He instead takes for granted that they are worthy of study, and tries to teach the application of the knowledge therein for people in their daily lives.

While using his *upāyakauśalya* to teach his audiences about *advaita-vedānta* by using scientific terminology and in fact calling Vedānta itself a science, he is also delivering certain traditional values. For example, lineage is important to the tradition of the Upaniṣads. Even within the Upaniṣads, the lineage of each character is mentioned. In the same fashion, Chinmayananda links himself up with lineage of Śaṅkara through his initiator, Swami Sivananda. Notably, he is not ostensibly opposed to Śaṅkara when it comes to the authority of *śabda* in delivering the knowledge of the Absolute. But he still makes sure to say that we must approach the texts as scientists, though assuming them to contain Truth, still verifying it with our own experience. This can be said to be his *upāyakauśalya*.

What we have done in this chapter is to give an indication in some depth of the chief concerns of Swami Chinmayananda with respect to "Consciousness" or "Knowledge" (*cit*, *caitanya*, *jñāna*) and the context of its source and study. By discussing the six points outlined above, we have seen how the study of the Upaniṣads has several attributes. These are: 1. Being a "scientific" study of Consciousness; 2. Being an important source of *jñāna*; 3. Being cryptic, and thus requiring a teacher for their study; 4. Being a uniting factor for people in India; 5. Being a means for the synthesis of the different *yoga*s; and 6. Being able to be interpreted in a way that shows a continuum between the different schools of Vedānta. Now we need to develop further the core ideas expressed here, and with this in mind we shall start the next chapter.

Chapter 3 – Conceptual Biography of Swami Chinmayananda, Part I

In this chapter and the next we shall be providing a conceptual biography of Swami Chinmayananda. We will provide a neat framework with which we can examine his philosophy and the development of his ideas. We will not do this chronologically, but topic-wise. The advantage of understanding his philosophy by topic is that we can systematically analyze each topic, referencing other topics, with respect to his influences and his particular stance on each issue. We established already that his philosophy does not substantially change over time, so it is more worthwhile to understand his ideas according to the flow of arguments laid out by foundational members of his lineage, like Śaṅkara.[198] Since, to the best of my knowledge, Chinmayananda's philosophy has never been studied in an academic context, it will be useful and important to construct this narrative.[199] We have already introduced Chinmayananda as a developing individual and his journey to becoming a Swami. In doing so, we provided a social context for this thinker. But now we shall use that context, recognizing that thinkers are not born in vacuums, to analyze Chinmayananda as a philosopher.

In the previous chapters we have introduced the complexity of the study of "consciousness", the variety of approaches taken to study and describe it through different paradigms, and the potential usefulness of the Upaniṣads in studying it. We have also described in detail one particular teacher of Upaniṣadic thought in the modern world, Swami Chinmayananda, and a few of the key thinkers that influenced him: Śaṅkara, Swami Vivekananda, and Aldous Huxley. Now having situated both the philosophical focus and the lens through which we will focus on it, we will enter into the philosophy of Consciousness in the Upaniṣads according to Swami Chinmayananda.

According to Chinmayananda, the enquiry into Consciousness as described in the Upaniṣads is narrated through a dialogue between a teacher and a student. The

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[198] In particular, Swami Chinmayananda uses the framework of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, which he considered to have been written by Śaṅkara, as we shall see below.

[199] I recognize that in creating a narrative for Chinmayananda's philosophy in this conceptual biography, I provide my own interpretation. But every reading of a set of works is an interpretation, and here I am providing, in my opinion, the best framework for reading Chinmayananda's works. In the fifth chapter we will take up some of the most important issues that arise while analyzing Chinmayananda's works and comment on them. In the following two chapters, however, we will attempt to let Chinmayananda's works speak for themselves.

enquiry is performed by the student and guided by the teacher. The Upaniṣads, then, are in the format of question-and-answer sessions between the student and teacher.[200] They do not take each reader of the Upaniṣads by hand, guiding the reader through all of the essential vocabulary and basic premises that the student must know before entering into the study of *advaita-vedānta*. Instead, they answer each question from the student one at a time, and move at the pace of the student in the Upaniṣad.[201] In order to prepare a reader for the study of the Upaniṣads, then, different teachers over time have written introductory texts known as *prakaraṇagrantha*s (*prakaraṇa-*, introductory, *-grantha*, text) to make the overall framework of Vedānta clear.[202] One such text was especially influential for Swami Chinmayananda and seems to have been his guidebook when introducing his audiences to Vedāntic concepts, called *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (the "crest-jewel", *-cūḍā-maṇi*, of discrimination between Real and unreal, *viveka-*). He emphatically states, "Vivekachoodamani is the cream of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Geeta… The Goal and the Path are both exhaustively dealt with, in this elaborate treatment of Vedanta, by Acharya Sankara."[203] According to Chinmayananda, this text was authored by Śaṅkara.[204] We will reference his

[200] Chinmayananda writes, "The technique in every *Upaniṣad* is one and the same; it is a personal conversation between an enquiring and thirsty student and a sympathetic and loving Man-of-Wisdom. No *Upaniṣad* fails to give a sufficiently direct or indirect evidence as to the existence of a definite *guru* and particular disciple at the background of it." (*Discourses on Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 2010: 13).

[201] But we are reassured by Chinmayananda: "As the conversation progresses, while removing the doubts of the particular student, the teacher over his shoulders, talks to us upon the meaning of life, the purpose of existence, the diagnosis of our sorrows and the remedy for all our finite weaknesses." (*Discourses on Praśnopaniṣad* 2005: 18).

[202] As Chinmayananda states, "The study of any science cannot be undertaken without a preliminary understanding of the exact definitions of the terms and terminologies [*sic*] employed in it. The fundamental beliefs, the accepted theories, the observed modes of behaviour, are all necessary data with which a modern scientist freely launches his new adventure into the realm of science. Similarly, in philosophy also, a fundamental knowledge of the terms used and the correct connotations in which various terms have been employed, is an unavoidable preliminary before a student can start the study of Vedanta." (*Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: iii).

[203] *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: v.

[204] There is an ongoing debate regarding the authorship of texts attributed to Śaṅkara (cf. the introduction to *The Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of Śaṅkarācārya Bhagavatpāda*, 2004, by John Grimes), but for the purpose of this project, we are not interested in that debate. We are instead assured by the fact that Chinmayananda believed them to have been written by Śaṅkara, which is what matters for us. Thus I will be referring to Chinmyananda's commentaries on texts considered by him to have been authored by Śaṅkara, like *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, *Ātmabodha*, *Dakṣiṇāmūrtistotra*, etc. Chinmayananda writes, "One of the greatest texts [Śaṅkara] has written as an introduction to Vedanta, is the *Vivekachoodamani* [*sic*]." *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: iii.

commentary on it and a few other texts that he considered to be authored by Śaṅkara to help guide our narrative.

We begin with a discussion about the qualities of a student that is eligible for the study of Vedānta. The discussion shifts then to the characteristics of a capable teacher. How the student should approach the teacher is then discussed, followed by an elaboration about the nature of the relationship between the teacher and student. Finally, the *upadeśa*, or teaching, is explained, the details of which we shall see in the following chapter. Let us enter into the discussion without further ado.

According to Chinmayananda, the study of Consciousness can only be undertaken by the individual for himself or herself, and thus this study requires the student to have fulfilled some qualifications before embarking on this study. The fit student of Vedānta is known as an *adhikārin*, or "someone with the right [to study]". To be an *adhikārin*, one must have four preliminary qualifications, called the *sādhanacatuṣṭaya* (the four, *-catuṣṭaya*, qualifications, *sādhana-*). These qualifications are called: 1) *viveka*, or discrimination between the Real and the unreal; 2) *vairāgya*, or dispassion from the unreal and attachment to the Real; 3) *ṣaṭsampatti*, or the six-fold "wealth" of a qualified student, which we will elaborate upon later; and 4) *mumukṣutva*, or an intense desire for liberation from the bondage of *saṁsāra*, the cycle of birth and death.

At this point, it would be appropriate to quote Chinmayananda's words about the qualifications of a student:

> In the world of men, certainly, all of us have not the same sensitivity to react readily to the world outside or to the quantity of our thoughts and emotions… Thus viewed, the *Vedāntic* teachers have classified all men, other than the *Mineral-men*,[205] into three groups: The *Animal-man*, the *Man-man*, and the *Super-man*. The *animal-man* stage is the dull insensitive stage of least awareness, and men of this stage constitute the slaves, the underdogs, the sensuous, the unprincipled atheists… Some of them evolve into the next higher stage of a greater awareness, the *Man-man* stage. These constitute the religious and the true seekers. Our *Śāstras* call this type of men as the *adhikāris*, meaning, 'the fit ones' for spiritual life.[206]

[205] By "Mineral Men", Chinmayananda is referring to bodies without any awareness, or bodies in a vegetative state.
[206] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: 15-16.

But Chinmayananda did not view this as completely binding, as we shall see below. Rather, he made it a point to explain this version of the classification system so that his students were aware of the distinction, and could assess for themselves where they stood. He was sure, as we saw in the previous chapter, to reassure his students that everyone was a 'fit student' for Vedāntic teachings. It is worth repeating the following quotations for context: "When I say *adhikāri*s, I am not repeating the word in the connotation in which it has come to be used by the orthodoxy, who made use of it to keep us all, including themselves, in complete darkness regarding the sacred wealth of knowledge contained in our scriptures."[207] Instead, he says:

> It is the tradition of ignorance that gave power to a priest-class to decide who are fit for spiritual life and who are unfit. Certainly, this is an absurd proposition… All of us, educated in the modern colleges, who have the capacity to think for ourselves, have an *awakened* intellect, a heart of abiding emotions, a balanced character, and an adventurous spirit to live the higher values of life, are fit *adhikāri*s to enter the spiritual kingdom.[208]

As the reader may have noted, also implied here is a rejection of caste-discrimination. We shall consider this aspect of Chinmayananda's teaching in detail in the fifth chapter. With this in mind, we continue with a detailed description of the four-fold qualifications of a student.

The attainment of the *sādhanacatuṣṭaya* involves the purification of the mind and the development of single-pointed focus. The process of purifying the mind and body in Vedānta is known as *bahiraṅgasādhana* (purifying, *-sādhana*, the "outer instruments", *bahiraṅga-*). Purification is called *cittaśuddhi*, and single-pointed focus is called *cittaikāgratā*. The Veda, according to Chinmayananda, can be broadly categorized into three sections: the *karmakāṇḍa*, or the section dealing with rituals; the *upāsanākāṇḍa*, or the section dealing with spiritual practices; and the *jñānakāṇḍa*, or the section dealing with Self-knowledge.[209]

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[207] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: 16.
[208] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: 16-17.
[209] In the introduction to his commentary on the *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, Chinmayananda writes: "The second section [of the Vedas] i.e., *Brāhmaṇa* portion contains detailed and scientific description of methods of various ritualistic performances and secret methods to invoke the Mighty Powers behind the nature to bless the devotees' desires into fulfilment. This section is further divided into two sub-sections – *Karma Kāṇḍa* and *Upāsanā Kāṇḍa*. The grosser rituals, their rules, prescriptions for various *Yajñā-s* and *Yāgā-s* [*sic*] form the first sub-section, while comparatively subtler meditations, that are part and parcel of *Vedik* ritualism, form the second sub-section." (*Discourses on Aitareya Upaniṣad* 2004: ii).

The purification of the mind involves removing dirt (*mala*), or the constant bombardment of thoughts – even unwanted ones – in the mind, and removing agitation (*vikṣepa*), or the inability to focus on one thought for an extended period of time. *Mala* is removed by the rituals prescribed in the *karmakāṇḍa*, and *vikṣepa* is solved by the spiritual practices prescribed in the *upāsanākāṇḍa*. Finally, if in the bucket of the body, the water of the mind is clear and calm, then one is able to see one's own reflection in it. But that reflection may go unrecognized, and to rectify this lack of recognition, called *ajñāna* (ignorance of the Self), the *jñānakāṇḍa*, comprised of the Upaniṣads, is prescribed.

Regarding *karma*, Chinmayananda argues in the third chapter of his *The Holy Geeta*:

> In the limited concept of life in the *Vedic* period, work (*Karma*) meant only the ritualistic sacrifices. These activities, pursued for a sufficiently long period, purified the heart; meaning, integrated the personality and brought about a single-pointedness of mind in the individual. It is obvious that such a conditioned and steadied mind alone could successfully apply itself on the path of Self-enquiry, and come to rediscover the Self, the Divine Soul…
>
> If ritualism alone was the 'Path', all people, at all times, would never be able to employ themselves for the highest Goal of all life. In the *Geeta*, therefore, we have an expansion of the idea indicated in the *Vedas*. Krishna, in His Divine declaration, gives the sanction that ANY ACTION can be a glorious 'sacrifice', if only it is undertaken with the required purity of motive, with a spirit of surrender, and with the deep emotion of love.[210]

This idea is elaborated on in his commentary on the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*:

> All *karmā*-s [*sic*], sacred and secular, produce in their reaction some fruit or the other. In ritualism, when the divine acts are pursued with an intention to gain the fruits thereof, the individual, in proportion to his diligence and acquired mental strength, comes to enjoy the fruits, but the same ritualism, when pursued with[out] a demand for the fruits thereof, results in an efficient integration of the *upāsaka's*[211] inner personality.[212]

And about *upāsanā* he expatiates:

> *Upāsanā* is an intellectual process of conscious thinking over a subtle [ideal] superimposed for the purpose by the mind temporarily upon a grosser object.

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[210] *The Holy Geeta* 2008: 189.
[211] The *upāsaka* is the performer of the ritual.
[212] *Discourses on Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2006: 31-32.

> To have upon a lesser object (*Nikṛṣṭa Vastu*) a super-imposition of a nobler ideal (*Utkriṣṭa Dṛṣṭi*) is *Upāsanā*…
>
> Without the minimum amount of intellectual sharpness and mental tranquillity, it is certainly impossible to understand the scriptures as they should be understood, if our studies were to fulfil themselves in bringing out the beauty, that is now lying concealed within ourselves.[213]

There are many different specific practices prescribed for pursuing "outer purification" (*bahiraṅgasādhanā*), an important one of which is called *japa* (repetition of a particular *mantra* or sacred name). Chinmayananda describes it thus: "To keep the mind actively engaged in the repetition of a sacred hymn invoking divine ideas or ideals, which provides an infinite possibility for contemplation and intellectual flights, is *japa*."[214]

According to Chinmayananda, all four of the qualifications of a student (*sādhanacatuṣṭaya*) can be gained by studying the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. A student, when studying the Upaniṣads, first gains the knowledge that there *is* something called Real, which is opposed to that which we perceive around us, called the unreal.[215] Anything that can be perceived with the senses is unreal, for there is a perceiver that is relatively more "real", but that which makes even the perceiver its object is called Real, and is the subject of each experience, known as Consciousness.[216] That is, the objects of the senses are unreal due to their objectification by the senses. The senses, too, are unreal because they are objectified by the mind, the consolidator and experiencer of sensory perception. The mind, though it acts as the perceiver to the objective world, is also unreal because it is made

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[213] *Discourses on Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2006: 5-6.
[214] *Discourses on Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2006: 33.
[215] As the *guru* declares in *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, "Fear not, O learned one! There is no danger for you. There *is* a way to cross over this ocean of change. I shall instruct you in the very path by which the ancient Rishis walked to the Beyond." (*Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 61). Chinmayananda explains, "The teacher promises that if the student is faithful and ready to put forth the required effort diligently, the subtle knowledge of the Self can be brought into his immediate, direct experience as 'That is this' (Tat-idam-iti)." (*Vakya Vritti of Adi Sankara* 2006: 13).
[216] In his commentary on the *Kena Upaniṣad*, Chinmayananda states: "It is the function of the *Upaniṣad* to point out this realisable Truth, that there is such a Divine Spark in us, which is Eternal Wisdom, the *Ātman*. This Divine Entity in us is not realised by us because of our pre-occupations with our Ego. Eliminate the Ego in self-surrender to the Lord… May we all come to renounce our false little 'I'-ego and come to realise the true big *'I'-ego - Śivoham*. Many have done it before. 'You too shall,' is the divine optimistic assertion in the thundering message of *Vedānta*." (*Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 53).

into an object by an even subtler Self, known as Consciousness, or the *ātman*.[217] This concept will be expanded upon in the next chapter, but for now it is sufficient to emphasize that with this knowledge comes the ability to distinguish the Real from the unreal. The discrimination between what is Real and unreal is *viveka*.

We may make one more observation here. On the one hand Chinmayananda explains *viveka* thus:

> Though potentially there, *viveka* is not generally awakened in all men. However actually intelligent the generation might be, it is the special privilege of a few to have the subtlety of intellect to delve deep into things and happenings and discriminate between the true and the false. Those who are sufficiently evolved, exhibit a greater keenness of intellect but those who do not have it, should not despair. For, it is not a God-given bonus which comes to us from the heavens but it is the aroma of a well-developed and integrated mind and intellect. Where there is a large amount of *viveka*, it is safe to presume that the individual has a fairly well-integrated personality.[218]

This explanation clearly makes a distinction between those who have *viveka* and those who do not. Remarkably, even here he says, "those who do not have it, should not despair." But on the other hand, he paints a different picture of *viveka*:

> *Viveka* or a capacity to discriminate the real from the unreal, the true from the false, the object from its shadow. Who has not got this? We may not have it playing in the higher Realms of Thought, but we all have this faculty of discrimination. We are not mere worms and animals. We are a cultured society of young people who can apply their power of discrimination in everyday life.[219]

Worthy of note is the distinction between "higher Realms of Thought" and "everyday life". Here, Chinmayananda clearly wants his audience to feel at ease when listening to the lecture or reading the book. It is significant that for Chinmayananda, the study of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, an introductory or ancillary text to the Upaniṣads (*prakaraṇagrantha*), is reserved for people more committed to the sudy of Vedānta, and is taught almost exclusively at the Sandeepany Sadhanalayas (discussed later in

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[217] The preceding explanation is the import of the first verse of the Vedānta text *Dṛg Dṛśya Viveka*, or "Discrimination between Seer and Seen": "*rūpaṁ dṛśyaṁ locanaṁ dṛk taddṛśyaṁ dṛk tu mānasam; dṛśyā dhīvṛttayaḥ sākṣī dṛgeva na tu dṛśyate*". Chinmayananda does not comment on this text, but his disciple and successor, Swami Tejomayananda, has published a commentary on it through the Chinmaya Mission.

[218] *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 30.

[219] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 18.

this chapter), but the *Kena Upaniṣad*, which is considered to be a higher level of study traditionally, can be directly taught to everyone. He seemed to be more interested in getting his lay audiences to be acquainted with the Upaniṣads than with *prakaraṇagrantha*s. This was probably because he thought the study of the Upaniṣads was what was lacking in society, and if people showed interest, then they could come to study Vedānta formally and systematically in his ashrams set up for that purpose.

The more the student hears and reads about the Real and the unreal, the more this discrimination wells up in him or her, and the more he or she desires the Real, and develops a dispassion towards the unreal. This dispassion is *vairāgya*. Chinmayananda clarifies:

> This faculty for dispassion is in man and the *Śruti-s* make use of it. Gradually the untrue nature of the world is realised by a keen student of the *Śruti-s*, and then dispassion in him becomes natural and intense. The function of the *Upaniṣad-s* is not merely a negative one: one of removing us from the world. It also opens up for our view a Greater World of Perfection to be achieved.[220]

As *viveka* and *vairāgya* develop, the student becomes more and more established in the notion that the observable world is transient, illusory. Thus the happenings in the world affect the student less and less, and his or her mind maintains equanimity.

This equanimity of mind is called *śama*, and is the first of the six-fold virtues or psychological qualifications of a student (*ṣaṭsampatti*) mentioned above.[221] The second of these virtues is called *dama*, or the control of the senses. Since the organs of perception are constantly using energy by rushing out towards their objects, to keep them in control is a way of focusing one's energy on the pursuit of knowledge of the Self.[222] The third of these is a natural byproduct of the first two, wherein the mind of the student is no longer swayed by the influences of external stimuli. This condition is called *uparati*, or self-withdrawal.[223] The fourth of these qualifications is called

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[220] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 19.

[221] "The first among the six qualifications is *sama* – calmness of mind." (*Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 33).

[222] "Compared with *sama*, *dama* is a system of discipline concerned with a relatively outer field since it prescribes a control for the sense organs. To withdraw our mental rays that shoot out through the sense organs for the perception of their respective sets of objects and to absorb those rays of perception within the sense organs is *dama* or self-control." *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 34.

