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Elios Universal Freedom

**Advaita Vedanta
In the
Life Practice of the
21st Century**

Translation from German
Vidya Bolz

tao.de



With pure heart
and in deepest humility
I thank my
Master Raphael
for His presence within and
for His wise guidance

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Prologue

In the year of 2006 a few of us, fellow students of Advaita, founded the ‚Vedanta Academy Germany‘ (VAG) with the blessings of my Master Raphael.

Raphael is a contemporary sage whose teaching is the inner unity of the Eastern and Western traditions. He is considered to be a ‚Jivanmukta‘, liberated while still alive, a Perfect Master. A few of us, a small group of close and intimate disciples, succeeded in bringing Him to Germany for a few seminars in the beginning of 2000. Meanwhile Raphael has reached a very advanced physical age and lives completely withdrawn in a hermitage in Italy. The name Raphael is a pseudonym and it represents both a state of consciousness and a special kind of Dharma. He is well known in the United States, India and in Europe as a Western Master in the One Tradition.

Elios received his name as a recommendation from Raphael. Raphael would never impose anything upon anyone.

Elios has taken on the task and the responsibility to teach the Unity of the Eastern and Western tradition in the German-speaking regions. The emphasis is on Advaita Vedanta and the work is thus

physically grounded through the founding of the academy. Elios had already been asked by his Master to teach Advaita Vedanta a few years before this. For that purpose he had started a study group whose members later on became the founding members of the VAG.

Ever since we started working publicly people had asked more and more frequently for our own publications. It is true that I had been thinking of a book project for quite some time, but I had postponed it repeatedly, mainly because it is my nature to prefer to speak rather than to write. This was and is also true in the context of my scientific and therapeutic work. Then, a few years ago in a conversation with Raphael I mentioned almost resignedly, that Raphael had written so much himself on just about every topic regarding the Tradition that it wouldn't make much sense for me to also write something. Ultimately the answers to all possible questions could be found in his books. To that Raphael replied, as usual, briefly and precisely: Plato and Shankara have also written a lot. Does that mean that Raphael should not write anything? I remained silent with my mouth slightly agape: I had understood.

Another reason for my growing motivation to write had at least two more aspects. One is that Raphael's works are highly philosophical in the style of the great masters of the original texts. This is His Dharma here on earth and has to be carried out in that way. His works are highly sophisticated and are pure Advaita in accordance with the ancient Tradition. Thus the idea arose to perhaps write an Advaita book in a language that is easy to understand, without, however, distorting the greatness and the sublimity of the teaching. Not an easy endeavor.

In order to fulfill this requirement I have tried in the process to describe my own experiences from my childhood and youth with utmost honesty and clarity, so as to share them with the reader.

My pains and confusions are equally expressed here. Liberation is not possible without pain. Whoever wants to go to heaven must pass through hell first, according to many ancient scriptures. However, under the definition of hell falls also the prosperity-addicted behavior of western man, who believes he is able to live all his life in material abundance and indulge in emotionally-hedonistic happiness. This kind of attachment to the world is, strictly speaking, a state of hell because it prevents liberation.

Generally I made an effort to allow the pure essence of the teaching to resonate in all the chapters in spite of the more comprehensible language. The sensitive reader can soak it up between the lines or even perhaps contemplate it throughout several paragraphs, instead of just mentally absorbing the letters, words and sentences. In order not to neglect the main thread presented in the book's title it could not be helped but repeat to an extent some of the topic outlines and observe them from the ever-new perspectives of life practice.

As a classical Advaita teacher I cannot, I may not, and I do not desire to abandon the use of Sanskrit terms¹. Sanskrit is the most ancient original language on earth. It is ascribed to Lord Brahma's consort, the goddess Saraswati. Each Sanskrit word carries great energy and embodies mantric powers. Some terms are very hard to translate without losing their potency. This becomes most obvious with the primordial sound OM or AUM. It cannot be translated into any language of the world. Likewise it cannot be decoded on the analytical and mental level. It can only be experienced, heard, seen or realized in a transcendently altered state of consciousness. It defies any analysis or description. For it is far beyond any words.