[223] Here, Chinmayananda gives his trademark reassurance: "When we think of these requirements, it is possible that we think of them as very delicate, difficult and distressing feats, but in fact, the more we practise them, the more easily will we understand that after all

titikṣā, or forbearance in the face of suffering without the desire for redress. This is another requisite of someone that wants to engage with knowledge of the Self: the endurance of suffering for an ideal or a cause that has been taken up by the individual as worth pursuing.[224] The penultimate psychological qualification is known as *śraddhā*. It is defined as the capacity through putting in effort to realize the pregnant suggestions of the scriptures and the teachings of the *guru*. It is an essential component of realization of the Self.[225] *Śraddhā* is often loosely defined as "faith", but Chinmayananda makes it clear that it is not just blind faith; rather it is "a healthy attempt at a clear intellectual appreciation of the secret depths of the significances underlying the words of the scriptures and the Teacher."[226] The final requisite quality of the six is a total engagement with the teaching that has been taught by the preceptor about the nature of the Self. As a result of constant contemplation on the Self, the aspirant gains a certain poise to deal with the situations of life. This total engagement and resulting poise is called *samādhāna*.[227] The above mentioned six qualifications

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this is but a verbal explanation of the state of mind of anyone who is trying to achieve or execute any great work... In any successful business man [*sic*] too, we observe a certain amount of self-control within as well as without, and also *uparati*, at least while he is at his desk. Of course... a seeker needs a subtlety a million times more than the materialist. Yet, to a large extent, we can appreciate and understand these qualifications within ourselves when we watch for them and experience them as available in our work-a-day world." *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 35.

[224] But Chinmayananda does not let the student fall into the trap of self-harm, which could occur in a person's practice of *titikṣā*. "It is a great pity that many people indulge in acts of perversion in the name of *titiksa*... as a result of their self-persecution, all they gain at the end of years of suffering is a crooked, ugly, deformed mind!... Discarding clothes or starving oneself to a skinny existence, denying the body its bare necessities or giving unnecessary pain to the mind, running away from life... none of these is true *titiksa*... *Titiksa* (forbearance), is that faculty of the mind which it maintains when intellectually it is governed by a tempo and a conviction which is complete and self-ordained, divine and noble." (*Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 36).

[225] Chinmayananda does not let his criticism of the priests (and "decadent" Hindu ways) go unheard here: "In the name of *sraddha*, a perverted set of priests start tr[e]ading upon the highly credulous but extremely ignorant community, shamelessly but successfully. *Sraddha* is not blind faith as it is generally understood." (*Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 37).

[226] *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 37.

[227] Again, Chinmayananda applies corrective lenses to the concept: "*Samaadhana* [*sic*], as it is understood today, is an indifferent attitude towards both good and bad, especially towards insults and failures, threats and despairs... The *Acharya's* definition does not sanction such a superstitious belief... *Samaadhana* is not that state of the mind where in cowardice, the individual sits quietly, not daring to face life and its challenges, but, at the same time, in the secret of his bosom, goes on lamenting against the scheme of destiny that he has to face in life... *Samaadhana* is the state of mental equilibrium which comes to one when intellectually

are an essential component of seeking the Self, and according to Chinmayananda, can all be gained as a result of immersing oneself in the teaching of the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā.

Finally, expatiating on Śaṅkara, Chinmayananda says that as one begins to develop the qualities of a seeker, a burning desire to gain the liberation that is expounded in the Upaniṣads will arise in the aspirant. The seeker will have no choice but to be attracted to the knowledge of the Self. This knowledge, the seeker is taught, will help release him or her from the bondage of egoism due to identification with the body. The knowledge of the real nature of the Self will help to shift one's identification from the body, the individual self, to the universal Self, or *brahman*. The intense desire for liberation from this bondage of false identification with anything but *brahman* is known as *mumukṣutva*.[228]

According to Chinmayananda, in every individual there is a natural desire for freedom from whatever bondage one experiences, and it is this desire itself which makes a student fit for the study of Vedānta.[229] This interpretation is the result of Chinmayananda's universalizing urge, which we explored in more detail in the previous chapter, and will expand upon further in the following two chapters. *Mumukṣutva* is not so much only relegated to the realm of freedom from body-identification, then, but rather starts off as a general desire for freedom, which undergoes a process of crystallization and distillation as a result of Vedāntic study and culminates in the desire for freedom from any limitation whatsoever.

The qualified student (*sādhana-catuṣṭaya-sampanna-adhikārin*), finally, is one who is fit for the study of Vedānta (*-adhikārin*) by attaining (*-sampanna-*) the four (*-catuṣṭaya-*) qualifications for the study of Consciousness (*sādhana-*). But as we have seen, according to Chinmayananda, one can be said to naturally have these qualifications to begin with. By highlighting these qualities, though, he makes the student aware of the necessary requisites to be refined and enhanced over the course of one's study, and with this honing of qualities one becomes the fit student even

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one has unshakeable foundations and mentally when one soars to the highest pinnacles of greater visions." (*Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 38-39).

[228] This is Śaṅkara's view (cf. Chinmayananda's translation of *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, verse 27); Chinmayananda's view, as we shall see in the following paragraph, is more universalizing in nature – that is, it makes the definition of *mumukṣutva* more inclusive than just liberation from the bondage of body-identification.

[229] Cf. *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 40-41.

according to Śaṅkara's definitions. This is yet another example of Chinmayananda's *upāyakauśalya*, or skillful means in teaching.

It is important to note here that the four qualifications (*sādhanacatuṣṭaya*) are called purification of the "outer instruments" (*bahiraṅgasādhana*) because they are not directly related to the realization of the Self, but are instead prerequisites for that realization, in the form of purifying the "outer instruments" at the level of the mind and body. Performing ritual action (*karma*) helps to gain purification of the mind (*cittaśuddhi*), and performing spiritual practices (*upāsana*) helps to gain single-pointed focus of the mind (*cittaikāgratā*). The mind is still considered an "outer instrument" (*bahiraṅga*), though, because it is not the "Self", as we saw above. There is still a Self "looking out" from within, and the mind is the instrument through which this outward looking takes place. Coming to understand that which is "inside" is called purification of the "inner instruments" (*antaraṅgasādhana*), which we shall expand upon in the next chapter.

Perhaps the ancillary nature of the qualities of the four qualifications with respect to gaining the knowledge of *brahman* explains why Chinmayananda was satisfied with giving it a brief overview in the introductions to his Upaniṣad commentaries and not dwelling too much on it (although he does elaborate on it in his commentary on the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*). For him, it was the teaching of the Upaniṣad itself that would help develop those qualities in each seeker, so it was less important to dwell on the qualities and more important to simply highlight them before beginning so that the student could know what to attempt to enhance in one's own life through the teaching of the Upaniṣads.

We must pause to consider an important objection that is raised at this point. As we have seen, Chinmayananda expresses a strong urge to universalize his teaching, especially in the context of the fit student (*adhikārin*), by removing barriers of caste, gender, status, race, and religion when deciding who could attend his lectures. He mentions that the scriptures are self-selecting, as we shall see at the end of this chapter, which means that those who are meant to hear the scripture will hear it, and those who are not, will not, even if they are present in the lecture. Even in his explanations of the four-fold qualification of a student, he makes sure to modify the meaning of each qualification to exclude no one. In doing so, he removes the necessity to guard against certain people entering the lecture halls when he is

speaking. But we have also seen that his teaching relies heavily on Śaṅkara's categories and Hindu language, which can be seen as an anti-universalizing tendency. It appears to make his teaching accessible only by those seekers who are already familiar with Sanskrit or the Hindu tradition, whether by birth or through some amount of study. Does he not, then, exclude a certain population from his teaching?

We may argue that he does not. After all, it can be easily observed that he gathered and maintained a large following of non-Hindus and people who were previously unfamiliar with any Hindu concepts. How did he manage to do so? While ostensibly his teachings may rely upon Śaṅkara and traditional Hindu terminology, he clearly was aware of the cultural differences between his native India and abroad, an awareness that he manifested by making an effort in the lectures he delivered outside of India to use language that kept his audience in mind (his *upāyakauśalya*, one may note once again). We need only turn to the number of Chinmaya Mission centers he inaugurated abroad (there are over 350 centers all over the world), and the amount of lectures he delivered while traveling (his full itinerary is available in the Chinmaya Mission publication *Chinmaya Vishwa: A Global Movement*) to make the conclusion that his teaching was, in fact, inclusive of his non-Hindu audiences as well as his Hindu ones. This does not mean, however, that his teaching changed in any way or that he gave up his own categories when teaching abroad. He attempted to solve this problem by aiming to explain himself in such a way as to be understood by whomever he was speaking to.

The qualified student, finally having developed the four qualities required to understand the teachings of Vedānta, comes to the *guru* to learn the Knowledge of the Self. But how does the seeker know who a *guru* is? The *guru* is recognizable, according to Chinmayananda, not by claiming that he or she is a *guru*, but by the two qualities of 1) being well-versed in the scriptures (at least the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gītā*), or *śrotriyatva*, and 2) being established in *brahman* in one's lifestyle and practice, or *brahma-niṣṭhatva*. In his commentary on verse 34 of the fourth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, he explains in detail:

> The verse explains the qualities that are necessary in a teacher, who alone can instruct us on the path-of-Knowledge and guide us to the great consummation in all life…
>
> The two main qualifications essential for a fully useful teacher on the spiritual path are: (a) a perfect knowledge of scriptural literature and (b) a

> complete subjective experience of the Infinite Reality. These two factors are indicated here. Each, without the other, is totally useless in guiding a seeker. Mere knowledge of the scriptures can make only a learned *Pandita* and not a Perfect-Master. A man of intimate experience of Truth will, in himself, become completely silent, because he will find it impossible to explain and express his own transcendental experience to other seekers.
>
> By this the Lord means to say that, that Knowledge alone, which is imparted by those who have realised the Truth – that Knowledge alone and no other 'knowledge' – can prove effective.[230]

In his teachings, Chinmayananda never claims that he is a *guru*, although it is implied in his descriptions of what it means to be a *guru* and the lineage of *guru*s that had come before him, as we saw in the previous chapter. Instead of overtly stating his "*guru*-dom", as he called it, he clearly displayed knowledge of scripture (*śrotriyatva*, or the first qualification of being a *guru*): firstly by virtue of having formally commented on the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the "principal" Upaniṣads, and secondly by being able to convey the meaning of these texts in simple language to laypeople.[231]

The *guru* is also meant to be an "ocean of compassion" (*karuṇā-sāgara*). According to Chinmayananda, the *guru* does not have a choice of whom to shine his grace upon; rather, the receptive student will gain as much as is possible to gain from the ocean of knowledge and compassion that is the *guru*, in the same way that an ocean does not choose whom to give water to, but any proper receptacle can take water from that ocean. It depends upon the vessel, not the ocean; it depends upon the

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[230] *The Holy Geeta* 2008: 321-323.

[231] In his commentary on *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, verse I.2.12, Chinmayananda has also stated: "In this *mantra*, we get the clearest definition of a perfect *guru*. It is noteworthy that nowhere else in the bulk of our scriptures have we such a complete and exhaustive definition of a *guru*.
A *guru* should have two great qualifications:
(a) a mastery over the entire scriptural literature, and
(b) a complete personal experience of the Absolute Reality...
In order to realize the Self, a mastery of the scripture is not necessary. It is only to become a *Jagat-guru* [world-teacher] that we need this education... *Śruti* alone is the mighty magical instrument by which the *Inexpressible is* at least *to some extent expressed*. Conversely, we also get hundreds of *paṇḍita*-s erudite in their scholarship and perfect in their knowledge of the *Vedā*-s... And yet, they cannot serve the world as teachers, leading and guiding their generation, and bringing even a pencil of light into their lives' darkness. Thus, a teacher is he who has a *thorough knowledge of* the *Science of Religion* which is in the *Upaniṣad*-s and is one who is also rooted in his *own subjective experience of that plane of Consciousness* which is indicated by the *Śruti*. Such a Master alone can convincingly propagate the *Śruti* and kindle enthusiasm of the youth to brave the difficulties and stand the challenges of life, till he slowly reaches the *Eternal Goal of Life*." (Emphasis original.) *Discourses on Muṇḍakopaniṣad* 2003: 55-56.

student, not the *guru*, but the *guru* is an infinite resource for the student to draw from. This seems to place the responsibility on the shoulders of the student, but the *guru* is patient in teaching the student, and, remembering the days of learning from his own *guru*, bestows his infinite grace upon the student. It is clear that Chinmayananda intended not to disallow any students from coming to learn from him, but instead explained that the student had the responsibility of crafting him or herself into a proper container for extracting from the ocean of knowledge that is the *guru*.

The student, or *śiṣya*, approaches the *guru* with folded hands, seeking the knowledge the *guru* has to offer. The student has heard of something called *brahman*, but is unsure of how to study and come to know it. Thus he or she approaches the *guru* in an attitude of reverence and humility. This attitude of approach, with folded hands, is known as *samitpāṇi* (the attitude of folded, *samit-*, hands, *-pāṇi*).[232] Chinmayananda expands on this in his commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā, verse 4.34:

> The verse… explains the mental attitude and the intellectual approach, which a successful student must adopt, so that his contact with the *Guru* may be fruitful… PROSTRATING YOURSELF – …the student must have an intellectual attitude of surrender and meekness, respect and obedience, when he approaches the teacher who has to instruct him upon the secret of life… BY QUESTIONS – by raising doubts to the teacher we are opening up the cistern of 'Knowledge' locked up in the Master's bosom… BY SERVICE – the offering of flowers and sweetmeats is not what constitutes *seva* [service]… A true service of the teacher lies in the attempt of the student to attune himself to the principles of life advocated and advised to him by the Master.[233]

The approach itself is called *gurūpasadana* (approaching, *-upasadana*, the teacher, *guru*).

A vital feature of the *guru-śiṣya* relationship is the importance of a *guru* in the *advaita-vedānta* tradition.[234] Chinmayananda makes sure to emphasize this

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[232] *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, I.2.12.
[233] *The Holy Geeta* 2008: 321-323.
[234] In Chinmayananda's own words: "*Upaniṣad Mantra-s* fulfil their functions only through their pregnant 'suggestiveness'. They do not directly and openly express or explain: but with their 'indicative meaning', in their secret 'import', in their meaningful 'suggestiveness', they simply guide us to the very presence of Truth. Hence we always need the interpretations from a *Guru* to understand fully the meaning of the *Upaniṣad*-s. Any amount of mere reading would not reveal to us their fuller and ampler

importance in all his works. One particularly striking example of this emphasis occurs in his commentary on the *Kena Upaniṣad*:

> To a seeker after Truth, a *Guru* is as absolutely unavoidable as a *Śiva-liṅga* is to a *Śiva* devotee. To the student of *Vedānta*, the *Guru* is the embodiment of his goal. Just as the *Bhakta* [devotee] sees no stone, but sees his beloved *Śiva* only in the *Liṅga*, a true disciple sees no faults in his *Guru*. To the *Śisya*, his *Guru* is nothing but pure Consciousness, Absolute Bliss, Eternal Wisdom. Anyone who can elicit such a total feeling of faith and devotion, continuously in us, is our *Guru*.[235]

But as we have already seen in the previous chapter, Swami Chinmayananda never claimed that he himself was a *guru*. We have also seen above that he established himself as the *guru* by expressing *śrotriyatva*. But what was the nature of the *guru-śiṣya* relationship between Chinmayananda and his followers, if there were hundreds of thousands of *śiṣya*s?

Chinmayananda understood that it was one thing to have a *guru* that one adores at home through pictures, audio, and video recordings, and quite another thing to have a living, breathing *guru* in one's vicinity for the purpose of asking questions in real time. To this end, in 1963, he established the Sandeepany Sadhanalaya, an English-medium residential school of Vedāntic study in Bombay (now Mumbai).[236] The course to be undertaken there was designed, in the *āśrama* style, to train, initiate, and release into different communities of followers celibate men and women (*brahmacāri*s and *brahmacārinī*s, respectively) who could serve as local *guru*s.[237] Over time, several such schools were set up in various cities around India.[238]

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wealth of meaning. These *Mantra-s* are jealous, shy and secretive by their very nature." (*Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 40).

[235] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 56.

[236] The Sandeepany Sadhanalaya is named after the mythological teacher of Kṛṣṇa (Sandīpanī). The word *sādhanālaya* means the abode (*-ālaya*) of spiritual practice (*sādhana-*). Thus, Sandeepany Sadhanalaya means "An abode of spiritual practice fashioned after the great teacher Sandīpanī, the likes of which even Lord Kṛṣṇa gained knowledge from".

[237] On the Chinmaya Mission website, the Sandeepany Sadhanalaya is described thus: "Sandeepany Sadhanalaya runs an intensive residential Vedanta Course of two year duration. The students herein live the life of sadhakas [seekers] as per the guidance of the Acharya [teacher] in line with the ancient Gurukula System. The candidates selected for the Vedanta Course stay in the Sandeepany Sadhanalaya Ashram at Powai, Mumbai, India, during the course of the training period (2 years). There are no holidays during the course. The typical day schedule consists of Vedic chanting, Meditation, Vedantic studies, Sanskrit studies, Bhajans and Satsang, and Shramadan spread over the day between 5 am to 8 pm. Vedantic texts such as Bhagawad Gita, Upanishads, Prakarana-granthas authored by Adi Sankara, Vidyaranya and others, Sanskrit, as well as Bhakti Literature like Ramayana and Bhagawata

Although he did not go through them himself, he initiated his disciples (those who completed their studies in the Sandeepany Sadhanalayas) in two stages of initiation. The first stage is called the "*brahmacārin*" stage, where the initiate wears yellow, and is sent to serve at a Chinmaya Mission center, where there is a local population of Swami Chinmayananda's followers, as a teacher and missionary. At this stage, his or her name has the format of a given name followed by the surname "Chaitanya". For example, Swami Tejomayananda, the current head of Chinmaya Mission, was called "Vivek Chaitanya" at this stage. The duties of a *brahmacārin* include but are not limited to teaching, self-study, guiding, counseling, and expanding the community, and being in charge of teaching at the various camp-style and workshop-style lecture series (*jñāna-yajña*s) run by the Chinmaya Mission. The second stage is called the "*saṁnyāsi*" stage, where the initiate wears the traditional ochre of renunciation.[239] For the most part, the duties remain the same.[240] At this stage, the previous "Chaitanya" name is dropped, and a new name is given, with the format being the title "Swami" followed by a given name ending in "-ananda" in the well-known style.[241]

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are studied in depth. Students will also get an overview of all the six Darshanas (philosophical systems) of India and the basics of world religions. This is not only a course for study of subjects but also a training in the life style characterized by spiritual sadhana. At the end of the course they will be endowed with the knowledge enabling them to walk the path of knowledge, devotion and service." (Source: "Sandeepany Sadhanalaya." <http://sandeepany.chinmayamission.com/>).

[238] These cities include Mumbai, Maharashtra; Sidhbari, Himachal Pradesh; Coimbatore, Tamilnadu; Guntur, Andhra Pradesh; Chokkahalli, Karnataka; and various others.

[239] These stages of initiation are documented by Swami Krishnananda of the Divine Life Society (Swami Sivananda's organization, from which Chinmayananda was initiated into *saṁnyāsa*) in chapter 5 of his 1974 book *The Guru-Disciple Relationship*. Chinmayananda probably learned this style of initiation from Swami Sivananda, even though, for some reason, he was directly initiated into *saṁnyāsa* as Swami Chinmayananda and never officially went through the "*brahmacārin*" stage.

[240] Additionally, a qualified *saṁnyāsin* may be sent to teach at a Sandeepany Sadhanalaya, or become the regional head of various Chinmaya Mission centers, or head different wings of the Chinmaya Mission itself, such as the Chinmaya International Foundation (the research wing of the Chinmaya Mission).

[241] This is an old tradition whose roots are unclear. In modern times, it has been well used, for example by the Ramakrishna Mission among other orders of Hindu monks, and as Lipner explains in his translation of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's 19th Century work, *Ānandamaṭh*, the translation of *Ānandamaṭha* from Sanskrit is not the "Abbey of Bliss", but rather is the "Abbey of the Ānandas", that is, the abbey of those with the name *–ānanda*. (Cf. Lipner 2005: 44-45). This means that the tradition was well known to that time, and even further back one can see the name *–ānanda* appearing in the name of the 15th Century author of *Vedānta Sāra*, Sadānanda, who also names his own guru in the introductory verse,

The establishment of these Sadhanalayas, in addition to his extremely itinerant schedule, allowed Swami Chinmayananda effectively to maintain his *guru-śiṣya* relationship with all of his disciples, through the medium of these trained initiates. It is, after all, extremely important according to him, as we have seen, to have a *guru*.[242]

After duly approaching the *guru*, the student expresses to the *guru* how he or she feels. The student feels as though caught in an inferno, a fire of change, and is afraid. The student expresses the desire to be liberated from death, having heard of something beyond. The student seeks refuge in the teacher, expressing his or her utter surrender. Having completely surrendered, the student asks a question: "How to cross this ocean of relative existence? What is to be my ultimate destination? Which of the many means should I adopt? I know nothing of these. O Lord! Save me and describe in all detail how to end the misery of this life in the finite."[243]

Hearing of the student's misery, the *guru* is reminded of the misery once felt before asking his or her own *guru* for knowledge of the Self. He or she understands that one who is anxious for liberation, one who has come to a teacher for protection and knowledge, and has the qualifications mentioned above, is fit for knowledge of the Self. That student is fit to be taught by the teacher. The *guru* feels pity for the student, and compassionately frees the student from fear, saying, "There *is* a way to cross over this ocean of change."[244] The *guru* reiterates, "*mā bhaiṣṭa*", "Do not worry."[245] The teacher humbly tells the student that whatever his or her *guru* taught him or her, he or she will teach to the student. Thus the *guru* effectively situates himself within the tradition, and also assures the student that the knowledge he will impart unto the student is authentic. Chinmayananda too refers to his own *guru*, Swami Tapovan, several times in his own writing.

Here one may once again object that Chinmayananda's universal outreach conflicts with his embeddedness in Hindu tradition, particularly that of the *guru-śiṣya* relationship described above. We may note that while he did keep the tradition of *guru-śiṣya* alive in his Sandeepany Sadhanalayas, through the rite of initiation at the

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Advayānanda. Thus we can see that the tradition of *saṁnyāsin* names ending with *–ānanda* goes at least several centuries back.

[242] Although he did not comment on it directly, he often repeats the famous phrase from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* verse VI.4.2, *ācārayavān puruṣo veda*, which means "That person with a *guru* has (true) knowledge."

[243] *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 57-58.

[244] *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 61.

[245] *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 61.

end of the course and the changing of the name of the initiate, he also expanded the concept of a *śiṣya* to include any students who attended his lectures and participated in the Chinmaya Mission discussion groups, thereby circumventing the problem of discipleship being reserved only for formally initiated students. In this way, he could remain true to his lineage, as well as adapt to the modern demands of society.

Finally, having assessed the qualifications of the student, the qualities of the teacher, and the relationship between the two, the teaching begins. What is the actual teaching? We shall elaborate upon the teaching itself in the next chapter. But we can learn from this chapter introducing the teaching that Swami Chinmayananda, while placing himself into the tradition, is also situating himself as a reformer of the tradition, more in line with Vivekananda and Sivananda than with Śaṅkara. His reformist agenda has been made clear throughout this chapter (and as we shall see in the next) by way of his inclusivity and universalism regarding the nature of the student, the qualifications that the student must have, and the *guru-śiṣya* relationship.

About the *guru* testing the qualifications of a student before teaching him or her, Chinmayananda says:

> This testing of the student and the qualities for a spiritual seeker are enumerated in *Vedanta* not for the purpose of denying this benefit to any single individual. It is out of sheer kindness that *Śruti* [the scripture] prescribes these qualifications, for unless an individual has these mental and intellectual qualities, it will be a sheer waste of the Teacher's energy to impart knowledge to the undeserving. Also, spiritual knowledge and its concomitant strength will be misplaced in an imperfect student as he will make use of it for his own annihilation as well as the annihilation of the world. When an unscrupulous man comes to power in any country, we know what a menace he can be to society.[246]

While in theory he says that an "undeserving student" is not fit for this knowledge, he nevertheless in practice followed the doctrine of "not… denying this benefit to any single individual". Rather, his lecture halls were always open to anyone. Speaking in English was, of course, one form of selection, but the Sandeepany Sadhanalayas are

[246] *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 60.

also run in the medium of different languages.[247] Instead, his philosophy was that the scripture would itself "select" the students. He rather humorously writes:

> An atom-bomb secret certainly needs an army with all its ammunitions to guard it; but such guardians are not needed for the eternal wisdom of the *Upaniṣads*. It is neither your nor my responsibility to guard it. Mother *Śruti* Herself guards every *Jñāna Yajñaśālā*. The halls of learning, where the scriptural texts are taught, need no gatekeeper: the unworthy will be shunted away from the very atmosphere of such a sacred and divine study. Even if unauthorized members walk into the halls, they will not be able to hear the great secret; for, in such an atmosphere surcharged with divine and subtle vibrations, a gross animal-man cannot keep awake for long, I am not exaggerating. Go to any assembly where spiritual discourses are given, and you will find at least a couple of persons leaning on to the walls or to the pillars and conspicuously snoring away all through the *satsaṅga*.[248]

In the next chapter, we shall explore in detail the contents of the *upadeśa*, or "teaching".

[247] For example, the Sandeepany Sadhanalaya in Sidhbari, Himachal Pradesh is run in the medium of Hindi, the Sandeepany Sadhanalaya in Chokkahalli, Karnataka is run in the medium of Kannada, etc.
[248] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: 17.

Chapter 4 – Conceptual Biography of Swami Chinmayananda, Part II: The Upadeśa

Until now, we have introduced the concept of Consciousness, Swami Chinmayananda, the Upaniṣads, and their role (according to Chinmayananda) in helping us develop our study of Consciousness in his thought. We have also introduced his teaching in the previous chapter by going into great depth about the background of the study, the qualities of a fit student of Upaniṣadic study, the qualities of a *guru*, and the nature of the relationship between the *guru* and the student.

Now, we will address the topic of the teaching itself. What is the *upadeśa*, or the instruction, that the teacher gives to the student, according to Chinmayananda? How does he actually bring the student from ignorance to Knowledge? We shall dive into this discussion in the present chapter. We will see, interestingly, that Chinmayananda's teaching of *advaita-vedānta* follows a tiered approach. Although his teachings do not substantially change in terms of their authenticity and purpose as we established in the second chapter, the depth to which they expound the Advaitic framework is varied, and is created skillfully for various audiences, and we shall expand on this now.

Chinmayananda's discourses on the Upaniṣads and the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* are arguably his deepest expositions on Advaitic philosophical concepts, followed closely by his well-known commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*. In his commentaries he does not shy away from attempting to engage with the full depth of the teaching, inspired by Śaṅkara's commentaries, which we will discuss in depth in this chapter. In his own independent texts, however, such as *Self Unfoldment*, *Kindle Life*, etc., which we can classify as *prakaraṇa-grantha*s ("ancillary texts") for preparing the student for studying older Advaitic texts,[249] he maintains a lay readability that can be accessed by anyone educated in English.[250] In these texts, he constructs heuristic tools such as diagrams, schematics, representations, charts, and even equations that would have been hitherto unseen by students of Vedānta in order to make the philosophy more

[249] That is, ancillary texts even to what are already considered ancillary texts (such as *Tattva Bodha*, *Ātma Bodha*, *Vedānta Sāra*, *Dṛg Dṛśya Viveka*, etc.) in the scheme of learning Advaitic philosophy.
[250] We have already discussed why he writes only in English in the first chapter.

accessible. As a result, his teachings can be classified into two categories: primary and secondary texts.

Primary texts can be characterized by an engagement with ancient material, focusing on the philosophy of *advaita-vedānta* as an academic study, and attempting to reform the interpretations of scriptural texts for a modern audience. In this category of texts he is also unafraid to say that the scripture itself is the *pramāṇa*, or the means of valid knowledge, about certain concepts like the Self, Consciousness, and *dharma* (righteous conduct), as we explored in the second chapter.

Secondary texts can be characterized as attempting to entice and attract readers and followers into the Advaitic tradition, introducing the basic concepts necessary to create a (reformed) framework for further study, and even creating his own schematics for a better understanding of Vedāntic topics. Here, he will present topics relying on reason, rather than attempting to use scripture as the fundamental authority to validate his arguments. This, of course, is for the purpose of connecting with audiences that are not inclined to believe in any given scripture. However, as we shall see later in this chapter, he will always link his arguments back to scripture by saying that the scriptures were trying to say what he was saying all along.[251]

By publishing texts that fit into both of these categories, he is inscribing himself firmly into the tradition, of which he was definitely aware, and therefore legitimizing his place in history as a teacher of *advaita-vedānta*. He was influenced, as we saw, by examples of such reformers of the tradition as Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and Śaṅkara, all of whom wrote their own commentaries on older scriptural texts and additionally wrote independent ancillary texts to help with understanding the overarching philosophy. With this in mind, we may proceed to analyze in depth Chinmayananda's reading of Consciousness in the Upaniṣads.

It will be interesting here to note a particular excerpt of Swami Chinmayananda's from a lecture he gave on the Bhagavad Gītā verse 2.48 (date unknown), explaining the line "*yogasthaḥ kuru karmaṇi*" ("being steadfast in *yoga*, perform actions"):

[251] We explored this concept in a deeper way in the second chapter, when discussing his engagement with science. We had observed that according to Chinmayananda, the scriptures are revealed literature in that they are not the product of the human mind, but that they stand up to scientific scrutiny once revealed, which makes them scientific as well.

> When Mother Ganges starts from the peaks of the Himalayas, she has already decided to go and reach the Bay of Bengal. She is flowing down, millions of gallons of water per minute… When she meets a little obstacle, she gracefully jumps over it. If that obstacle is a little higher and she cannot jump over, she does not just stop there and despair, saying, "What can I do?" She collects her white sari and goes around it, foam and lather around… Ultimately she pours herself into the Bay of Bengal and reaches all the seven oceans of the world. Think! Be like Mother Ganges![252]

According to Chinmayananda, it was the Ganges River that inspired him to come down from the Himalayan hermitage where he was studying Advaitic philosophy and teach the same philosophy to the masses.[253] His goal was already laid out – it was to "convert Hindus to Hinduism", as we saw in the second chapter. In attempting to do so, he used several strategies, of which we have already named a few, including his engagement with science, his writing in English, and his two-tiered approach to teaching Vedānta. We shall explore further his engagement with science and the two-tiered approach to teaching Vedānta in this chapter and the next.

Now we shall resume elaborating on Chinmayananda's conceptual framework of *advaita-vedānta*. The *guru* has said to the student, "Fear not, O learned one! There is no danger for you. There is a way to cross over this ocean of change. I shall instruct you in the very path by which the ancient Rishis walked to the Beyond."[254] Having said this, the teacher presents the teaching that he or she received from his or her own *guru*.

The discussion between the teacher and the student usually follows, in Chinmayananda's works, the format of what is known as the "*tat tvam asi*" framework. "*Tat tvam asi*" is a famous statement made nine times in the sixth chapter of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, meaning "You (*tvam*) are (*asi*) That (*tat*)", when the

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[252] Source: *Chinmaya Birth Centenary Celebration*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iItDshG_DoI>.

[253] "Can I do it? Can I face the educated class of India and bring to their faithless hearts at least a ray of understanding of what our wondrous culture stands for? Sitting on the banks of the roaring Ganga, I shivered as I pondered the thought. None could argue against the Eternal Truth that man is in essence God. But could I explain it to others? Sitting, watching the Mother Ganga in her incessant hurry, I seemed to hear the words interlaced in her roar, 'Son, don't you see me; born here in the Himalayas, I rush down to the plains taking with me both life and nourishment to all in my path. Fulfillment of any possession is in sharing it with others.' I felt encouraged, I felt reinforced. The urge became irresistible!" Chinmayananda, quoted in Patchen 2006: v.

[254] *Discourses on Vivekachoodamani* 2009: 67.

teacher (Uddālaka) tells the student (Śvetaketu) that he, Śvetaketu, is none other than the *ātman*, or the Self, or Consciousness, which pervades the entire universe.[255] It is one of the four accepted "*mahāvākya*s" ("great statements") in the Advaitic teaching. Chinmayananda writes:

> A *mahāvākya* is a scriptural declaration which has got almost an inexhaustible wealth of significances, over which the more a seeker meditates the more he shall find fresh woods and pastures new to roam about through contemplation.[256]

The four *mahāvākya*s are statements that establish the identity of the individual Self, the *ātman*, and the universal Self, *brahman*. Each statement comes from a different one of the four Vedas, found in one of the Upaniṣads from each Veda. They are: 1) "*prajñānaṁ brahma*" from the *Ṛg Veda*, in *Aitareya Upaniṣad* 3.3; 2) "*tat tvam asi*" from the *Sāma Veda*, in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7 (this phrase appears 9 times in total, at the end of each section from 6.8-6.16); 3) "*ayam ātmā brahma*" from the *Atharva Veda*, in *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 1.2; and 4) "*ahaṁ brahmāsmi*" from the *Yajur Veda*, in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10. According to Chinmayananda, there are not only four *mahāvākya*s – if by *mahāvākya*s we understand statements of identity between the *jīva*, or individual self, and *brahman*, or the total Self – but in the Advaitic tradition these four are studied particularly because they are the ones identified by Śaṅkara as having the greatest import.

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[255] We must make a note here of Joel Brereton's article entitled "'*Tat Tvam Asi*' in Context", where he discusses the peculiar construction of the sentence in which the phrase *tat tvam asi* appears in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. His argument is that in the sentence, "*sa ya eṣo'ṇimaitadātmyam idaṁ sarvaṁ tat satyam sa ātmā tat tvam asi śvetaketo iti*", the word *tat* preceding *tvam* and following *ātman* should in fact be *sa* if it refers to the *ātman*, since *ātman* is a masculine word. But in an article entitled "The Self of Being and the Being of Self: Śaṃkara on 'That You Are' (*Tat Tvam Asi*)", Julius Lipner contests this interpretation of the Upaniṣadic statement. He argues that the interpretation given by most *Vedāntin* theologians has been that of equating *tat* with *ātman*, with which Brereton also agrees in his article, and that it may also be a pronoun referring to *sat*/*satyam*, which is why the traditional interpretation is not necessarily faulty. In this dissertation, it is Swami Chinmayananda's interpretation that is important to us, and that interpretation is clearly the traditional one, as we shall expand upon in this chapter. For more information on this debate, cf. Brereton, Joel P. "'Tat Tvam Asi' in Context." *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 136.1 (1986): 98-110, and Lipner, Julius. "The Being of Self and the Self of Being: Śaṃkara on 'That You Are' (Tat Tvam Asi)." *New Perspectives on Advaita Vedānta: Essays in Commemoration of Professor Richard De Smet*. Ed. Bradley J. Malkovsky. Leiden: Brill, 2000. 51-69.

[256] *Discourses on Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 2010: 29.

Chinmayananda follows the "*tat tvam asi*" framework in his teachings. Here, we may ask the question, why this particular framework, and not the framework of any of the other *mahāvākya*s? It is because, according to Chinmayananda in his commentary on the text attributed by him to Śaṅkara called *Vākya Vṛtti*,[257] each statement falls under a different category. He writes:

> Number 1 [*prajñānaṁ brahma*] gives a definition of Brahman (Lakshana Vakya); number 2 [*tat tvam asi*] is the statement of advice (Upadesh Vakya); the 3rd [*ayam ātmā brahma*] is the direct experience of the student in his meditation seat (Anubhava Vakya); and the last [*ahaṁ brahmāsmi*] is the roar of realization echoed through the attitude in which he lives thereafter, "I am Brahman" (Prasthava Vakya).[258]

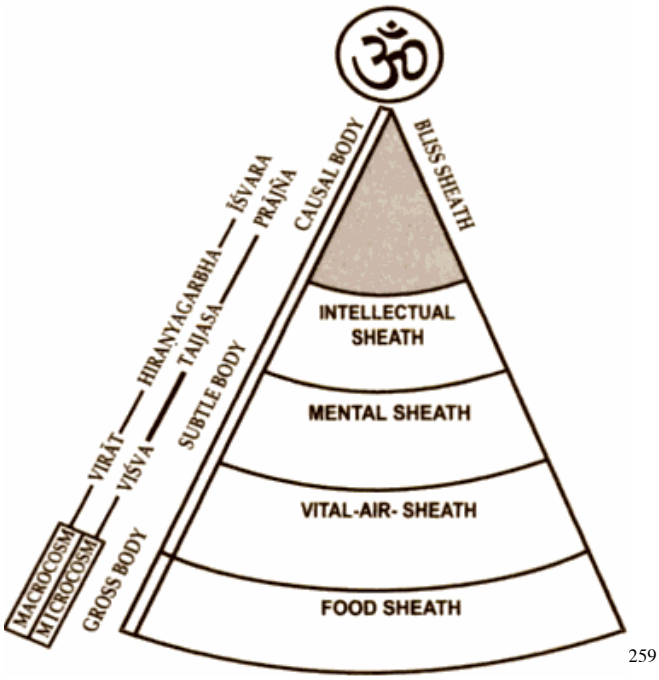
Tat tvam asi is known as the *upadeśa vākya*, or the "statement of instruction". We find that each *mahāvākya* falls under a different category, and the only statement whose category is a direct instruction from teacher to student is *tat tvam asi*. Therefore, we could say that since Chinmayananda served as the *guru* for countless students, it was logical for him to choose this framework when teaching.

This discussion usually begins with an analysis of the word *tvam*, "you", because *tvam* is who one thinks one is. This way, the teacher can start with what is "known", and the progression of the teaching can go from the "known" (one's conception of oneself, including the body and the mind) to the "unknown" (*brahman*; *caitanya*; Consciousness; the Self).

What is the student's conception of oneself? In traditional *advaita* schools, the student's conception of oneself is presented as a hierarchy of concentric "sheaths" (*kośa*s) [of ignorance] concerning the Self, or *ātman*. In several of his commentaries on the Upaniṣads, Chinmayananda presents this breakdown as a series of concentric circle envelopments. These concentric circles represent each "layer" of ignorance over the individual Self. Chinmayananda's diagrammatic representation can be seen in the following image:

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[257] Chinmayananda accepts the text *Vākya Vṛtti* to be authored by Śaṅkara, although not all scholars do.
[258] *Vakya Vritti of Adi Sankara* 2006: 12.



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The innermost circle is portrayed as the symbol *Oṁ*, or the mystical syllable representing the Self. This is what Chinmayananda calls the "*Divine-Spark-of-Life*". Chinmayananda writes, "This *Divine-Spark-of-Life*, the spiritual centre – called the *Ātman* in *Vedānta* – is considered to have been enveloped by the various layers of Matter of varying degrees of grossness."[260] Without this spark, bodies would be inert, dead, unable to perform any functions independently. The traditional student knows this, and first comes to ask the question "What is life?" as a result of his or her study of the "personality of man", but not being able to discern a cause of the life factor in a person.

The study is not a psychological one, for if the student was interested in psychology, as Chinmayananda says in his commentary on the *Kena Upaniṣad*, the student would have gone to a psychologist. If the student was interested in a biological answer, the student would have asked a biologist. Instead, the student asks a spiritual *guru*, for he or she knows that the question is a spiritual one. The student is asking about the *causal factor* of the expression of life in both the mind and the body. In Chinmayananda's own words:

> Critics who took this question of the disciple in its direct and most superficial meaning had come to conclude that the Teacher in the *Upaniṣad* had failed to

[259] A version of this diagram can be found in several of Chinmayananda's works, including, but not limited to, *Kindle Life*, *Self Unfoldment*, *Meditation and Life*, and *Discourses on Kaṭhopaniṣad*.
[260] *Discourses on Kaṭhopaniṣad* 2006: xxiv.

> answer the simple question raised by the student. Had the question been upon how the mind functions, or on the physiological functioning of the sense-organs, etc., the student would have approached some authorities on these branches of knowledge. He need not reach the sacred feet of the *Ṛṣi*.
>
> Also had the question been merely on the biological functions and psychological mechanism in man, the answer would not come under the scriptural literature. Scriptures of the world discuss the Eternal Reality in life, the goal of existence, the meaning and purpose of life.[261]

Since Chinmayananda's audiences were not made of traditional students, he would first have to explain to them that there *is* such a thing as the life spark, and only then could he elaborate upon the "sheaths" or the properties of this "*Divine-Spark-of-Life*". He writes:

> The man of the Physiologist is only a "combustion engine" having a fleshy form which almost functions according to the fuel supplied! But to the *Ṛṣī*-s, man has, besides his body, a life of thoughts and a noble mission with his ideas. On analysis it is found that, in the silent moments of physical, mental and intellectual satisfaction he has yet a deeper personality full of impatience and urges, cravings and demands, too deep for words to express, and yet, too poignant to be ignored.[262]

Having thus explained that there is something deeper than just the body or the mind, he proceeds to provide, in his own way, the *Ṛṣi*s' analysis of the "material envelopments" around the Self. Chinmayananda translates these envelopments as "sheaths". To justify his use of the word "sheath" he gives the example of a sword in its sheath. Just as the sword and sheath are not intrinsically related, so too the Self and its envelopments are not intrinsically related. The word "only indicates that in the presence of the Spirit alone the Matter coverings gain a similitude of life; just as the firmness and sharpness of the sword give status to the sheath."[263]

The Self is "covered" by five of these sheaths. They are coverings in order of subtlety, rather than by physically covering some space, and subtlety is measured by pervasiveness. Instead of being a ball covered by many layers of physical sheaths, the *ātman* is the subtlest, most pervasive Self of all things, giving life to everything. The

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[261] *Discourses on Kenopaniṣad* 2004: 52.
[262] *Discourses on Kaṭhopaniṣad* 2006: xxii-xxiii.
[263] *Discourses on Kaṭhopaniṣad* 2006: xxiv-xxv.

grossest or "outermost" sheath is called the *annamayakośa*, or the "food sheath". Chinmayananda explains vividly:

> This body was born out of the seed in the loins of its father. The seed is formed by the food assimilated by the father. When the seed was in the mother's womb, it was being maintained by the food taken by the mother. After birth it grew because of the food taken and assimilated by it day after day. When it perishes it shall become food for other living creatures like birds, insects and plants. Hence, that which is born out of food, exists in food and goes back to be food for others is appropriately called the food-sheath (*Annamaya-kosa* [*sic*]).
>
> This body which [*sic*] carefully analysed is found to be constituted of skin, flesh, blood, and marrow. The container made up of the above parts is filled with faecal matter. All these together constitute this fascinating, this enchanting, "my body".[264]

This is the sheath made of physical matter, observed as the physical body. This sheath contains the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin, which are collectively called by Chinmayananda the "organs of knowledge". It also contains the hands, feet, mouth (speech), genitalia, and excretory organs, which are collectively called by Chinmayananda the "organs of action".[265]

The sheath underneath the "food sheath", which is depicted by Chinmayananda as an "inner silk lining, as it were, for the outer physical gross sheath,"[266] is called the *prāṇamayakośa*, or the "vital-air sheath". This sheath is made up of the breath, which enters the body through the nose, is assimilated as oxygen into the blood, and forms a subtle "lining" beneath the grossest layer of the food sheath. This sheath is the controller of the organs of action. According to the function of the air (in-breath, out-breath, expulsion, digestion, metabolism, etc.), it is described by different names (*prāṇa*, *apāna*, *udāna*, *vyāna*, *samāna*).