¹ For a better reading flow I have omitted the exact transliterated spelling in the main text; this can be found in the glossary.

Hence for me the essence of Advaita Vedanta was always the foundation upon which to build the themes and observations made within the framework of our present life experiences.

Another important reason for the creation of this book is the Neo-Advaita-scene. It makes the seeker believe that realization is a very simple thing, or even that it has already occurred and that we are not aware of it only because of our alienation, or what have you. This concept misleads some teachers to make fatal statements, which as a consequence rob us of any willpower or possibility of making our own decisions.

Still others claim that the refinement (they even say complexity) of the teachings of Shankara is totally superfluous. Then using this self-created axiom they pull out some supporting passages from the old teaching and then promise a considerable shortening of the “enlightenment process”.

This would compare to somebody who is, let’s say, on the Raja Yoga path of Patanjali and who follows his path of Ashtanga yoga, but picks out just two or three limbs of the eightfold path of yoga and declares everything else to be superfluous. This kind of thing simply doesn’t work, it is not acceptable and it indicates that something very basic has not been understood. To illustrate it more graphically: when somebody has spent many months in darkness his eyes have to become accustomed to light very slowly. He cannot immediately look into the blazing sun. This is man’s situation in the Dark Age: we can only approach the light of our souls, the light of God, step by step.

Aside from ONENESS God is also MULTIPLICITY. Brahman, who is One without a second, is the Whole. Saguna Brahman and Nirguna Brahman. The Upanishads say it with certainty: *All is truly Brahman!*

Basically, nobody is against such minimalist teachings. Because of the current zeitgeist they are well received by many people today. None of our impatient fellow citizens like making sustained effort. Fine, but then, please, don't classify these systems as Advaita Vedanta. In chapter 8 we will have a closer look at the differences between some of the Neo-aspects and classic Advaita.

In the process of writing, and while holding in mind the interested reader, I was concerned with creating a productive tension between spiritual curiosity and the thirst for knowledge on one hand, and on the other hand with reflections on my very personal confusions via recognition of mistakes, dead ends and omissions throughout my lifetime up to now – in my very own life task.

If at least one such spark has been triggered between the two poles of the rational and the spiritual then this book has fulfilled a useful purpose. Anything else lies with the discernment of the reader.



1. Advaita Vedanta in the 21st Century

With his commentary on the Mandukya Upanishad in the 8th Century AD in India, Gaudapada laid the foundation for the systematic completion of the Vedas. He and his principal disciple Govindapada tasked the still young Shankara with the work of producing a commentary on the Upanishads and the Brahmasutras. Because of his life's work he was regarded as Shankara-Acharya (acharya = teacher), he who codified Advaita into the form in which we know it today and which can be read in its transliterated Sanskrit entirety just as Shankaracharya wrote it.

One speaks of codification or of a codifier because Shankara summarized and systematized the essence of the ancient Vedas and the later Upanishads in an unprecedented and unsurpassed manner, thanks to his enlightened mind.

Today we live in the 21st Century of the Christian era. A brief review of the origins and roots of Advaita Vedanta will give us a better understanding of the history of this ancient teaching. Viewed from our current time Advaita Vedanta is the essence of the Upanishads, and the Upanishads in turn are the essence of the Vedas. The four Vedas have been recorded since 1500 BC. The relevant

research is of the opinion that they've already existed in spoken form on this planet from about 6000 BC. There are Vedic texts in West India written in the form of the Sanskrit alphabet (Devanagari) from around 3000 BC.

Since its records began the essence of Advaita has been both partly hidden and partly available in the scriptures. Hence we can really speak of a 5,000-year-old literary tradition of Advaita Vedanta.

The time of the origin of the Upanishads, between 1000-600 BC, in historical awareness is generally regarded as a time of spiritual awakening. The philosopher Karl Jaspers called this phenomenon an "Axial Age" because it marked a very significant transition: a transformation of the mind, a breakthrough into a new dimension - the questioning of human existence. Man, hitherto nature religious, began to build a new relationship with God. This period was initiated independently across various countries: Lao Tzu and Confucius in China, the Old Testament prophets in Israel, the Greek pre-Socratic philosophers and the Indian Rishis of the Upanishads. Plato in the West and Gautama Buddha in the East were the high-lights of this beginning new era.