Here it will be worthwhile to make yet another note of Chinmayananda's use of so-called scientific language. He explicitly uses words that give "scientific" credence to the philosophy he is expounding. In this case, it is the use of biochemical and physiological language to explain *prāṇa*, a word that may be translated differently from the exclusively biological meaning given by Chinmayananda here. It is

[264] *Discourses on Vivekachoodamani* 2009: 209.
[265] *Discourses on Kaṭhopaniṣad* 2006: xxvi.
[266] *Discourses on Kaṭhopaniṣad* 2006: xxvii.

noteworthy that based on the overwhelmingly positive reception he gained, as we saw earlier, this was clearly a popular technique to gain credibility in the eyes of the western-educated masses of India and abroad. While he was not the first one to use this technique, his emphasis on the use of scientific language and even the word "science" is comparatively strong, as we shall explore in more detail in the next chapter. This may be seen as another example of his *upāyakauśalya*, or skillful means in teaching.

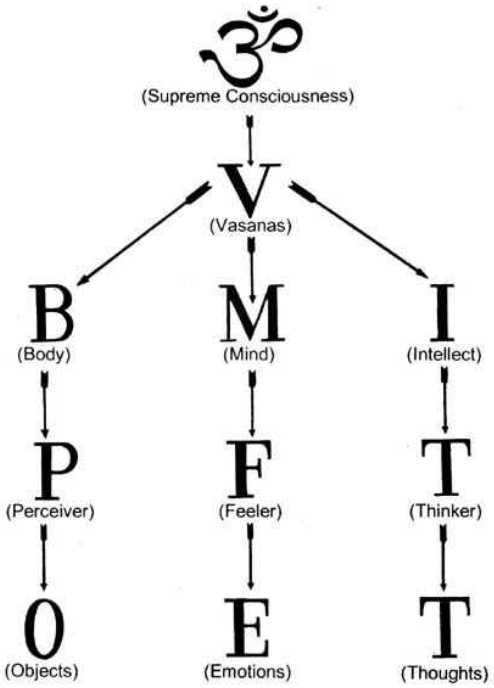
But at the same time, his goal is not biological, since he openly states in several of his works the limitations of a biological or physiological study of the human with respect to an enquiry into the Self, as we saw above in the passages from his commentaries on the *Kena Upaniṣad* and the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*. Still, he uses language borrowed from the natural sciences to make his points. With this in mind, we can analyze his discussions on elements of Vedāntic philosophy such as *prāṇa* in the following way. Since his discussion is following the *tat tvam asi* framework, and these biological descriptions all fall into the realm of *tvam*, or "you", he has to make the study of "you" applicable to his audiences, whose modern scientific education would have led them to believe that they are a mass of chemical and biological processes functioning together to form body and mind. Hence, Chinmayananda's language also had to echo this education to lead his audiences from the realm of the "known" to the "unknown". The scientific language he uses is for the purpose of catching the attention of his audiences with respect to the "known", because he is aware that this is how the western-educated individual is trained to think.

Returning to the sheath framework, then, subtler than the "vital-air sheath" is the *manomayakośa*, known as the "mental sheath". This consists of the "mind" (*manas*), which is an entity that is made up of our desires (*kāma*), doubts (*sandeha*), intentions (*saṅkalpa*), likes (*rāga*), and dislikes (*dveṣa*). It is subtler than the outer instruments (*indriya*) because it can bring up into its experience anything previously heard or seen by the outer instruments (whereas the outer instruments depend upon external objects – *viṣaya* – for their experiences).

Subtler still than the mind is the "intellectual sheath", called the *vijñānamayakośa*. The "intellect" (*buddhi*) is that subtle faculty (*antaḥkaraṇa*) in charge of decision-making, and thinking abstractly beyond simply what has previously been seen or heard by the outer instruments, or felt by the mind. According

to Chinmayananda, when the mental sheath activity comes to a decision, it is called intellectual sheath activity. It is thus considered subtler than the mind.

At this juncture, it will be appropriate to introduce a well-known chart used by Chinmayananda to explain the interrelationship between the body, mind, and intellect, their functions, fields of experience, and their origins. This chart is known as the "BMI chart", named for Body, Mind, and Intellect:



[267]

The BMI chart is Chinmayananda's most famous teaching tool, since he would always keep a large board with the chart on it next to him when teaching, and point to it with a pointer at various times during his lectures. It is a chart that explains the functioning of the body, mind, and intellect. The Perceiver, through the Body, perceives the world of Objects. The Feeler, through the Mind, feels the world of Emotions. The Thinker, through the Intellect, thinks Thoughts. The Perceiver-Feeler-Thinker is the ego, performing its functions through the instruments of the Body-Mind-Intellect, to interact with the world of Objects-Emotions-Thoughts. This network of relations is formed due to *vāsanā*s, which are residues, in the form of likes and dislikes, formed in the subconscious of an individual when he or she experiences the world. To reduce the *vāsanā*s is the way to transcend the finite limitations of the

[267] A version of this chart can be found in Chinmayananda's *Self Unfoldment* (2010: 37). The caption reads, "Through the BODY **(B)**, MIND **(M)**, INTELLECT **(I)**, the PERCEIVER **(P)**, FEELER **(F)**, THINKER **(T)** becomes enmeshed in the world of OBJECTS **(O)**, EMOTIONS **(E)**, and THOUGHTS **(T)**. But when we transcend our VĀSANĀS **(V)**, we realize our true Self, **OM**, the supreme Reality." (See diagram.)

world of the Body-Mind-Intellect and reach the Supreme Consciousness, represented by the symbol *Oṁ*.

We find this chart first in Chinmayananda's book called *Self Unfoldment*, which is a secondary text, as we defined above.[268] It is an ancillary text in which he is able to present his own heuristic devices, of which the BMI chart is one, for the purpose of making the teaching of *advaita-vedānta* easier to understand. What is the aim of this understanding? In Chinmayananda's own words:

> If a person can experience the world of objects through her body, then she must be different from her body. If she experiences the world of feelings through her mind, then she, the experiencer, cannot be the mind. Again, if she gains experiences of the world of ideas through the intellect, she cannot be the intellect. She seems to be a different factor altogether from these three instruments of experience, though she does have a very intimate relationship with them.[269]

If the person is different from her body-mind-intellect equipment, then who is she? This is the question that *advaita-vedānta* aims to answer, according to Chinmayananda. He continues:

> That principle by whose mere presence the intellect thinks, the mind feels, and the body perceives is the supreme Reality (*Brahman*), the substratum for all experiences of the body, mind, and intellect. This principle that lends its light to every being is, according to Vedanta, the divine principle *Om* – also known as the Self (*Ātman*), pure Consciousness, or pure Awareness.[270]

This divine principle is every being's very own Self. Recognizing this Self to be different from the body, mind, and intellect, a person gains equipoise, and finally pure happiness, which is the ultimate aim of religion, according to Chinmayananda.[271]

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[268] *Self Unfoldment* is an independent text by Swami Chinmayananda that is considered a core study text for the Chinmaya Mission. It is an ancillary text to studying the Upaniṣads, as we mentioned above, and is part of the syllabus of the higher grades in Bala Vihar, which is the youth wing of Chinmaya Mission, taught in the format of Sunday school in most Chinmaya Mission centers around the world, following the "grade" framework of local school systems. It is also considered fundamental study material for adults entering the Chinmaya Mission, who study it through "study groups", groups of five or more that come together to study a text on a weekly basis. For more information, cf. Chinmayananda's *As I Think* (2014: 1-4).

[269] *Self Unfoldment* 2010: 31. As a side note, we may observe here that Chinmayananda uses the feminine pronoun in his texts often, setting him apart from overtly patriarchal readings of ancient Hindu texts.

[270] *Self Unfoldment* 2010: 32.

[271] Chinmayananda writes: "Religion attempts to bring about a transformation in our inner lives. It teaches us how to master ourselves, to forge an unshakeable tranquillity, and to live

Chinmayananda presents yet another way to visualize this approach to happiness, in the form of an equation, in his book *Self Unfoldment*. Here we find another attempt at reaching out to logical-minded, scientifically educated individuals. He calls it the "Happiness Equation". "Happiness" is defined as the quotient between the "Number of desires fulfilled" and the "Number of desires entertained". That is, "Happiness" is equal to the "Number of desires fulfilled" divided by the "Number of desires entertained". In his own words: "Fulfillment of existing desires quiets the agitations created by desires. Again, if we have fewer desires, the agitations in the mind are lessened. In either case, it is the lessening of agitations that quiets the mind and therefore produces happiness."[272]

In order to increase happiness, he says, one can either fulfill desires, or reduce the number of total desires. Both paths result in an increase of happiness. However, he warns, only fulfilling desires causes new desires to spring up, thus increasing the total number of desires. Since the number of total desires can be seen to increase at a rate faster than one's ability to fulfill them, this results in an overall *decrease* of happiness, rather than an increase. A longer-lasting happiness can be gained by reducing the total number of desires through spiritual practice, and as the denominator of the equation goes to zero, "Happiness" goes to infinity. This, claims Chinmayananda, is "real Happiness", and not the transient happiness gained from removing the agitation of a desire by fulfilling it. Thus Chinmayananda defines Happiness as "desirelessness" due to one's knowledge of one's own nature as omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent *brahman*, leaving nothing to be desired. He says,

> Desirelessness is the state of Perfection visualized by the saints of the *Upaniṣad-s*… "What other desire is possible for him whose desire is always in a state of fulfillment?"[273]

As we have already shown, this is another example of his attempt to relate to his audiences using modern "scientific" language while still transmitting traditional knowledge.

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lives of inspired joy, irrespective of outer circumstances. This is the theme of all the scriptures of the world." (*Self Unfoldment* 2010: 30). Here, yet again, we see the universalizing urge in Chinmayananda, inspired by Vivekananda's works, as we explored in earlier chapters.

[272] *Self Unfoldment* 2010: 13.

[273] *Discourses on Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 2010: 61.

We may now proceed with our analysis of *tvam*, the "you" component of *tat tvam asi*. The next subtler sheath after the "food sheath", "vital-air sheath", "mental sheath", and "intellectual sheath", is known as the *ānandamayakośa*, or the "bliss sheath". This sheath is accessed when the physical, mental, and intellectual functioning shut down, and the person goes into the deep sleep state. This state is where the Self is still present, but the relationship between Self and objects is not present, because there is no mental functioning in deep sleep. It is called blissful because it is a state completely separate from our day-to-day existence, undisturbed freedom from any suffering of the world. It is characterized as pure ignorance of any objective or subjective knowledge. Chinmayananda writes:

> The idea is, the Life Principle, or Pure Consciousness in us is one and the same, but identifying itself with the physical body, it looks out into the external objects. When it is aware of the world outside, the condition is termed as the waking-state. When the same Consciousness Principle in us, detaching from the physical structure, identifies itself with the mind-and-intellect it becomes the Dreamer, dreaming its own world and mental impressions, which have certainly no relationship with or reference to the world outside. The same Consciousness, again, withdrawing entirely from the physical body and the subtle body, identifies itself with the causal-sheath and becomes the Deep-sleeper and enjoys the state of philosophical consciousness called the deep-sleep.[274]

Another classification scheme is used within the Vedāntic framework for the five sheaths, as we saw earlier in Chinmayananda's diagram of the sheaths. This scheme can be found in *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, verses 3-6.[275] There are two levels at which these sheaths work: the personal level and the cosmic level. At the personal level, the outermost sheath, the food sheath, is called *viśva*, or the gross body (*sthūla śarīra*); the middle three sheaths – the vital air sheath, mental sheath, and intellectual sheath – are collectively called *taijasa*, or the subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*); and the innermost sheath, the bliss sheath, is called *prājña*, or the causal body (*kāraṇa śarīra*). At the cosmic level, the food sheath, or the gross body, is called *virāṭ*; the vital air sheath, mental sheath, and intellectual sheath, or the subtle body, are collectively called *hiraṇyagarbha*; and the bliss sheath, or the causal body, is called

[274] *Discourses on Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 2010: 46-47.
[275] *Discourses on Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 2010: 31-44.

īśvara. First, we will discuss the analysis at the personal level, and then we will return to elaborate upon the cosmic level. Our exposition on the personal level takes place here because the personal level is what is referred to as *tvam* or "you", which is the subject of our present discussion, and the explanation of the cosmic level will take place later because that is the discussion on *tat*, or "That". The philosophical goal of *advaita-vedānta* is to show the non-dual (or *advaita*) relationship between "you" and "That", resulting in the "Happiness" described above.

The vital air sheath is sometimes included in the gross body and sometimes in the subtle body. Chinmayananda, in different places in his texts, uses both classifications. For example, in his commentary on the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, the diagram on page xxv shows the vital-air sheath as being part of the subtle body, whereas in his books *Meditation and Life* and *Self Unfoldment*, he classifies the vital-air sheath as being part of the gross body. But he is aware of the difference, as he mentions in his commentary on the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. He writes:

> The *Prana* layer of the personality is that which holds the gross physical body and the inner subtle body together. The sense-organs must be in contact with the inner equipment and it is the *Prana* that maintains this vital connection. Since the *Prana* holds the gross and the subtle together, some commentators consider it to belong to the gross body while others, to the subtle body. Both are right since one aspect of *Prana* has intimate connection with the gross while the other aspect of it has an equally intimate relationship with the subtle. Just as the same gold is called bangle, chain, ear-ring, etc. depending upon its function and the same water as ice, steam, foam, bubble, etc., so too, the same Life is called by different names according to its manifestation in the world.[276]

We can thus deduce that he is aware that in different places he has classified the vital air sheath differently, and we can also conclude that he has done this purposefully, perhaps in order to make sure his followers would not get caught up in the *paṇḍita*-struggles that we mentioned in the second chapter.[277]

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[276] *Discourses on Vivekachoodamani* 2009: 122. Here we also see a clear reference to the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.1.5, "Just as, dear one, by one lump of gold all that is made of gold becomes known, and all modifications arise only at the level of speech, (but) the truth is that all of it is gold alone." (My own translation.)

[277] *Self Unfoldment* 2010: 139. In *Self Unfoldment*, pg. 135, after classifying both the food sheath and vital-air sheath into the gross body, he writes, "In some texts of Vedanta, the gross and subtle bodies are categorized differently, namely, the mind, the intellect, the organs of

The gross body, at both the personal and cosmic levels, is associated with the "waking state" of awareness, and at the personal level is called *viśva*. This is the state in which conscious experiences are had and decisions are made, and is the level of action in and perception of the waking world. At the personal level this is done through the "organs of action" and "organs of knowledge", respectively.

The subtle body, at both the personal and cosmic levels, is associated with the "dreaming state" of awareness, and at the personal level is called *taijasa*. This is the state in which subconscious experiences are had, and is the level of action in and perception of the dreaming world. At the personal level, this is done through the subtle organs, or the subtle versions of sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste.[278]

The causal body, at both the personal and cosmic levels, is associated with the "deep sleep state", and at the personal level is called *prājña*. This is the state in which no experiences are had, because both the gross body and the subtle body are not associated with the notion of self, or "I-ness" (*ahaṁkāra*). Since there is no perception that can take place, at either the gross or the subtle level, the only thing that remains is the existence of the "I-notion". At the personal level, this is the state of complete unawareness of the body and mind, and therefore complete "relief" from the suffering associated with those two apparatuses (which is why it is known as the level of "bliss"). The three states of awareness are known as the *avasthā-traya* ("three", *traya*, "states", *avasthā*).

Once the five-sheath (*pañca-kośa*) framework and the three-body (*deha-traya*; *śarīra-traya*) framework is established and taught to the student, the *guru* then tells

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perception, the organs of action, and the vital-air sheath are all considered as part of the subtle body. The seeming discrepancy is easily resolved: The vital-air sheath is, as it were, a glue that holds the subtle body to the gross. At death, the vital-air sheath can be considered as part of either the gross or the subtle body.
When the organs of perception and the organs of action are categorized with the subtle body, we can think of them not as the physical organs, but the power behind those organs, such as "the power of vision," which, in essence, is located in the mind-intellect equipment. If the mind does not come in contact with the sense organs, no perception is possible."

[278] These are the versions of the senses before the process of *pañcīkaraṇa*, or "pentamerous self-division and mutual recombination". In *advaita-vedānta*, this is the process by which the five subtle elements – namely space (*ākāśa*), air (*vāyu*), fire (*tejas*), water (*ap*), and earth (*pṛthivī*) – combine with each other to form the five gross elements. Thus traces of each element can be found in all of the other elements in the gross world, or the world of the gross body, but in the subtle world, or the world of the subtle body, the elements are "pure", that is, not combined with each other, and thus can only be perceived by the subtle versions of the organs of knowledge. Cf. Chinmayananda's *Discourses on Vivekachoodamani* (2009: 108-109, verse 74).

the student that he or she is *not* the five sheaths or the three bodies. This style of teaching pertains to the teaching about *tvam* ("you") in the *tat tvam asi* ("That you are") method that we explained above, and is called *atad-vyāvṛtti-lakṣaṇa* ("characterization [of the Self]", *lakṣaṇa*, by "rejection", *vyāvṛtti*, of "that which [you are] not", *atad*). The teacher imparts to the student that the student's Self, *ātman*, is beyond all five sheaths. This is known as *pañcakośātīta* ("beyond", *atīta*, "the five sheaths", *pañcakośa*) and *dehatrayātīta* ("beyond", *atīta*, "the three bodies", *dehatraya*). Chinmayananda writes:

> One cannot quench one's thirst by eating the moss. Drinking water alone can quench thirst. Identification with the sheaths will never give anyone lasting happiness. Realisation of one's true nature alone will give eternal Bliss. The moss is not water, though it is born out of water. The five sheaths (*Panchakosa*), are not the Self, though they are born out of the *Atman*.[279]

Here, the author of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* writes, "When all five sheaths have been negated, the Self is apprehended as being the essence of everlasting Bliss, as the indwelling, Self-effulgent Spirit Supreme."[280] As we will see and point out repeatedly in this chapter, in his commentaries on texts that are not authored by Śaṅkara per se, Chinmayananda still follows Śaṅkara's lines of argumentation, which are clearly laid out in texts attributed by Chinmayananda to Śaṅkara (including *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* and others) and Śaṅkara's commentaries on the *prasthānatrayī* (the three central texts of Vedānta, namely the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gītā, and the Brahma Sūtra, all three of whose author is undisputedly Śaṅkara). Since Chinmayananda falls into Śaṅkara's lineage, it seems obvious that he should utilize Śaṅkara's lines of argumentation philosophically, but his predecessors such as Vivekananda seemed to take a more liberal approach in their commentaries on the same texts, as seen in the second chapter. As we also saw, Chinmayananda served as a unifier for Vivekananda's ideas, which were modern and relevant to the 20th century, and Śaṅkara's ideas, which were considered by Chinmayananda to still be philosophically most tenable and profound (and therefore also relevant).

The next portion of the teaching regarding *tvam* ("you") is when the *guru* tells the student that the student is the *avasthā-traya-sākṣin*, or the "witness (*sākṣin*) of the

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[279] *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 189.
[280] *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 189. Cf. Śaṅkara's *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* verses 154-188 for a full negation of the identity of the Self with the five sheaths.

three (*traya*) states of awareness (*avasthā*)". This style of teaching is called *taṭastha-lakṣaṇa* ("characterization [of the Self]", *lakṣaṇa*, by describing it "while standing on the shore", *taṭastha*). This is the style of teaching in which the *guru* describes in a relativistic manner the Self as the *witness* of the three states of awareness, but not the nature of the Self as such. The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, it can be observed, uses this style of teaching in several sections. The fifth *kārikā* (gloss verse) by Gauḍapāda in the first section of the Upaniṣad states, "One who knows both the experiencer and the experienced, just as they have been described so far, as associating with the three states of consciousness, he is not at all affected even when he is experiencing (enjoying) the respective objects of the three states."[281] Later in the same Upaniṣad, the *guru* says, "The Self which is free from birth and which is free from 'sleep' and dream reveals itself by itself; for this Self, in its very nature, is ever-luminous."[282]

To sum up, the author of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* writes, "This Atman is self-effulgent and distinct from the five sheaths. It is the Witness of the three states, is Real, is without modifications, is unsullied and bliss ever-lasting. The wise man should realize It as his own Self."[283] Thus far, then, the student has learned that she is not the three states of awareness, nor is she the three bodies, nor is she the five sheaths. Then what is she?

Finally, the *guru* explains to the student the actual nature of the Self. This is called the teaching of the *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa* ("characterization [of the Self]", *lakṣaṇa*, by describing "Its own nature", *svarūpa*) or *saccidānanda-lakṣaṇa* ("characterization [of the Self]", *lakṣaṇa*, as "Truth", *sat*, "Consciousness", *cit*, and "Bliss", *ānanda*). The *guru* teaches that beyond the three states of awareness – *viśva*, *taijasa*, and *prājña* – beyond the three bodies – *sthūla-śarīra*, *sūkṣma-śarīra*, and *kāraṇa-śarīra* – and beyond the five sheaths – *annamayakośa*, *prāṇamayakośa*, *manomayakośa*, *vijñānamayakośa*, and *ānandamayakośa* – lies pure Consciousness, or *śuddha-caitanya* ("pure", *śuddha*, "Consciousness", *caitanya*), and that is the nature of the Self. Chinmayananda writes,

> When I start a sincere enquiry into this great Reality, I am compelled by the very nature of the enquiry, to withdraw from all my perceptions, emotions, and thoughts. What then remains is Eternal, Changeless Bliss. This

[281] *Discourses on Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 2010: 53-54.
[282] *Discourses on Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 2010: 371.
[283] *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 248.

> Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute (*Sat-chit-ananda*), is to be realized in one's own heart.[284]

After explaining the *tvam* ("you") component of *tat tvam asi*, the teacher then moves on to explain the *tat* ("That") component.

Perhaps the first port of call when looking to understand the "That" (*tat*) component of the teaching of the *guru* is the second chapter of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad. To introduce this chapter, Swami Chinmayananda's words are significant and important for our discussion:

> The chapter opens with the declaration of the goal: 'The knower of the *Brahman* reaches the Supreme.' The *Upaniṣad* is addressed to those seekers who are struggling to understand what is the goal of life and how to reach it. They were, first of all, assured that the goal is '*to know the Brahman*,' and having known, '*the knower reaches the supreme*.' This reply to the seeker, though it is a declaration of the Truth, cannot be very satisfactory since it does not say anything about the goal. In other *Upaniṣad-s* too, similar assertions have been given, especially in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*: 'He who knows *Brahman* becomes *Brahman*.' …
>
> The students, to whom the *Upaniṣad* is declared, are all great seekers wanting to know what life is, and whether there be any goal in life worth achieving… This question is completely answered here in this short and pithy declaration by the great *Ṛṣī-s*. The goal is the *Brahman*, and one who realizes It reaches the Supreme.[285]

Although the "goal" has been declared several times in several Upaniṣads, there is not always an in-depth discussion about the goal itself. We are simply told the goal, but not anything about it. Thus, Chinmayananda provides an assurance that something will be said about the goal, and indeed, as we shall see, the Upaniṣad will deliver.

Even though Chinmayananda has clearly stated several times in various ways throughout his commentaries that "The infinite Truth can, on no account, be fully defined in words; Infinite defined is finitude ill-expressed",[286] he also consistently reassures his readers that the Upaniṣads are able to indicatively express completely in their cryptic declarations the nature of that Truth. As we mentioned in the second chapter, where we would expect to see a discussion about *pramāṇa*, or why the

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[284] *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani* 1981: 254.
[285] *Discourses on Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2006: 114-116.
[286] *Discourses on Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2006: 116.

Upaniṣads are a valid source of knowledge for the Self, he declares their validity without going into the details of *pramāṇa*. He simply asserts that this is true, and maintains the focus on the Upaniṣad itself without engaging in tedious explanations of the epistemological principles upon which Advaitic philosophy is based. He writes, "And yet, we have here three words which, in their indicative meaning, completely give us an appreciable suggestion of what the Truth is."[287] Here, yet again, he behaves derivatively as the *pramāṇa*, or authoritative source of knowledge as explainer of scripture, for his audiences with respect to the Upaniṣads being a valid source of knowledge of the Self.[288]

The most remarkable thing about Chinmayananda's acting as the *pramāṇa* is that he can be perceived as a synthesis of Vivekananda and Śaṅkara. His explanation reveals his conviction in the validity of the scripture. On one hand, his saying that the scripture is valid is enough proof of the validity of the scripture – this is the Vivekananda stance, in which the proof of the Truth of a statement lies in the experience of the individual stating it. On the other hand, he is still vouching for the validity and irreplaceability of the scripture itself – this is the Śaṅkara stance, in which the valid means of having the experience lies in the scripture alone. He does not want to let go of the scripture, from which he draws his teaching and gains his power, but at the same time, he is comfortable with himself being the proof of the validity of that scripture. Yet, at the same time, he states time and again that he is not the *guru*, that the scripture is the key, not Chinmayananda the man. As he says in a letter to a devotee that asked him the question, "Who are you?":

> Blessed Self,
>
> Om Namo Narayanaya! Salutations!
>
> Only because I have got more interesting and very useful fields of many other works in hand at present, I cannot give you an "Autobiography". But here are some positive points which should satisfy you for the time being. Later, I am sure, you will try to shift your attention from me to the Rishis and make your life beautiful and sublime…[289]

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[287] *Discourses on Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2006: 116.

[288] As we saw in the second chapter, as the *guru*, Chinmayananda is able to omit discussions about *pramāṇa* because, perhaps, his words and logic are simply enough to convince people of the validity of the Upaniṣads and other Advaitic scripture.

[289] Source: *Gurudev's Letter*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=775t8SGVOIw>.

He builds arguments using a particular epistemological framework without referencing the concept of *pramāṇa*, and it is mostly true to Śaṅkara's epistemology as we have indicated, but it is formulated according to Western standards of argumentation. This reflects his upbringing in a Western-style school system, and this thread of his education can also be found woven into the fabric of his lectures.

The "three words" Chinmayananda refers to above are the words of the famous declaration in the second chapter of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad, "*satyam jñānam anantaṁ* [*brahma*]" ("Truth, Knowledge, and Infinitude [are the nature of *brahman*]").[290] Here, the nature of *tat* ("That") is expounded upon in detail. Chinmayananda writes:

> *Satyam:-* It is generally translated as Truth. In itself this translation is mum, and does not express any idea. The words gather their momentum only in intellects that are familiar with the import of the words. In the tradition of *Vedānta*, *Satyam* is that which is the changeless substratum for all change and modification.[291]

For any change to be possible, Chinmayananda writes, there must be a relatively less changing support upon which that change can take place. The ultimate substratum for all change would be itself completely changeless, and this changelessness is what *satyam*, "Truth", refers to. We find through this and the explanations of the following two words that Chinmayananda stays true to the tradition of Śaṅkara. Śaṅkara writes, "as for *satya*, a thing is said to be *satya*, true, when it does not change the nature that is ascertained to be its own; and a thing is said to be unreal when it changes the nature that is ascertained to be its own. Hence a mutable thing is unreal… So the phrase *satyam brahma* (Brahman is truth) distinguishes Brahman from unreal things."[292]

"Knowledge" is usually the translation of the second term, "*jñānam*", but Chinmayananda expands upon this concept here in his commentary on the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*:

> Knowledge is of two kinds: (a) Unconditioned knowledge, and (b) Conditioned knowledge. We generally experience in the world only knowledge of things. Herein knowledge is conditioned by the things known. These conditioned-knowledge bits change from place to place and from time

[290] *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* II.1.1.
[291] *Discourses on Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2006: 116-117.
[292] Gambhirananda, *Eight Upaniṣads*, Vol. 1 (1957), pg. 302-303.

> to time, since the objects that Pure Knowledge happens to illumine are different from one another…
>
> The term *Jñānam* indicates this Absolute Knowledge which illuminates for us the objects of experiences in the outer and inner worlds. The Conscious Principle, beaming out in its Awareness, illuminates all objects that it comes across, just as the sunlight has no preference and blesses all objects with its light and grace irrespective of their nature and quality, when the objects come into the flood of the sun's light. By the word *jñānam*, this Consciousness in us, is indicated.[293]

Again, here he maintains the line of thought as given by Śaṅkara: "*Jñāna* means knowledge, consciousness… If Brahman be the agent of knowing, truth and infinitude cannot justly be attributed to It. For as the agent of knowing, It becomes changeful; and, as such, how can It be true and infinite? That, indeed, is infinite which is not separated from anything."[294]

Finally, to explain the term *anantam*, "unending" or "infinite", Chinmayananda sets up the argument in accordance with Śaṅkara's views. He first introduces the philosophical background of the doubt that will follow. Since *satyam*, or "Truth", as the nature of *brahman* was first explained as that unchanging substratum for all change to occur upon, and as the cause of all things, the reader was left with a doubt. Is *brahman* inert, like the material cause of all objects in the world, i.e. mud for pots, gold for ornaments, etc.? To remove this doubt, the word *jñānam*, "Knowledge", was used to indicate the nature of *brahman* as Consciousness, and therefore not inert. On this topic Śaṅkara writes: "From [the preceding argument] it may follow that (the unchanging) Brahman is the (material) cause (of all subsequent changes); and since a material cause is a substance, it can be an accessory as well, thereby becoming insentient like earth. Hence it is said that Brahman is *jñānam*. *Jñāna* means knowledge, consciousness."[295] But the next doubt raised (by both Śaṅkara and Chinmayananda) is whether "This Consciousness that is the substratum of the created world may itself end one day".[296] Chinmayananda writes:

> To refute this idea and to show that Pure Awareness which is *Satyam* is Itself not the effect of any other cause and, as such, is Infinite in nature, we have

[293] *Discourses on Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (2006), pg. 117-118.
[294] Gambhirananda, *Eight Upaniṣads*, Vol. 1 (1957), pg. 303.
[295] Gambhirananda, *Eight Upaniṣads*, Vol. 1 (1957), pg. 303.
[296] *Discourses on Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2006: 118.

> the term *Anantam* used here. This term explains that though Truth be the cause of the pluralistic mutable world, in itself [it] is the uncaused cause. Unborn and eternal, that Truth reveals Itself as Infinite and Conscious…
>
> Thus, in this irrefutable definition made up by the inimitable usage of the pregnant suggestions contained in these three terms, '*satyam*, *jñānam*, *anantam*,' the immortal text of the *Hindū-s*, the *Vedā-s* indicate the Absolute reality which is at once immanent and transcendent.[297]

Śaṅkara, too, provides the same line of argumentation: "From the phrase, *jñānam brahma* [Brahman is Consciousness], it may follow that Brahman is limited, for human knowledge is seen to be finite. Hence, in order to obviate this, the text says, *anantam*, infinite."[298]

Through this example and many other contexts we find that in philosophical discourse, Chinmayananda draws directly from Śaṅkara's philosophy, including the objections he raises and refutes. This evidently proved to be an effective strategy in developing a following of devotees and initiates, perhaps because the majority of the people that Chinmayananda preached to, as we have discussed, would not have had the opportunity to listen to such argumentation, which seems to have been effective even in the times of Śaṅkara. Yet at the same time, based on the quotes and passages that we have seen thus far, when discussing non-philosophical matters, such as nation building or self-development, he remains especially close to Vivekananda's approach.

This synthesis, we may observe, based on the outreach and impact that Chinmayananda and the Chinmaya Mission has had, was exactly the marriage of intellectual stimulation and experiential knowledge that could appeal to educated Hindus around the world. Chinmayananda writes:

> I have been trying, in my own way, to explain to the educated masses what I see so clearly in the immortal books of the Upaniṣads and *Gītā*. During these years, the 'jñāna yajñas'[299] have certainly rewarded me with a total result that is more than encouraging, and, at times, I am compelled even to consider it as nothing short of a miracle. In order to crystallise those ideas taught in the

[297] *Discourses on Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2006: 118-119.
[298] Gambhirananda 1957: 305.
[299] "*Jñāna yajña*" is the term ascribed by Chinmayananda to the series of lectures he would give on a specific text (the average *jñāna yajña* over the course of his career was approximately one week long).

> yajñaśālās,[300] during these yajñas (seminar sessions), we have organised ourselves into the mission groups, wherein seekers try to live and assimilate the Hindu culture…
>
> Members of the group have been provided with enough chances not only to continue their practice of sādhanā but also to intelligently enquire into the contents of our scriptures, and to discuss their implications among themselves. It was very gratifying to note that in many cities in India today, educated enthusiasts, young and brilliant, can very convincingly present the scientific conclusions of Vedānta and bring about a change of heart in those who have no faith at all.[301]

We clearly see many strands of thought in this single passage from the book *As I Think*, which is a collection of essays by Swami Chinmayananda about his vision that he wrote over the course of his career as an itinerant *guru*. Firstly, that his intended audience was definitely the "educated masses". His idea, as we explored earlier, was to expound the message of *advaita-vedānta* to the educated class of India (and abroad), so that they may work to create the "perfect society". Secondly, that the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā are the core source of *jñāna* according to Chinmayananda. Thirdly, that the teachings of the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gītā* are "scientific", and can precipitate belief on their own without prior partiality toward the teaching. We discussed this point extensively in the second chapter.

The teaching regarding *tat*, "That", continues. As we have seen, the term *jñāna*, or Consciousness, is used as a definition for *brahman*, to describe its sentience. This sentience becomes known as the causality factor of universe. The "creator" of the universe is called *jagat-kartṛ* ("creator", *kartṛ*, "of the universe", *jagat*), which is *brahman* conditioned in its role as the cause or creator of the universe.

Now we return to explain the cosmic level of the three states of awareness, and the five sheaths according to Chinmayananda. The cosmic "person" in its waking state is known as *virāṭ*; in its dreaming state, it is known as *hiraṇyagarbha*; and in its deep sleep state, it is known as *īśvara* (or *sarveśvara*). The two-fold power of creating the universe and veiling the Truth component of every name and form in the universe through "change" is called *māyā*. Thus *brahman* through the veil of *māyā* at the cosmic level is called *īśvara*, or the causal body (*kāraṇa-śarīra*); *brahman* through

[300] "*Yajñaśālā*" is the term ascribed by Chinmayananda to the lecture hall in which the *jñāna yajña* would take place.
[301] *As I Think* 2014: 2-4.

māyā becoming the subtle body (*sūkṣma-śarīra*) at the cosmic level is called *hiraṇyagarbha*; and *brahman* through *māyā* becoming the gross body (*sthūla-śarīra*) is called *virāṭ*.[302] When thus everything is explained in the context of *māyā*, and the difference between *brahman* and the world of change can be seen to be veiled by the power of *māyā*, then what remains when *māyā* is "unveiled" is nothing but pure Consciousness or *śuddha-caitanya*. Through a process of negating *māyā* the teacher comes to highlight that which remains as *brahman*.

We see how the teacher first defines *tvam* ("You") to ultimately be pure Consciousness and then defines *tat* ("That") as also pure Consciousness. The two entities have been defined separately, and now the only thing left for the teacher to do is to equate the two. This is done by saying "*asi*", or "are". This is the final piece of the puzzle, the copula that connects the Self and *brahman*, and says they are not two (*advaita*, "non-dual") but rather one and the same. This realization is meant to occur naturally in the mind of the student, who, after having gone through a rigorous process of naming, defining, and then negating both the *tvam* ("you") and the *tat* ("That") components of the universe, comes to see that they are not two different things in essence. That is, they are both nothing but *śuddha-caitanya*, or pure Consciousness, at the essential level. The student, having heard this, intellectually may understand the concept, but may feel that the realization that is meant to occur at the end of this teaching is not his or her own. To actually come to realize the truth of the teaching, different *sādhanā*s, or spiritual practices, are prescribed.

To comprehend the teaching, and make it one's own, a threefold *sādhanā*, originally mentioned in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.4.5, is elaborated upon in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* and Chinmayananda's *Meditation and Life*. This threefold *sādhanā* is comprised of *śravaṇa*, listening, *manana*, careful reflection, and *nididhyāsana*, constant meditation. These three steps were meticulously emphasized and established as part of Chinmayananda's teaching method, as we shall see in the following explanation.

Śravaṇa is the listening to teachings of the scripture. This step in the process of realizing the Advaitic truth is for the purpose of removing *abhāvanā*, or "lack of any notion" of the nature of the Self. At this stage, the absence of any notion of one's own nature as Consciousness is removed by listening to a teacher, and the core of

[302] *Discourses on Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 2010: 31-44. See also the exhaustive chart explaining these different terms on pg. 21.

what the Upaniṣads teach is understood. Simply by hearing that one is in essence nothing but the Existence-Consciousness-Bliss principle called *brahman*, the notion that one is the body or the mind is negated, even if it is not fully realized.[303]

It should be observed here that Chinmayananda took this concept to heart and therefore traveled around the world as an itinerant *guru* to make listening to his lectures available for people all over the world. He appeared to be convinced by the idea that *śravaṇa*, or listening, was a key element of the teaching of Vedānta, which is why he also emphasized training and initiating *brahmacārin*s, or celibate men and women, who would go out as missionaries and carry forward the teaching to various communities around the world. Chinmayananda also regularly and frequently held spiritual camps at serene locations for people to immerse themselves into the teaching without distractions. These camps were meant to be helpful for the following two stages of practice as well.

Manana is careful reflection on the material that was heard during *śravaṇa*. This step in the process of Advaitic realization is for the purpose of removing any *asambhāvanā*, or doubts that arise about the possibility that what was heard during *śravaṇa* could be true. After hearing about one's nature as *brahman*, that thought, too, becomes one of the many ideas about one's own Self battling for supremacy in one's mind. To establish the *brahman*-concept as the supreme idea of one's own Self, *manana* is prescribed. In this stage, the seeker attempts to believe in the truth of what was heard during *śravaṇa* by engaging in logical discussion, debate, and thinking so that no gaps in the logic of *brahman* are left in one's mind.[304] In order to emphasize and establish *manana* as an integral part of his teaching, Chinmayananda established the concept of "study groups" as part of the Chinmaya Mission framework, which would be the core method of collective reflection for his students while he was not present, and continues to be so today. A study group consists of at least five members that meet regularly to discuss a particular text.[305]

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[303] *Discourses on Vivekachoodamani* 2009: 103.
[304] *Discourses on Vivekachoodamani* 2009: 103.
[305] There is now an established "order" to study group materials, which starts with introductory texts like *Kindle Life* and *Self Unfoldment*, moves on to more intermediate texts like *Art of Man Making*, and finally moves to more advanced texts like Chinmayananda's commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā* or the Upaniṣads. Cf. Chinmayananda's *As I Think* (2014: 2-3).

Nididhyāsana is a constant state of meditation the results from understanding the teaching. It is the stage in the process of Advaitic mastery that removes any *viparītabhāvanā*, or the strong "false notion" that one is the individual ego despite the fact that one has heard (*śravaṇa*) and now intellectually believes (*manana*) that one is *brahman*.[306] In order to help students come to this final stage in the process of realization, Chinmayananda set up *ashram*s, or spiritual centers, in over 350 places around the world to serve as spiritual hubs for meditation and learning. They are meant to be serene locations to help seekers meditate and come to the wordless understanding of the *brahman* principle, where instead of defining the principle in words, one is simply immersed in understanding that transcends the limitations of language.

These three practices are called *antaraṅga-sādhanā* (purification, *-sādhanā*, of the inner equipment, *antaraṅga-*). They are named *antar* ("inner") because they lead one closer to the goal of realization.[307] Having undertaken these practices, the student sees that the teaching is not about an abstract concept, but rather is about his or her own nature. One who comes to realize this truth through the process of *śravaṇa-manana-nididhyāsana* is called a *jīvan-mukta* (liberated person that is still living).

The definition of a *jīvan-mukta* is given not as a way to identify a liberated individual, but rather for a seeker to identify those qualities within him or herself. Certain *jīvan-mukta*s may exhibit special "powers", known as *siddhi*s, and some may not. Chinmayananda explains his view on *siddhi*s, which are not, according to him, the goal or essence of *advaita-vedānta*. In a well-known video of a question-and-answer session at Humboldt State University in California in 1975, he speaks of a mother who has left her children to play in a room. The youngest one calls for her, so she comes and tries to placate him with toys from the older kids. The child is still unhappy, so the mother takes him on her hip into the kitchen. Chinmayananda continues:

> Now, at that time, you can't say that the other two children are not loved by the mother, the mother has got a preference to this child, no! She loves all the

[306] *Discourses on Vivekachoodamani* 2009: 103.

[307] As we saw in the previous chapter, *bahiraṅga-sādhanā* is the purification of the "outer instruments", including the body and mind, to prepare the student for the teaching.

> children. But one child wants nothing, desires nothing, expects nothing, hopes for nothing, demands nothing, accepts nothing.[308]

He accepts only the mother. If a seeker desires sensory powers, those are given to him or her, but if he or she desires only the Lord, then the Lord Himself comes to the seeker. Chinmayananda concludes with the lesson to be learned:

> A devotee wants nothing but the Lord, not these powers. A *jñānī* doesn't want powers because he has already realized and found that these powers are again limited. He wants the unlimited, immutable, and eternal, nothing short of it. The whole, not a part. Therefore the *siddhi*s and *riddhi*s… the great powers, [don't] touch, come and disturb the *jñānī*.[309]

The *jīvan-mukta* is also said to display *kṛtajñatā*, or gratitude. Why? Despite knowing that the world is false, this is the gratitude to the teacher who has brought the student to an understanding of the truth of his or her own nature, which is that of Infinitude, Consciousness, and Bliss. This bliss results from all the sorrows of the world no longer applying to what he or she considers to be the Self. Thus the *jīvan-mukta* expresses gratitude to the teacher in the form of passing the teaching on, as the new master, to a new set of students. Finally, the stage of liberation achieved by the liberated individual once he or she dies is known as *videha-mukti*, or "bodiless liberation".