For the two and a half thousand years from the peak of the Axial Age, man has found himself on a journey of evolution of the mind. Upon closer inspection, it is more particularly a journey of the analytical mind (Vedanta: Manas) and less that of the soul. We owe all of our modern technological, social and cultural achievements to this new, burgeoning power of our mind. In just the last hundred years enormous progress has been made in the most impressive directions, as never before in history. But what of spiritual development, the serious religious questions about God, about realization?

With the training of the mind, that is, with the unfolding of the Logos (after Heraclitus and Plato, especially regarding the importance of the analytical, experiential mind), so-called empirical science gained the upper hand. It became all about proof, about the concrete, repeatable testing of facts, “facts”, which could optionally even be interpreted as laws. This is true not only for the highly acclaimed exact natural sciences, but also for the humanities and the economic and social sciences. Everything must be explainable and rationally comprehensible. Man wants to understand the world of names and forms completely. He wants to understand time and space and also intellectually approach the non-explainable – God.

Is God empirically verifiable or is HE or IT merely wishful thinking, passed down through generations and anchored in the collective consciousness? Vedanta says man of course has both the right and the ability to intellectually penetrate, analyze, explain this world of appearance and disappearance (Samsara), and finally to “subject” it to himself, as it says in the Bible. In the best case, this means to understand its laws and to live responsibly in and with them. In the worst, it means blind exploitation, limitless greed and ultimately destruction, whereby man himself saws off the branch on which he sits.

We will leave the current environmental debate aside here, a theme which clearly indicates a scenario of disaster, and state only: that man has badly abused his intellectual powers in many instances of his modern way of life and must now deal with the life-threatening consequences of his actions, and perhaps their possible containment.

In addition to the affirmation of the virtuous use of intellectual powers, above all the Vedanta emphasizes the recollection of what a person actually is: immortal Self! Empirical understanding stumbles over this, because it cannot deal with a non-finite state.

This does not fit any of its concepts. It simply cannot be, because everything is born, is present for a time, and goes again. Even large cycles, which from their scale may be considered endless, eventually pass away, and something new appears. In Samsara, the world of becoming, there is nothing, really nothing, which lasts. Everything is in a constant flux of change, even the seemingly fixed or constant. In the molecular field everything is constantly in motion. The mind knows this and therefore strictly rejects the notion that there is infinity or something absolute, timeless and limitless. It knows better. It observes and ultimately calculates very exactly with that most accurate of all the sciences, mathematics.

Modern man of the 21st Century was born into this mode of thought. As a child of his time, he believes in his senses, his mind, his feelings, his analytical thinking, he believes in his ability to accomplish, identifies himself with his body and thinks he is the doer, that he is the creator of the world, who knows his place in the solar system and will soon land on Mars. All this gives him the impression of greatness and grandeur, so he sees himself as the crown of creation, endowed with the privileges of the unconditional and almost divinely sanctioned use of resources: “subdue all upon the earth!”

Vedanta says: what a fatal misunderstanding! And immediately adds the explanation of why this is so. Since around about the Axial Age we live in what’s called the Kali Yuga, following the Hindu concept of the World Ages, of which there are four in sequence. The Kali Yuga is known as the Dark Age, during which the ego comes to the fore, coupled with greed, anger, wrath, envy, destruction and forgetting of the Self, the soul. This is also called the “fall of the soul” in Advaita Vedanta. It has fallen from its divine origin, from the heights of the All-sublime, so to speak, fallen to the ground, and has almost been made helpless and overwhelmed by the forces of seduction, deception and projection (Maya) and materialism. For

eons of incarnations, the nature of the human being has identified itself with the material aspect of the world that it has observed. So it came to the fateful conclusion: the body, that's me, that's what I am.

But, thank God, there are the old traditions. They remind us again and again, in every age, and gently, of our origin. They encourage the Manas towards the known questions: Where am I, where am I going, what is my destiny, do I have free will, etc.?