We have now seen many elements of Chinmayananda's teaching, following the "*tat tvam asi*" ("you are That") framework. Several strands of his thought and its origins in Śaṅkara and Vivekananda have been analyzed. We find, as a result of this analysis, that while Chinmayananda was a *guru* of the latter half of the 20th Century, his content, style, and presentation does not exactly fit in with common descriptions of such *guru*s, some of which we saw in this chapter and the last. Rather, through the various themes we have explored in these chapters, we see that he is attempting to revive a particular tradition of going back to the original Sanskrit text, while formulating new heuristic tools and a revised hermeneutics of *advaita-vedānta* that keeps one foot in traditional arguments and concepts, especially by using Sanskrit terminology, and one foot in contemporary reasoning and an urge for the

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[308] Source: *#1 -Swami Chinmayananda: Meaning of Hari Om - Can Psychic Powers Be Developed?* 1975: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBIskkMEO4o>.
[309] Source: *#1 -Swami Chinmayananda: Meaning of Hari Om - Can Psychic Powers Be Developed?* 1975: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBIskkMEO4o>.

universalization of scripture. For example, in his “Happiness Equation”, which we saw earlier in this chapter, we find an almost syncretic heuristic device that may not be found anywhere else in his reading of the Advaitic tradition. In this way, we see Chinmayananda not only blend Śaṅkara’s tradition with Vivekananda’s modernization, but also formulate a new layer of teaching through secondary texts, acting as a new entry point into the subject of *advaita-vedānta*. We shall further provide an analysis of the teaching in the context of Chinmayananda’s time, his contribution to the dialogue between Hinduism and science, modernity, and the diaspora, and the necessity of engaging with Chinmayananda for an up-to-date understanding of Hinduism in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 – Chinmayananda vis-à-vis the ongoing hermeneutics of Advaita Vedānta

In the previous four chapters we have performed a fine-grain analysis of Swami Chinmayananda's philosophy on consciousness. To do this, we first examined the necessity of studying consciousness, taking stock of the study of consciousness as it stands today in Western philosophical and neurological disciplines. We then examined Chinmayananda's biography as the man, which revealed to us the nature of the lens through which we would be studying consciousness. Since he falls into the tradition of *advaita-vedānta*, we proceeded to analyze the epistemological framework from within which he expounds his philosophy. As a result of this analysis, with respect to Chinmayananda's treatment of consciousness in the Upaniṣads, several issues came to light, such as (and most importantly) Chinmayananda's engagement with "science", each of which we dealt with in turn.

Having examined our lens, we began the study in earnest, by undertaking an intellectual biography of Chinmayananda. The purpose of this biography was not to understand Chinmayananda the man, but to understand Chinmayananda the Advaitic philosopher. His work became the subject of our study, which, when analyzed through the lens of the Advaitic analysis of the individual self, the Total Self, and their relationship as one of identity, produced a fruitful result in firstly identifying Chinmayananda as an important and hitherto underappreciated transmitter of Advaitic philosophy, and secondly, through him, performing a fresh inspection of the study of consciousness itself.

Along the way, we brought up several topics that we could not elaborate on, for the purpose of the analysis at hand. In our more focused stream of investigation, we did not pause to examine streams parallel to our own. In this chapter, we propose to take a more lateral view at the ongoing conversation within which our subject is one, albeit major, strand.

We find that Chinmayananda follows Śaṅkara's lines of reasoning and argumentation very closely in his primary writings. Thus, he remains close to the tradition into which he was initiated. But he also presents arguments that he deems are acceptable to a modern scientific mind in both his primary and secondary writings, which are envisaged as making his writing more accessible and more attractive to

modern "educated" readers, whom he was attempting to target. In hindsight, this seemed an effective strategy.

It is exactly this attempt that we will use to launch into our next topic of discussion. We will take into account the lateral strands of thought that contributed to the ongoing hermeneutics of *vedānta* while Chinmayananda was alive. This will give us an idea for future directions of research as well as the reason why the voice of Chinmayananda may prove useful in the discussion regarding Hinduism today.

This is as far as we can get from the perspective of Chinmayananda at this particular moment, but this dissertation fits into the wider discourse of Hinduism and various global topics. What this chapter will do is engage with the ongoing discussion about Hinduism that may have been outside the scope of our fine-grain analysis from the previous chapters, imbricating our study into this larger discussion. There are three larger strands of research into which this dissertation fits. Of course, recognizing that in one dissertation we will not be able to handle the full extent of these strands, we can nevertheless indicate the relationship between the analysis we provided in the previous chapters and these larger research areas, which are: Hinduism and science, Hinduism and modernity, and Hinduism and diaspora configurations. In other words, we will be assessing Chinmayananda's particular position within the frameworks of these three broad areas. Every so often in this dissertation we have indicated some points that we could not elaborate on. In this chapter, we will attempt to tie together with concluding remarks some of these points, with respect to the above-mentioned strands.

Chinmayananda, "Hinduism", and Science

Where did the dialogue between Hinduism and science come from? It did not arise in an unprecedented manner in the time of Chinmayananda. There is a long historical continuity connecting Chinmayananda, Vivekananda, and others to the West with respect to the dialogue about Hinduism and science. It is most important to note at the outset that this dialogue arose as a subset of the overarching need to validate Hindu thought through the lens of the dominant paradigms in society, which was a reaction against criticisms that were perceived as "attacks on Hinduism" by the proponents of Hinduism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We see clear examples of these attacks in books like James Kennedy's *Christianity and the*

Religions of India from 1874, in which he presents lengthy arguments about why "Hindooism" is inferior to Christianity, claiming, among other things, that "Hindooism" is ahistorical, unscientific, fanciful, idolatrous, polytheistic, of human (and not divine) origin, and confusing.[310] Responses to this criticism used the same language, in its opposite form, calling Hinduism historical, scientific, divine, monotheistic, and straightforward. One example is Swami Vivekananda's claim to and expansion upon Darwin's evolution theory as belonging to ancient India.[311] More examples will be seen later in this chapter.

At that time, as Dermot Killingley lucidly explains in his article entitled "Modernity, Reform, and Revival" found in *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, due to advances in communication technologies, such as the printing press, telegraph, etc., Hindu texts that were otherwise considered accessible only to upper caste Hindus became available publicly in book form. This opened these texts and their philosophies to criticism from other sources. As a result, the new "foreign" attacks on certain Hindu positions like image-worship and the status of women were considered attacks on Hinduism itself. These attacks could only be parried with either proper justification of these beliefs and practices, or a conscious distancing of "true Hinduism" from the questionable practices, or by proving that the attackers were misrepresenting the practices. Killingley writes:

> Moreover, the dominance of Enlightenment ideas in the arena of public debate, together with widely held assumptions of Christian and British superiority, meant that the resulting body of Hindu apologetic was presented in terms of Western ideas of reason and morality which were assumed to be common to all civilized people.[312]

The influence of the Enlightenment paradigm on Hindu apologetic works is clearly a mark of modernity, wherein the frameworks of reason, logic, science, egalitarianism, masculinity, etc. are of paramount importance.[313] We shall explore this topic further in the next section.

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[310] Cf. *Christianity and the Religions of India* by James Kennedy, specifically the essay entitled "Hindooism Contrasted with Christianity" (1874: 158-208).
[311] Cf. Dermot Killingley's chapter entitled "Vivekananda's Western Message from the East" in *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernization of Hinduism* (Radice 1998: especially pg. 153-156).
[312] Killingley 2003: 512-513.
[313] Cf. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (1989) for a detailed look at this relationship.

Since we established that Swami Vivekananda was a strong influence on Swami Chinmayananda, it is pertinent to understand how Vivekananda responded to criticisms of Hinduism with the above analysis in mind. One of the ways in which Vivekananda created a vision of Hinduism acceptable to the Western educated mind was by calling Hinduism "scientific". This would mean, according to the ideas that were in vogue at his time, that Hinduism was a system of thought that was logical, rational, and reproducible by experience. In his speech called "Reason and Religion", for example, delivered in London in 1896, he describes the shortcomings of "religion" as compared to "science", and how reason must be the measuring rod for religion. Ultimately he establishes the superiority of "Vedanta" (by which he means *advaita-vedānta*), on the basis of reason alone.[314] As Ann Gleig and Lola Williamson observe, "Incorporating numerous Western values such as rationality, ethics, and tolerance, Vivekananda framed Hinduism as universal and scientific, and thus a viable choice for modern Western people."[315] Chinmayananda would later pick up on this strand of thinking and expand upon it. The idea that religion should be subject to reasoning, and that one should not enter religion blindly, but should judge it against one's own reasoning capacity, can be found in numerous works by Chinmayananda, such as the section called "Sans Faith, Sans Prejudice" in his commentary on the *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad*.[316] These strong echoes of Vivekananda we have seen quoted throughout this dissertation.

Gleig and Williamson continue, "Following Vivekananda, the majority of second-wave gurus also promoted an essentially modernized and Westernized vision of Hinduism, which placed a universal mystical experience at the core of all religions and offered meditation techniques as scientific tools for accessing higher states of consciousness."[317]

But between Vivekananda and Chinmayananda came many proponents of *advaita-vedānta* and many scientists, who changed or enhanced the way both were viewed. An obvious example is Swami Sivananda (1887-1963), whose 296 books expounding on a variety of topics, including commentaries on the Upaniṣads, already assimilated and used the scientific language popularized by Vivekananda and helped

[314] Cf. Swami Vivekananda, "Reason and Religion", in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume 1*.
[315] Gleig and Williamson 2013: 5.
[316] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: 6-7.
[317] Gleig and Williamson 2013: 5.

to propagate it, along with new syntheses of concepts related to Yoga. He was responsible for ordaining Swami Chinmayananda into the *sannyāsa* order, and his effect on Chinmayananda has already been elaborated upon in the second chapter of this dissertation. Another example of an *advaitin* is Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), a well-known teacher of *advaita-vedānta*, who had written new texts in Sanskrit that influenced Swami Chinmayananda (as we saw in the first chapter), such as *Saddarśanam* ("Vision of Truth") and *Upadeśa Sāra* ("Essence of the Instruction [of *advaita-vedānta*]").[318] Finally, to cite yet another Advaitic-minded teacher, there was Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), a famous mystic who had at first been imprisoned by the British for "advocating terrorism and violence", but then changed course for a more spiritual direction, and subsequently taught and wrote extensively about Yoga and the Bhagavad Gītā.[319]

Scientists, too, were numerous. Perhaps the most famous of them was Albert Einstein (1879-1955), whose theories of relativity and the relationship between matter and energy significantly impacted the fields of science. Another example is the well-known scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858-1937), whose pioneering work helped in the development of the radio, among other things, including the decoding of plant communication through plant physiology.

By the time Chinmayananda entered this debate, the atom bomb had been invented and used, mechanized flight was common, telephones were ubiquitous, and quantum physics was a recognized field for research. So Chinmayananda had many new challenges to face and connections to make, and we can see that he advanced the debate significantly.

It is not our objective in this dissertation to comment upon the politics of using "science" as a way of validating Vedāntic thought. Given the above interpretation of why Hindu thinkers started to use the "science" argument (among other arguments based on Western values) as a response to the critique of various Hindu beliefs and practices, and realizing that it did in fact shape the way many proponents of Hindu thought spoke about Hinduism, we can understand Chinmayananda's stance on the matter.

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[318] Both of these texts have commentaries published by Chinmaya Mission.

[319] There is clear evidence that Chinmayananda read the works of all the teachers mentioned here. Cf. Patchen 2006: 30-31.

But Chinmayananda was not only part of the trend that wanted to show how scientific *advaita-vedānta* was. He found himself inextricably linked with the ancient lineage of Śaṅkara, and therefore was thrust into a battle between the traditional and the modern. He knew that there was a debate raging around him about how scientific Hinduism was, but at the same time, he also wanted to maintain continuity with his lineage's greatest figure, Śaṅkara, whose contribution to *advaita-vedānta* had been recognized as by far the most important. About Śaṅkara, Chinmayananda writes:

> An exquisite thinker, a brilliant intellect, a personality scintillating with the vision of Truth, a heart throbbing with industrious faith and ardent desire to serve the nation, sweetly emotional and relentlessly logical, in *Śaṅkara* the *Upaniṣad-s* discovered the fittest spiritual general.[320]

This continuity was important to maintain because doing so would not only connect his audiences to a tradition, it would also give more weight to his own arguments when viewed from the perspective of a traditionalist, whose views also had to be taken into consideration. We will see Chinmayananda's views on taking the "orthodoxy" into account in the next topic.

In order to connect Śaṅkara's views with the argument that *advaita-vedānta* (and by extension, Hinduism) is scientific, Chinmayananda makes the case for a revealed scripture, the Upaniṣads, being able to stand up to scientific scrutiny once revealed, which we explored in the second chapter of this dissertation. Therefore he is able to maintain the belief in the non-human origin of the Upaniṣads, but also propagate the view that the teachings of the Upaniṣads are scientific. It was this trend that led scholars like David Smith to comment, "More than any other religion, Hinduism welcomes science with open arms, and asserts its own scientific truth."[321] It must here be noted that were it not for the efforts of Chinmayananda and his predecessors, this type of statement could not be made in the first place.

Perhaps Chinmayananda's greatest contribution to the dialogue between Hinduism and science has been his articulation of the triangle of experiencer-experienced-experiencing in a distinctive manner. He makes the case that the ancient *ṛṣi*s were interested in understanding "life". "Life", they said, is made up of one continuous unbroken set of experiences. This interpretation is found in Chinmayananda to its most detailed degree, with a version of this same explanation in

[320] *Śaṅkara the Missionary* 2007: 2.
[321] Smith 2003: 201.

the introduction to several of his Upaniṣad commentaries.[322] Experiences can then further be broken down (just as an atom, the building block of matter, can further be broken down into its constituent parts, he never fails to mention) into three components: the experiencer, or the subject of experience; the experienced, or the objects of experience; and a relationship between the two, called experiencing. While the modern scientific world has been interested in the world of the experienced, Chinmayananda claims, the *ṛṣi*s became interested solely in the world of the experiencer. Thus, since the very realm of enquiry is different, the hypotheses, experiments, observations, and conclusions must also be different from those of modern material science. However, the hypotheses, experiments, observations, and conclusions of the realm of the experiencer can also equally be called "scientific", for they maintain the same rigor of enquiry. Chinmayananda's argument is that to try to equate the two – material and spiritual sciences – is foolish, for to try to make the subject of all experiences (the realm of enquiry for the spiritual sciences) into an object of enquiry (the realm of the material sciences) is illogical. But the subject is not beyond study, because it is nevertheless present in every experience. The methods and conclusions of the study of the subject, according to Chinmayananda – and substantiated by his commentaries – are given in detail in the Upaniṣads. As Chinmayananda writes in his commentary on the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*:

> The great *Ṛṣi-s* of old not only declared the philosophy but also prescribed a certain technique by applying which the… integration of personality was possible. The declaration of the *Science of Life* and the descriptions of the *technique of living* together constitute the contents of the *Upaniṣad-s*.[323]

In this way, Chinmayananda played a significant part in the ongoing hermeneutical evolution of *advaita-vedānta*, as we shall see and have seen from examples throughout this dissertation, especially with respect to the dialogue between Hinduism and science. His innovations in the field of public debate regarding the status of Hinduism as a coherent scientific religion while still being connected to its ancient scriptural roots can thus be said to have helped shape the discussion about Hinduism today.

We must also note, however, that Chinmayananda was not interested in making claims about what constituted the science of the ancient *ṛṣi*s. He made it clear

[322] Cf. the introduction to Chinmayananda's *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* (2007).
[323] *Discourses on Kaṭhopaniṣad* 2009: xvii.

that according to him, the science of the *ṛṣi*s was about the realm of the experiencer alone. He did not lay claim to ancient Hindus having modern technology.[324] His definition of the science of the *ṛṣi*s is unambiguous. However, today, it can be seen that certain elements of the viewpoint that Hinduism is "scientific" are being re-presented by modern Hindu apologetics, claiming that ancient Hindu society was an ancient version of the modern West. That is, that ancient Hindus had better versions of everything the modern West values today, including science and technology.[325] This is obviously an echo of our previous comment about the "defense" of Hinduism from "foreign" attackers. But proving this was not Chinmayananda's intent. To explain his view, he says in one of his talks on the Bhagavad Gītā:

> Krishna is a myth. Admitted. Rama is a myth. There is no historical evidence. Think, my dear! It is not necessary that he must be a historical figure. Rishis who wrote Ramayana and Bhagavata were not historians. Don't expect them to write history for you. That was not their job. They were great rishis, mystics. Their anxiety was only to communicate to you this mysticism of life. Whether Rama lived or not is immaterial… How can you prove that it is historical? It is not. It is called symbolic life. Such a literature is called mysticism. But it has got all bits of historical facts, geographical position, and that is the style of all classical literature… But to recognize it or try to do the experiment and to prove that "Rama lived, and therefore religion is

[324] One may compare this with another strand of thought, starting with Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), the founder of the Arya Samaj, who believed that modern technological advances were known, at least *in nuce*, to the ancient Aryans, the people of the Vedic Age. As J. T. F. Jordens writes in his book *Dayananda Sarasvati: His Life and Ideas*, according to Dayananda, in the "Golden Age" of the Vedic civilization, "the kings were wise, and knew the secrets of missiles and fire-arms. They had a superior knowledge of medical science, and travelled across the continents by mechanically propelled airships and boats." (1978: 124). Cf. Jordens, *Dayananda Sarasvati: His Life and Ideas* (1978).

[325] As a small but telling example, consider the argument that ancient Hindus had better flying machines than modern airplanes, based on the account that Ravana, the villain of the Ramayana, travels in something called the *puṣpaka-vimāna*, a flying vehicle that moves at the speed of the mind, and can expand and contract in size depending on the number of passengers. To see examples of such arguments, one only needs to go as far as the Indian Science Congress held in January of 2015, in which a paper entitled "Ancient Indian Aviation Technology" was presented. The author of the paper reportedly stated, "The Vedic or rather ancient Indian definition of an aeroplane was a vehicle which travels through the air from one country to another country, from one continent to another continent, from one planet to another planet… In those days aeroplanes were huge in size, and could move left, right, as well as backwards, unlike modern planes which only fly forward." (Dadawala 2014: <http://goo.gl/a1LGrF>).

> right"; "Rama did not live, and therefore religion is absurd"; you are not understanding religion at all. It doesn't matter whether Rama lived or not.[326]

This sets Chinmayananda apart from the famous agitations in Ayodhya in December 1992 that eventually resulted in the death of nearly 2,000 people and the destruction of the Babri Mosque by volunteers of right-wing Hindu nationalist groups claiming that the site of the mosque was actually the historical birthplace of Rama. Chinmayananda would have called such agitations foolish, for they placed too much importance on the historicity of Rama, a fact that Chinmayananda was not interested in proving, as we saw above. In this way, he can be seen as stepping away from the excessively reactionary form of Hindu political discourse. His philosophy was "mystical", by his own claims, and the science of the *ṛṣi*s was not physical, it was spiritual. With regard to Hinduism and claims to its historicity, the above remark by Chinmayananda actually shifts him somewhat out of the mold of the above noted Hindu apologetic discourse, providing an original way of responding to criticisms leveled at Hindu scripture for its ahistorical nature. It also sets Chinmayananda's teachings apart from contemporary claims that make ancient Hinduism look like a mirror of the modern West, which brings us to our next topic, Hinduism and modernity.

Chinmayananda, Hinduism, and Modernity

Our discussion is part of an ongoing narrative, as we mentioned above. Chinmayananda was thrown into the turmoil of national struggle in India and subsequently international representation of Hinduism as a modern *guru*, as we have seen in the previous chapters, so we must contextualize him to understand his perspective and the changes he brought to the ongoing dialogue between Hinduism and modernity.

We begin this section with a quote from Chinmayananda on "orthodox" Hindus to give a flavor of how he saw himself fitting into the struggle between Hinduism and modernity: "…after the announcement of the [series of discourses called the] *yajña*, I have been receiving letters from the orthodox section of the *Hindus*, expressing their anxiety at my outrageous folly. According to some of them, by teaching Vedānta freely to all and sundry, I am molesting the purity of our

[326] FAQs with Swami Chinmayananda at Guelph, Canada (1987). DVD.

Śrutis."[327] Chinmayananda was not only fighting a battle to validate Hinduism in the eyes of Western-educated elites in India, he was also fighting a battle to update the teaching of Hinduism from the orthodox way it was taught only by and to upper caste Hindus privately. According to Chinmayananda's experience, as we can see, the public teaching of the Upaniṣads was frowned upon.

Chinmayananda's technique of teaching *advaita-vedānta* with his head bowed to tradition on one hand, and within his arguments updating what he thought were outdated norms in the teaching on the other hand was his special forte. He negotiated the currents of these two forces, building respect and a significant name for himself with both, even being hailed by some as the "second Vivekananda". As the well-known journalist Pritish Nandy says in his interview of Swami Chinmayananda in Calcutta in 1981:

> A distinguished scholar, an ardent teacher and a compulsive globetrotter, the Swami is today held to be one of the few serious and credible missionaries that Hinduism has to offer. His missions are all over the world. So are his devotees and students. And they are growing at a rate which will soon, perhaps, make Swami Chinmayananda numero uno in the glittering pantheon of gurus, rishis, bhagavans and babas who hold sway over India's millions and many abroad. In many ways, this is the best thing that could have happened to Hinduism. For the Swami is no quack healer or fast-buck merchant. He offers no miracles to lure the gullible. He makes no predictions, reads no fortunes and sings paeans to no politician. He makes no claims to being a God, except for argument's sake; nor does he offer you, for a fee, the quick route to nirvana. He simply teaches.[328]

Chinmayananda entered the milieu of *guru*s in India as a Swami in the 1950s, and sought to reform the teaching of Hinduism, as Vivekananda had done half a century earlier, to suit his times.

But what was the context of this reform? How does Swami Chinmayananda fit into the dialogue between the traditionalist conservativeness of many Brahmins at the time, the modernizing urges of Vivekananda and others, and the Western study of Hinduism? We have indicated the context of the Hinduism and science debate above. But what about modernity in general? As David Smith writes:

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[327] *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* 2007: footnote on pg. 18.
[328] Nandy 1981: <http://pritishnandy.com/downloads/Sunday%20Cover%20Story%2020-12-81.pdf>.

> Modernity is the Enlightenment project, with its certainties of reason and progress; it is the detraditionalizing of the traditions which preceded it. According to Charles Taylor, as summarized by Felski, modernity is 'a general philosophical distinction between traditional societies, which are structured around the omnipresence of divine authority, and a modern secularized universe predicated upon an individuated and self-conscious subjectivity' (Felski, *Sources of the Self*, 1995: 12).[329]

The context of Hinduism with respect to the dialogue regarding modernity is a complex one. To broaden the point we made in the section about Hinduism and science, it is not only the case that Hindu apologetic discourse used Western values to defend Hindu beliefs and practices by claiming that the beliefs in question were more Western than (and therefore superior to) the West according to its own values, but "Hinduism" as a unified concept was actually *defined* by the body of Hindu apologetic in relation to the West, as we shall elaborate below.

According to Richard King's analysis of the development of Hinduism as a single religious entity in relation to the Orientalist discourse of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in his book *Orientalism and Religion*, at first it was the Judeo-Christian paradigm from within which the Orientalists were working that gave rise to the idea of a unified religious entity called "Hinduism". They could not comprehend a group of differing religious beliefs peacefully coexisting without being part of the same overarching united religious body, a notion that they gained from observation of their own religious structure. Hence they uncritically applied it to the Hindus and a new category was formed. Thus arose the idea of a historical Hinduism whose former glory was now lost and needed to be restored by contemporary Hindu leaders.[330] This idea was taken up by Hindu apologetics and employed to unite and reform "Hinduism". Hindu unity was especially helpful for the Indian nationalist movement in the first half of the twentieth century, but as Peter van der Veer observes, that very movement, although certainly anticolonial, "in its very anticolonialism it shares basic discursive premises with orientalism and with the nationalism of the colonizing British."[331]

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[329] Smith 2003: 7.
[330] King 1999: 105.
[331] Van der Veer 1993: 39.

This "Hinduism", as we saw, was interpreted and formulated in opposition to Western constructs of "superior West versus inferior Indian". As King puts it, "The Westerner, presupposed as the normative paradigm in such analysis, tends to be idealized as modern, egalitarian, civilized, secular, rational and male. In contrast, the Indian is often represented as tied to tradition, primitive, hierarchical, uncivilized, religious, irrational and effeminate."[332] In response to this Western critique's formulation of "Hinduism" and the stereotypical "Indian", India is defined as "non-West", rather than just as "Indian". In other words, the Indian response to the Western critique is to build upon the "Hinduism" that reflects the core values of the stereotypical Western society as presented by Western Orientalists, but is superior to the West in terms of those very same values. Hence, we find a Hinduism that is "more modern" than the modern West, "more egalitarian" than the egalitarian West, as well as more civilized, more secular (that is, less ritualistic), more rational, and more masculine. Vivekananda, in presenting Hinduism to the West, presents Hinduism in this way. We find echoes of this argument, therefore, in Chinmayananda as well.

By the time Chinmayananda entered the scene, the term "Hinduism" and its unified roots in ancient history had gained traction, and was used by Chinmayananda to promote *advaita-vedānta* as the essence or culmination of Hinduism, just as Vivekananda had done before him. He brought out more elements of this argument than his predecessors, however, which led him to be invited to give his now well-known talk called "Planet in Crisis" in 1992 at the United Nations.[333] This Hinduism, argues Chinmayananda, could be used as a force for peace in the world if only modern man could understand its core, *vedānta*. His argument for the spread of this "modernized" Hinduism can be quintessentially demonstrated by the way he represents the notion of caste and the way he talks about modern *guru*s, both of which we shall now examine.

Chinmayananda and Caste

His commentary on the *Manīṣā Pañcakam*, a text attributed to Śaṅkara, serves as an example of his view that *advaita-vedānta* was radical with respect to caste even in the times of Śaṅkara. The story is that once, while Śaṅkara was returning from a

[332] King 1999: 112.
[333] The video of this talk can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUg3UiiikVI>.

bath in the Ganges river, an outcaste *cāṇḍāla*[334] was blocking his path. He told the *cāṇḍāla* to move out of his way, and the *cāṇḍāla* responded by questioning Śaṅkara's own philosophy of non-duality, asking to whom Śaṅkara was referring when he asked him to get out of the way. Was it the body he saw before him, which performed the same functions as his own body? Or was it the *ātman*, the self, which was the same in both bodies? Śaṅkara promptly fell at the *cāṇḍāla*'s feet and proclaimed him as a master and his *guru*.[335] The *cāṇḍāla* revealed himself to be none other than Lord Śiva.[336] This story serves as an example, according to Chinmayananda, of how *advaita-vedānta* (as the "true" version of Hinduism) transcends caste boundaries and can therefore serve as the egalitarian core of all religion for modern times. Chinmayananda writes:

> As a Master of advaita, preaching and propagating the one infinite Self (Brahman) of the Upaniṣads, Śaṅkara must have felt a poignant pain at the social ulcer that was prevalent at his time, which had no justification in the light of the universality of our Hindu philosophy. In the following five verses [the verses of the Manīṣā Pañcakam], Śaṅkara replies the divine critic [*sic*] at the Banārasa street-corner, carefully treasuring therein a secret message for all his immediate followers and all deep students for all times, that the distinctions based upon social, moral, ethical and such other considerations have no sanction or sanctity in the light of the Upaniṣadika Truth.[337]

In the aforementioned interview with Pritish Nandy, too, Chinmayananda maintains that "Hinduism is the religion for our times".[338]

Chinmayananda's explanation of caste during an interview in Australia in June 1984 is also indicative of his desire to "update" Hinduism for modern times. He says, importantly, "the fundamentals of all religions are all collected together, that is Vedānta. But historically it being earlier, we'll have to say that Vedānta is the basis upon which all religions stand. And if there is a religion which is contradictory to these fundamentals, it is not a religion, it is only an apparent look of a religion."[339]

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[334] The word *cāṇḍāla* refers to a person that deals with the disposal of corpses, who is considered to be "untouchable".
[335] *Manīṣā Pañcakam* 2012: 18-19.
[336] *Manīṣā Pañcakam* 2012: iii-4.
[337] *Manīṣā Pañcakam* 2012: 6.
[338] Nandy 1981: <http://pritishnandy.com/downloads/Sunday%20Cover%20Story%2020-12-81.pdf>.
[339] Source: *Australian interview with Swami Chinmayananda* 1984: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrxGTXadYpE>.

Here we see Chinmayananda asserting that (*advaita*) *vedānta* is the essence of all religions, including Hinduism, and therefore is representative of the basic values of Hinduism, to the extent that any deviation from Vedāntic principles is a deviation from religion itself. This is a direct echo, again, of Vivekananda, who says, "The Hindus have discovered that the absolute can only be realized, or thought of, or stated, through the relative, and the images, crosses, and crescents are simply so many symbols – so many pegs to hang the spiritual ideas on."[340] As Indira Chowdhury-Sengupta observes, "Hinduism was thus presented [by Vivekananda] as a universal faith of which the world was in need."[341] This urge to present *advaita-vedānta*, or *vedānta*, as the essence of all religions is also reminiscent of the philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), first vice president and second president of independent India. Julius Lipner writes in his article, "Religion and Religions" in *Radhakrishnan: Centenary Volume*:

> Radhakrishnan nails his banner to the Advaitic mast. In fact, he consistently interprets Hinduism, other religions and the nature of religion itself from the standpoint of Advaita. Advaita, often referred to by the generic term 'Vedānta'… represents the essence of Hinduism. 'The germinal conceptions' of Hinduism, declares Radhakrishnan, 'are contained in the Vedānta standard… The Vedānta is not a religion, but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significance'.[342]

There are several echoes of Radhakrishnan such as this one in Chinmayananda's works, but in order to maintain some focus in this dissertation, we have limited our archaeology of Chinmayananda's writings to identifying the resonances of Vivekananda and Śaṅkara.

Chinmayananda promotes, in other words, a very modernist version of Hinduism in the form of *advaita-vedānta*, which we shall see below, focused on the ideals of modernism as we defined above. With this in mind, and in the light of our prior discussion on Hinduism in the context of, or in opposition to, modernity, we see Chinmayananda's interpretation of Hinduism's views on caste:

> Now, religion has got two aspects. One is the philosophical depth of religion. And the other is the superficial, the ritualistic, the social discipline. The social discipline aspect of religion will be always reflecting the social

[340] Quoted from Chowdhury-Sengupta 1998: 27.
[341] Chowdhury-Sengupta 1998: 27.
[342] Lipner 1989: 136.

> conditions where it was born… But the depth of philosophy in it will be universally applicable… Caste-*ism* is the evil in our society today, but caste? You can't remove it! It is a scientific classification of human personality… These are the four names, and the original name when you say, you immediately think of the decadent confusions in India. But translate it into English: are there not brain trusts in every part of the country? The Brahmins, uncompromisingly living their own convictions? Are there not dynamic men, who want to bring those ideals into society and working, the leader class? The commercial, and the workers? … These are there all over the world. Now caste-*ism*. Later on what happened in India was… they were anxious that we get good human beings, geniuses. So in order to do that they [inbred], so that Brahmin should marry only Brahmin. Thus their qualities are brought out. This experiment was done in the first century. And true enough, we had a harvest of geniuses in the second century. Astrology, astronomy, medicine, mathematics, all these rose up at that time. But they continued. There was no other creative master to say, "stop it!" They continued. Therefore it has become more and more mutant, so that after some time their seeds become very weakened. So today, the Brahmin class *has* become weakened, because of this inbreeding… so this was an experiment done. Slowly the Brahmins and the *kṣatriya*s together became the power politics in India. So the Brahmins started keeping all other castes away from scriptural study, etc… caste-*ism* we can remove… caste is a human classification.[343]

Here we see Chinmayananda attempting to update the notion of caste by creating a distinction between caste and "caste-ism", the former being a classification of human personality and the latter being a system of oppression based on this classification, including restrictions on marriage and social mobility between castes.

In this way, he is able to retain the "non-Western" component of Hinduism, caste, but to define it only as a descriptive classificatory system, rather than a prescriptive, structural order within society, blaming the latter on caste-ism, a festering of natural societal hierarchy that results in domination by a particular class. In so doing, he is able to maintain continuity with Hinduism's past (a goal of his that we examined above), yet at the same time update its ideas to suit modern times. Caste is not the thing that needs to be thrown out, because it is purely a descriptive

[343] Source: *Australian Interview of Swami Chinmayananda* 1984: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrxGTXadYpE>.

classification. Caste-ism, caste's evil counterpart, on the other hand, can be done away with, because its purpose has long since been forgotten and mutated. In this way, Chinmayananda can be seen as a product of the ongoing narrative of a "non-Western" Hinduism, by rejecting caste-ism, but surprisingly, his "innovation" in the field is to bow his head to the tradition by accepting the existence of caste. His way of dealing with caste seems to militate against modern theorizations of caste, which identify a single entity called "caste", including all the elements of what he calls "caste-ism." Instead, he makes a distinction between the two, allowing caste to remain as a description of natural human psychological categories, and he takes an aggressive stand against caste-ism, promoting the egalitarianism so valued by the West. At the same time, Chinmayananda indirectly accepts social stratification, which is potentially problematic.

Chinmayananda seems to assimilate "*vedānta*" into the wider concept of "Hinduism", but creates a distinction between the two when it comes to caste. The way in which he promotes the egalitarianism of "Hinduism" is through the "philosophical depth" of *advaita-vedānta*, which can serve as a fundamental basis for all religions, but at the same time he maintains that Hinduism, the Indian religious incarnation of *advaita-vedānta*, is a product of its social context just as much as any other religion, and therefore retains the "caste system" as a system of social classification that was used in India. By saying this, he is updating the image of Hinduism in the West by making a distinction between "Hinduism" and *vedānta*, its true essence or core. Hinduism is the religion that formed in India, whereas other religions (based on the same essence) formed elsewhere. But within Hinduism can be found a systematized version of *advaita-vedānta*, which nevertheless can serve as the fundamental basis for all religions, wherever they may have been formed. This is another way in which Chinmayananda is part of an overarching trend of acculturation between two cultures. As Lola Williamson says, "Such is the case with the idea of 'natural religion' based on rationality. It begins with Enlightenment ideas in Europe and America, travels to India through the British, becomes part of the Hindu Renaissance, and then returns to America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the teachings of Hindu gurus."[344]

[344] Williamson 2010: 23.

Chinmayananda and *Guru*s

In the same book, Williamson's study of the emergence of the trend of Hindu *guru*s going to Western countries to teach in the 1960s and 1970s that helped to develop the "New Age" movement will help shed light on Chinmayananda's stance on modern *guru*s. Williamson writes about a category called "Neo-Hinduism", which she contrasts with traditional Hinduism in many ways. Neo-Hinduism, she says, arose in repudiation of some of the customs of traditional Hinduism and instead of the ritual and mythological aspects (including the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*), emphasized the philosophical aspect of Hinduism, focusing on the Upaniṣads as its chief source. "Although there was much trial and error throughout the nineteenth century as Hindu intellectuals reformed and redefined their religion, Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta as an experiential and universal religion is probably the most widely accepted version of Neo-Hinduism today."[345]

Chinmayananda, too, as the inheritor of this way of thinking, promotes an anti-ritual (or one could say, post-ritual) stance. In his introduction to the *Manīṣā Pañcakam*, he describes the "cultural break-up" of the "nation". He explains that the Indian culture became decadent over time, where "Orthodox Hinduism" became excessively ritualistic, and the sacrifices and ceremonies that could be afforded by the rich were not inspiring to the masses anymore. Buddhism, too, had fractured into several competing groups. Into such a decadent culture was born Śaṅkara. He writes:

> It was at such a smouldering era of total decadence and endless confusions, that we had the timely rise of a fresh national hope in a young Kerala brāhmaṇa, Ādi Śaṅkara. And soon this hope of giving Hindus a clear philosophy, beaconing them back to the Upaniṣads and raising the general consciousness of the entire nation was fulfilled. With the advaita philosophy, stemming forth from the gushing 'sources of knowledge', the Upaniṣads, Śaṅkara could reclaim the hopes of the community from the cobwebs of ritualism and give to the Hindus, a peep into the wholesome beauty of their own ancient culture.[346]

But while Chinmayananda, like Vivekananda, promoted the Upaniṣads and their role in forming a "philosophical" religion that could be the underlying basis for all religions, he was nonetheless sure to emphasize the epics that were important to

[345] Williamson 2010: 18.
[346] *Manīṣā Pañcakam* 2012: iii-iv.

"traditional Hinduism". Chinmayananda authored, for example, two important texts for children called *Bala Bhagavatam* and *Bala Ramayana* (first edition 1968), which are abridged versions of the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Ramayana*, respectively. These are texts that, according to Williamson, would be interesting only to traditional Hinduism, and downplayed by modern (Neo) Hinduism, but Chinmayananda attempts to engage with both, even relatively early on in his career. In this way, having inherited the Neo-Hinduism of Vivekananda, he chose to update it by integrating a version of the ancient texts central to traditional Hinduism into the Hinduism that he taught as well. Thus he maintained continuity with traditional Hinduism by connecting his audiences with Hinduism's so-called epic past while attempting to push them forward into modernity.

Chinmayananda's overt stance on modern *guru*s is also revealing. Chinmayananda contrasts ritualistic religion as taught by various *guru*s in India with knowledge-based religion in his interview with Pritish Nandy. Nandy makes the claim that teachings by these *guru*s who preach a ritualistic way of life are in fact promoting a lower level of consciousness. While Chinmayananda initially defends the *guru*s, praising them for bringing solace to the masses that worship them, and even wishing there were more such *guru*s, which is initially in striking contrast to the attempt to distance "true Hinduism" from practices that are different from Vedāntic Hinduism, he later concedes and paints a hierarchy of growth for seekers within the Hindu fold:

> Yes, I admit it. It *is* a lower level of consciousness and, therefore, they can only appreciate it at that lower level. When they come higher, they will drop it themselves. There are many who have dropped Sai Baba. They went there first. It was an introduction for them; they were stunned by what the man could do. My intellect cannot explain it. It is scientifically impossible to explain. And when you ask him, he doesn't say it is all because of his own glory. He says, you can *also* get this power. Turn towards him and sing the song. The man sincerely does it for some time and then drops him because he starts finding higher levels of consciousness. Then he wants to study the *Gita*. So he comes to me. He starts reading the *Gita*. And then he wants to go to the Upanisads. I teach him. Then he wants to go to the original. To the Sanskrit.

> So they go to Benaras. I know thousands who have thus streamed out – from the lower to the higher and higher.[347]

Chinmayananda thus concedes that there is a hierarchy in such a manner that ultimately *vedānta* is the highest level in that hierarchy. But he also expands the now-established version of Neo-Vedanta to include traditional forms of "gurudom", as he calls it, as well. In so doing, he updates the version of Hinduism that has been taught over the course of the twentieth century. He begins to accept once again different forms of Hinduism and finds a novel way to bring them into the fold of the version of Hinduism that he promotes. This is, in a way, part of the ongoing trend of portraying *vedānta* as the epitome of religious achievement, à la Vivekananda, but it has antecedents in Śaṅkara, whose arguments on behalf of *advaita-vedānta* were meant specifically to defeat other systems of thought, and Chinmayananda uses both of these to make his point and starts to include various forms of "traditional Hinduism" that were lost to "Neo-Hinduism" for nearly a century. By doing this, Chinmayananda seems to be creating a new category of Hinduism, or at least an updated version of "Neo-Hinduism". Until this time, Hindu reformers had neglected "popular Hinduism", a trend that began at the time of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894), who sought to eradicate all "mythic" elements from the *Mahabharata*. As Sitansu Sekhar Mittra writes in his book, *Bengal's Renaissance*:

> In *Krisna Charitra* [Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay] established Krisna as an ideal human being instead of a God. He gathered evidence from the *Mahabharata*, various *Puranas*, and other religious texts. He then followed a rigorously analytical reasoning to judge everything that was written about Krisna and accepted only those that passed his test. He summarily dismissed a large amount of folklore about Krisna as being old wives' tales. As a result, Bankim Chandra was often criticized by the orthodox Hindus for decrying the divinity attributed to Krisna.[348]

Another example is Chinmayananda's view on psychic powers (*siddhi*s). According to David Smith, *guru*s claim some general characteristics, including spiritual powers. He says that "Gurus are commonly held to have special powers. They may flaunt these powers, or leave it to their disciples to spread their fame. At

[347] Nandy 1981: <http://pritishnandy.com/downloads/Sunday%20Cover%20Story%2020-12-81.pdf>.
[348] Mittra 2001: 87.

the least, the guru will claim to be able to read the thoughts of his disciples."[349] Here, notwithstanding Smith's analysis, Chinmayananda insists that powers are not at all interesting to a student of *advaita-vedānta*. In a question and answer session at Humboldt University in California (possibly in 1975, during his first trip to Humboldt), Chinmayananda answers a question about developing psychic powers. He says that psychic powers are powers of the mind, and can be developed. But they are like toys in the hands of a child. The toy may be interesting for some time, but if the child wants only the mother, then the toy, even when in hand, ceases to be interesting to the child.[350] Similarly, the spiritual aspirant of *advaita-vedānta* must be interested in knowing *brahman*, and therefore powers of the mind are not interesting to him or her, even if present, because *brahman* is beyond the mind. Instead of being fascinated by psychic powers that develop in the purified mind, the aspirant is interested in only the quieting of the mind, because it is by quieting the mind that knowledge of *brahman* can be approached. Chinmayananda says:

> Even though all these powers come, you transcend them, you ignore them, and therefore you go higher… He who wants nothing but the Lord, him the Lord embraces… A *jñānī* doesn't want powers because he has already analyzed and found that these powers are again limited. He wants the unlimited… nothing short of it. The whole, not a part… How to develop it? … Go through the various processes of quieting the mind…[351]

It may be argued that by this approach, Chinmayananda raises the standard of Vedāntic teaching because according to him, a teacher of Vedānta, and by extension of Hinduism, must have a deep knowledge of scripture (in his case, mainly the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā) to be able to keep the attention of students interested in the "higher" states of consciousness without dazzling them with displays of spiritual powers. This is another example of Chinmayananda's innovation in the teaching of Hinduism. He sets aside displays of power by "simply teaching", as

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[349] Smith 2003: 172. Let us make a note here that Smith, in his book, while mentioning a number of influential *guru*s of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, conspicuously fails to name Chinmayananda as one, though he does mention Chinmayananda once in passing in the context of his involvement in the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). Having dealt with this issue earlier and the misunderstanding concerning Chinmayananda's role that seems to underlie it, in this dissertation we aim to provide an entry point to the study of Chinmayananda as an influential teacher of *advaita-vedānta*.