Advaita Vedanta is one such old tradition. Strictly speaking, there really is only One Tradition, one that presents itself differently depending on the zeitgeist of the era. Its essence, however, is immutable. This is so because it is not of human origin. In the true and proper sense it is revelation, in whatever form of communication it presents itself: written, oral, by a means of miracle, in the form of a master/teacher or in silence. It is always present whether noticed or unnoticed by people, it is pure wisdom, truth, transcending the world, beyond space and time, unaffected by all impermanence, and it taps gently on the shoulder of a man who has attained maturity. It finds him, he doesn't find it.

In the Western world we see many societies and nations threatened by complete burnout. People live in a strong field of tension between labor-economy and personal growth-spirituality. Work serves several purposes simultaneously: the search for meaning, psychological self-actualization, self-preservation, livelihood protection, social integration, sense of belonging, recognition, appreciation, and so on. These are complex life constellations, in which formal, temporal, social, emotional, future and current problem areas overlap, calling for strong internal and external coping strategies, differentiated discernment and a high degree of clarity.

Are we as modern people already so resistant to stress that we can withstand all of this? Our full hospitals and outpatient treatment centers, such as physician's and psychologist's practices, speak for

themselves: no, we're not able to cope with it. This means that man, thanks to his highly developed mental abilities, has created living conditions that easily overwhelm him psychosomatically. The rate of evolution of the mind is a good deal faster than that of the body and the emotions. The latter two are lagging behind considerably. And this significantly erodes one's health.

Do we have any way out of this situation – or even any corrective steps we can take? We do possess a complex medical and psychological technology, which reacts to this situation and tries to move the ailing individual back to more stability. But what can we do? How can we create a new stability in our lives, one which transcends the wide range of tasks demanded in the workplace, in the family and in society, a stability that goes beyond merely regenerative relaxation?

The answer is found in true, sincere spirituality. True and earnest effort must be unconditional if the seeker wants to achieve progress. Half-hearted intellectual toying with a spiritual path, occasional exercises or even participating in practices just to fit in, not only contribute nothing, but can actively foster a person's vanity, which in turn can lead to disturbing results.

A path like the classic Advaita Vedanta of Shankaracharya calls forth the whole essence of a man in a holistic manner. The initial impression that this is an easily understood path evaporates rapidly when one understands – or even feels – what a proper piece of work it is to build the necessary qualifications², without which one makes absolutely no progress. However, this should not discourage anyone from actively engaging with the Sacred Tradition. Quite the contrary. Whoever feels the urge for liberation within, feels all the more called to make friends with this highly

2 Higher discrimination, letting go of all attachments, unquenchable thirst for freedom, mental stillness, etc. More about qualifications in later chapters.

refined spiritual path, and to ever more thoroughly investigate who and what this "I" is.

Another question arises in today's life practice: how can one integrate an ancient Wisdom Teaching into modern everyday life and its current events? Do we still understand this ancient teaching today, is it still up to date or is it more suited to spiritual romantics? The Teaching has been present throughout all the ages. Every age wonders this question alike and all too easily considers religion, philosophies or mystical teachings outdated and obsolete. Interestingly, however, only for as long as a society is doing well. In good times society quickly becomes arrogant and with dizzying ease falls for superficial materialism, idealism, or any kind of seductive ideology. Raphael calls this attitude "psychological comfort rather than true and genuine spirituality."

The main problem that prevents us from embarking on an authentic spiritual path intensively and with full responsibility, with total and loving dedication, lies in one particular aspect of man. It is his ego, the little self. Vedanta provides us with the exact structure of the framework of the human being³ with unrivalled clarity. Here it should suffice to say that it is the Ahamkara, the I-sense, the ego, that which collaborates in close liaison with the mind (Manas). This is a psychic organizational structure grown over thousands of existences, one that seems unshakeable and unavoidable. It is part of our inner organs⁴. No one can easily escape the influence of these innermost components of our being. After all, these forces work with different states of consciousness, such as the unconscious, the subconscious and the sleeping and waking consciousness. But in deep sleep, this sense complex is totally switched off, as it also is in the so-called fourth state of consciousness, the superconscious.

3 see graphic *ibid.* page 124-125

4 Antahkarana, the internal operating structure, which we in modern psychology call psyche. A very complex mental-emotional structure. See graphic page 126