[350] Source: *#1 -Swami Chinmayananda: Meaning of Hari Om - Can Psychic Powers Be Developed?* 1975: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBIskkMEO4o>.

[351] Source: *#1 -Swami Chinmayananda: Meaning of Hari Om - Can Psychic Powers Be Developed?* 1975: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBIskkMEO4o>.

Pritish Nandy observed in his interview, and by doing this, promotes knowledge as the highest aim of Hinduism, rather than the development of psychic powers, or the ability to manifest objects from thin air, or any number of physical and mental feats. His appeal was enhanced by his actively engaging with modernity, in this case by rejecting the importance of the supernatural for the sake of what is perceived to be logic and reason. This helped to make him an internationally popular and influential figure in "modern" times, which leads us to the topic of our next discussion.

However, before we take up the discussion, it must be noted that Chinmayananda makes a special attempt to keep close to tradition, and to make his arguments as close to Śaṅkara's as possible. When it comes to the social element, Chinmayananda combines the potential radicality of Śaṅkara's Vedānta with a reaction to the social climate of his time vis-à-vis Vivekananda to create a Hinduism that is against discrimination based on caste, gender, and religion, drawing such conclusions as based on its Upaniṣadic roots. This trend, as we shall see, has great influence upon his followers in the Hindu diaspora.

Chinmayananda, Hinduism, and Diaspora Configurations

Chinmayananda is an important figure for engagement with diaspora Hinduism as we shall now attempt to show by providing a framework for this topic. For this section, we will focus on the USA as an example of the ongoing narrative of diaspora Hinduism, and attempt to contextualize Chinmayananda in this narrative, assessing his entry into the diaspora and the impact of his teachings on it as well.

Of course, it must first be noted that any attempt to essentialize Hinduism by claiming that there is one thing that is common to all Hindus is generally untenable. For every claim made about the essence of Hinduism, it would appear that there is a "Hindu" belief that contradicts that claim. As a result, even the mention of a "diaspora", which is predicated on an essentialist assumption that "India" (or for some Orientalist authors and nationalist Hindus, "*Bhārat*") is considered a homeland or a "motherland" ("*Bhārat Mātā*") by all Hindus, whether inside or outside of India, can be seen as another example of the dominant Orientalist lens through which Hinduism has been studied, whose idea of a diaspora is gained from the dispersion of Jews from

Israel.[352] We find in the case of Hinduism, however, that there are Hindus who, for whatever reason, consider themselves to be "Hindu" without having any connection to India as the homeland.[353] In fact, many new Hindu pilgrimage sites, in the form of temples, can be found all over the world.[354]

It can be said, however, that India is nevertheless the home for most of the Hindu population in the world, is host to most Hindu pilgrimage sites globally, and is also the origin for much of the Hindu population outside of India, whether in the current generation or in generations before, and as such is still a kind of "homeland" for most Hindus. As Sandhya Shukla explains in her article entitled "South Asian Migration to the United States", due to the "brain drain" of South Asian migrants to the USA, where there was opportunity for highly skilled workers, there was an economic lack felt in the developing nations of South Asia. This flight of skilled labor from these countries "was the source of some anxiety for developing nations in terms of perceived effects and also in the way that this confounded post-colonial nationalisms that rested on ideas of autonomy and strength in the face of richer and dominant countries like Britain and the United States".[355] Thus, the category of the non-resident Indian, or "NRI", was born, at first created to address economic disparity caused by the migration of skilled labor away from the homeland to a foreign land. In time, however, "the figure of the NRI conjured complex, and reciprocal, desires of migrant Indians for their homeland, and the homeland nation-state's claim on peoples outside its borders."[356] Many migrant Hindu people in the USA, then, with the term "NRI" applied to them, experience an affinity for India as the "Hindu homeland".

This does not imply a unified Hindu identity, as we discussed above, since "Hinduism" is a term that incorporates several distinct views of the world and sets of rituals. But when Hindus do not live in a Hindu-majority nation, then the effect is

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[352] Even here, there is debate. Some Jewish scholars may not agree that "diaspora Judaism" holds much meaning, for "Israel" may be a philosophical concept, independent of the state of Israel. The difference between these two is even built into the Hebrew language, with the term *'Éreṣ Yisrā'el* meaning the "Land of Israel", and the term *Medīnat Yisrā'el* meaning the "State of Israel". Cf. Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity", in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pg. 693-725.

[353] For example, Tulsi Gabbard, the first Hindu member of the United States Congress, is of Samoan and Euro-American descent, with no ancestry in India. Such examples are numerous.

[354] There are over 100 Hindu temples in the United States alone, which serve as nodes of Hindu worship and pilgrimage. See a list of Hindu temples in the USA here: <http://www.hindutemples.us>.

[355] Shukla 2013: 172.

[356] Shukla 2013: 172.

something like the clumping together of oil molecules when a drop of oil is dropped into a glass of water. Even though the oil molecules may not initially have been so determined to stick together, due to the polar nature of water, the non-polar oil molecules are forced to clump together. Similarly, in America, due to the pressure of a paradigmatically Christian-secular-dominated society, Hindus, who otherwise may not have had the need to define themselves in India, suddenly feel the need to be able to describe themselves using Christian categories, facing questions such as, "What is your Bible?" or "Who is your Jesus?" As van der Veer aptly puts it, "The construction of a unified Hindu entity is of utmost importance for Hindus who live outside India. They need a Hinduism that can be explained to outsiders as a respectable religion, that can be taught to their children in religious education, and that can form the basis for collective action."[357]

Thus, versions of Hinduism are born, needing to be unified for their very survival, rather than for the purpose of removing a colonial force from a nation. But these two drivers are not unrelated. The initial purpose of unifying Hinduism, from the Hindu perspective, was to move against a colonial oppressor. But the organizations that were the products of this drive, such as the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), an organization that Chinmayananda was a co-founder of, whose original purpose was to unite Hindus under a single umbrella banner (as we saw in the first chapter of this dissertation), were also effective at promoting an ideology that would, ultimately, be helpful for Hindus in the diaspora to define themselves in relation to the dominant culture. Here, van der Veer notes, "The VHP provides such a religious ideology, and it is thus not surprising that it has already gained great support among Indians in Britain, the United States, the Caribbean, Fiji, Holland [*sic*]. In an ironic twist of history, orientalism is now brought by Indians to Indians living in the West."[358]

As we have seen, Chinmayananda distanced himself from the VHP in India itself, and thus his spiritual organization, the Chinmaya Mission, remained distinct from the VHP. When the VHP expanded to the USA and other countries outside of India, the Chinmaya Mission nevertheless maintained its distance from organizations that it considered "political", including the VHP, as we explained in detail in the first chapter. But in one important respect, the Chinmaya Mission seeks exactly what the

[357] Van der Veer 1993: 42.
[358] Van der Veer 1993: 42-43.

VHP desires: it attempts to give Hindus a recognizable identity to hold on to, especially in the face of an "other" that, through its own lens, interrogates the very essence of Hinduism, triggering a self-interrogation within the mind of the Hindu through that very lens as well. Both of these organizations can be described, according to John Zavos, as global Hindu organizations "invoking an image of global Hinduism: a transnational consciousness which binds Hindus around the world to one articulated form of identity."[359]

There is a significant difference between these two organizations, however. The Chinmaya Mission bases its ideology on knowledge of the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā and Chinmayananda's commentaries on these as well as his other works, being an organization formed to propagate the teachings of *advaita-vedānta*, specifically in the lineage of Śaṅkara.[360] The VHP, on the other hand, is not an organization born of any lineage or tradition, and therefore propagates only a generic "Hindu" identity, loosely based on the writings of Vivekananda, but sharing ideology with other Hindu nationalist groups.[361] As a result, the Chinmaya Mission is able to

[359] Zavos 2013: 314-315.

[360] It is useful to note here Lola Williamson's analysis of the Neo-Hindu movement with respect to its teaching conventions. She writes, "When Neo-Hindus needed a vehicle to spread their philosophy, they looked to Christian missionaries as their model… Neo-Hindus often held social gatherings for youth and organized conferences for adults. They also held regular congregational worship services in a manner similar to Christian services, complete with prayers, hymns, and sermons. When Hindu gurus came to the United States, they simply continued to use these forms already familiar to Americans. They would, though, eventually add another ingredient that they learned from American institutions, and that was to charge fees for the classes, conferences, and social gatherings. Paying fees seemed appropriate to Americans since they did not see themselves as receiving religious instruction, but instruction in universal principles and 'techniques.'" (2010: 19). This is quite similar to the Chinmaya Mission model, which teaches children in a "Sunday school" format, called "Bala Vihar". There are class sessions, which run simultaneously as adult study groups (for parents of the children), before or after which there is a congregation where there is usually a sermon-style talk by the resident *ācārya*, or teacher, followed by a collective prayer service. There is a fee for enrolling a child in Bala Vihar, but all youth groups, adult study groups, and public discourses, are free.

[361] Here we say "loosely" because, as Tapan Raychaudhuri writes in his chapter entitled "Swami Vivekananda's Construction of Hinduism" in the book *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernization of Hinduism*: "Swami Vivekananda represents the high noon of a Hindu revival, both in popular perception and serious historical literature. Expectedly, in the VHP's 1993 celebration of the centenary of the Chicago Congress of Religions where Vivekananda made his debut, they claimed the Patriot-Prophet as one of their own. Amiya P. Sen's study of the Hindu revival published in the same year, a work of scholarly and analytical excellence, confirms this received perception… I draw upon the same material… and arrive at a very different conclusion, that the Hindu revival, a phenomenon I would prefer to describe as the Hindu reaction, was at best peripheral and for the most part antagonistic to Vivekananda's

propagate a Hindu identity that is rooted in scripture, but need not necessarily be geared towards a nationalist agenda, whereas the VHP is dependent upon a nationalist sentiment tied to India.

It is not without significance that the Chinmaya Mission, founded by Chinmayananda in 1953, would come to compete with the VHP, co-founded by Chinmayananda, to develop the ideology with which Hindus could define themselves in the diaspora. Like a boomerang, the VHP, initially encouraged by Chinmayananda and others to perform the task of unifying Hindus on spiritual grounds, would ultimately turn around to attempt to "reclaim" India for the "Hindu majority", a political agenda, and this would result in Chinmayananda avoiding association with the VHP, along with similar organizations in India, like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), etc., on the grounds that his mission was spiritual and not political.

But the impact of Chinmayananda's teachings was not insignificant in the diaspora in North America. His organization, the Chinmaya Mission, has 49 centers across the USA and Canada, with thousands of members.[362] Each center is home to a Sunday school for children called "Bala Vihar", whose curriculum is standardized, and is used by other temple organizations across North America as well. We may take this opportunity to expand upon the curriculum of the Bala Vihar program to show its spiritual content and that there is no driving political agenda. While there may be elements in the organization that promote their own political agenda, as is inevitable everywhere, the content itself is spiritual in nature.

Each Chinmaya Mission center is known as a "School of Vedantic Studies". It is host to a Bala Vihar, whose mission statement is "To help children learn values with fun, to delight like the moon and shine like the sun".[363] The broader mission statement of Chinmaya Mission is "To provide to individuals, from any background, the wisdom of Vedanta and the practical means for spiritual growth and happiness, enabling them to become positive contributors to society".[364] Chinmayananda says about the Bala Vihar programs:

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concerns. His role and his personality were misinterpreted in his own time for identifiable reasons. The persistence of that misreading is, however, less justified." (1998: 1).

[362] Source: *Chinmaya Mission West*. <http://www.chinmayamission.org>.

[363] Source: "Balvihar." <http://www.chinmayamission.com/what-we-do/activities/balvihar/>.

[364] Source: "About Us." <http://www.chinmayamission.org/aboutus.php>.

> Children are not vessels to be filled, but lamps to be lit. The seed of spiritual values should be sown in young hearts, and the conditions made favourable for sprouting and steady growth through proper control and discipline. It must be cared for with the warmth of love and affection, and such a tree shall blossom forth flowers of brotherhood, universal love, peace, bliss, beauty, and Perfection.[365]

On the Chinmaya Mission website, the description of Bala Vihar is:

> Bala Vihar is a weekly gathering of children, between the ages of five to fifteen years that takes place in Chinmaya Mission Centres or in private homes, under the supervision of trained [volunteer] teachers. The aim of Bala Vihar is to help children bloom, grow, and inculcate values through fun-filled activities. Bala Vihar enhances the overall development of the personality of a child at all levels — physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual.[366]

The curriculum for Bala Vihar is usually split by grade in school (provided there are enough children, though grades may be combined with each other for practical purposes) and centers are encouraged to follow a standard curriculum, but may adjust it depending on the individual needs of the center. A typical curriculum includes (the following is a list of books and topics from the curriculum of Chinmaya Mission Houston, as an example, and descriptions are adapted from the Chinmaya Mission Houston website):[367]

1. KG: *Alphabet Safari* – Teach values like aspiration, brotherhood, etc., through animal stories and hands-on activities.
2. Grade 1: *Bala Ramayana* – Inspire children and enhance their imagination through the events and stories of Lord Rāma's journey in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.
3. Grade 2: *Sri Hanuman the Super Superman* – Learn from Hanumān values like courage, etc.
4. Grade 3: *Bāla Bhāgavatam* – Through stories of different *avatāra*s of Lord Viṣṇu, children learn to own up to their actions. They learn to ask only for what they need, not necessarily for what they desire.

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[365] Source: "Balvihar." <http://www.chinmayamission.com/what-we-do/activities/balvihar/>.
[366] Source: "Balvihar." <http://www.chinmayamission.com/what-we-do/activities/balvihar/>.
[367] Source: *Science of Living*. <http://www.chinmayahouston.org/pdfs/bvbooks/ScienceOfLiving-FINAL.pdf>.

5. Grade 4: *Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Everywhere* – Encourage children to learn about sharing and self-discipline through stories of Lord Kṛṣṇa. They learn to introspect and record their observations regularly.
6. Grade 4: *My Twenty-Four Teachers* – Children will learn to develop reverence for teachers throughout nature. Story of Dattātreya.
7. Grade 5: *Symbolism in Hinduism* – Explain the importance of symbols. The deities are symbols of the one Omnipresent Lord. These symbols teach us to live a life of harmony, fulfillment, and happiness.
8. Grade 6: *India, the Sacred Land* – Energize children about the rich heritage of India. Saints and sages, our treasure, made this land sacred and contributed to its success.
9. Grade 7: *P. O. Box Mr. God* (*Rāmacaritamānasa*) – Invite children to find the Omnipresent God and His address. Then they learn that each one of us is His address and we can find Him within us, if we learn to live a life of noble values.
10. Grade 7: *Key to Success* (*Rāmacaritamānasa*) – Challenge children to learn to achieve success in the world by living a life rich in values. Emphasize how a disciplined mind enjoys happiness and peace.
11. Grade 8: *Yato Dharmaḥ Tato Jayaḥ* - The text dives deep into what is Dharma, how to live by Dharma, along with the story of the *Mahābhārata*. The goal of life and how we are the architect of our own future is explained through the Law of Karma.
12. Grade 9: *Hindu Culture* – Accomplish the goal of life by following the Hindu values. Learn to live a stress free life by applying the message of the Upaniṣads.
13. Grades 10 and 11: *Bhagavad Gītā* – Absorb the message of the Gītā through flowcharts and other unique techniques, in a logical sequence. The text used in this class is *The Holy Geeta* by Swami Chinmayananda.
14. Grade 12: *Self-Unfoldment* – Realize your inner potential and transform your life through the fundamentals of Vedānta.

The content of the curriculum, as can be seen, is not political in nature, but seeks to instill values and a spiritual thirst in the student. Thus, as we have stated before, Chinmayananda's and Chinmaya Mission's agenda appears to be a spiritual one.[368]

The impact of Swami Chinmayananda is not just limited to centers. The Chinmaya Mission is also the only official Hindu religious endorsing agent for board certified chaplains in the USA, according to the US Department of Defense.[369] Additionally, Chinmayananda's impact can be seen on other sections of the diaspora as well. His first initiate, Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1930-2015),[370] started an offshoot organization called the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, whose western headquarters in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania is also a popular retreat center for Hindus in America. All of Dayananda's disciples, too, are products in some way of Chinmayananda's teachings, through whom they can be said to be connected with the Śaṅkara lineage.[371]

While many aspects of the Orientalists' approach to Hinduism have shaped the way Hindus see themselves, to the extent of "creating Hinduism" as a unified entity, there are some effects of the intersection between Christian Orientalism and Hindu self-portrayal that can be seen as progressive, characterized by the move to become a Hindu chaplain.

Clearly, Chinmayananda's place in the ongoing narrative about Hindu diaspora configurations cannot be ignored. If we are to undertake a study of the diaspora, Chinmayananda must be reckoned with. With the above analyses performed, in the context of Hinduism and science, modernity, and the diaspora, we provide some concluding remarks to this dissertation below.

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[368] Whether this material can be politicized or not is not the objective of this analysis, but rather it is to show that the curriculum itself, if taught according to the syllabus, is spiritual and not political in nature.

[369] Source: "Armed Forces Chaplains Board Endorsements." <http://prhome.defense.gov/MRA/MPP/AFCB/Endorsements.aspx>.

[370] Not to be confused, of course, with Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) of the Arya Samaj.

[371] This includes Anantanand Rambachan, a well-known Hindu author and Professor of Religion at St. Olaf College in Minnesota, and Shama Mehta, the first board certified Hindu chaplain of Indian descent in Michigan. In the case of Shama Mehta, it is interesting to note the turn towards chaplaincy as a Hindu.

Concluding remarks

With this dissertation, we attempted to complete two objectives. Firstly, to assess, from the perspective of Chinmayananda's teaching on Consciousness, with special reference to Śaṅkara, what we can learn from the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā with respect to the contemporary study of consciousness; and secondly, to demonstrate that Chinmayananda as a philosopher and *guru* is an important player in the wider narrative of Hinduism today, especially with respect to its relationships with science, modernity, and the diaspora.

In pursuit of our first objective, we began by introducing Swami Chinmayananda the man, giving a brief account of his life with the goal of understanding his stance on Consciousness, taking note that he grew up in times of political upheaval in India, and that he started teaching only in independent India. This history gave us the required backdrop for attempting to understand his philosophy on Consciousness, which is a word, as we saw, that carries many definitions within itself, according to various philosophies from different places around the world and different times throughout history. We assessed that Chinmayananda's version of Consciousness is a version derived from a particular reading of *advaita-vedānta* based on Śaṅkara's teachings, choosing to focus directly on Śaṅkara and his commentaries on the Upaniṣads and Bhagavad Gītā, without getting entangled in technical considerations, especially epistemological ones, brought up by various commentators between Śaṅkara and the 20th Century.

We were able to assess that Chinmayananda's teachings give us fresh insight into the study of Consciousness in the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā by providing concrete new heuristic tools for understanding the teaching of *advaita-vedānta* and by giving us a new set of introductory textbooks, which we classified as secondary texts, to serve as innovative entry-points into this knowledge tradition. This means that Chinmayananda is a significant and constructive lens through which we can study the teachings of the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā. The structure of this dissertation became a mirror of the way in which Chinmayananda approaches Consciousness, which is to allude to it, to suggestively indicate it (following the style of the *ṛṣi*s, according to him), and to describe but to never definitively define it, for to define it, according to him, is neither possible nor desirable. Instead, the seeker is taught to

intuit the "Truth" through the arguments and reasoning provided in Chinmayananda's interpretation of the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā.

In pursuit of our second objective, we saw that Chinmayananda had not been rigorously studied before as a philosopher, though his social impact, involvement in the VHP, and his part in Hindu-Christian dialogue had all been previously examined. We found that as a *guru*, Chinmayananda does not fit into the common conceptions of the "20th Century *guru*" identity because he offers new insight into the ancient textbooks of *advaita-vedānta* and distinguishes himself from *guru*s attempting to strengthen the Hindu identity by tying it to the Indian national identity. We found that not getting caught up by epistemological considerations, or *pramāṇa*, in his writings can be seen as a successful tactic in his overall strategy of teaching *advaita-vedānta* to the wider Hindu population. We also found that this tactic helped him to engage with the ongoing dialogue between Hinduism and science, and Hinduism and the modern world, making his contribution an important node on the timeline of these ongoing dialogues. This seemed to make him a popular teacher not only for the diasporic Hindu community, but also for the Hindu community without any connection to India.

I believe that we have been able to show that there is valuable material and insight to be gained about the study of consciousness from the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā through the lens of Swami Chinmayananda. With regard to Chinmayananda as a philosopher and *guru*, we have, I hope, sufficiently contextualized him for this preliminary study, and ascertained that he is worthy of our attention and should not be ignored when considering the nature and configuration of contemporary Hinduism. There are, of course, many more considerations left open for analysis with respect to all three major topics discussed in the fifth chapter. However, we hope that the above discussion can be expanded upon in future research.

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