THE HAMSA
A magazine for learning and living Advaita Vedānta
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Dedication to Our Lineage

This magazine is created with deepest gratitude to our spiritual teacher, our Guru and guide, Acharya Shunya, who is disciple of her Guru, Baba Ayodhyanath, who is disciple of his Guru, Paramatman Shanti Prakash. These eminent teachers, from Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, India are bearers of sacred knowledge of Advaita Vedānta, as expounded in the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gīta and Brahma Sutras.

This magazine is a humble reflection of the non-dual Truth Acharya Shunya’s students have received from her live discourses in her Vedic Spiritual Studies Program at Vedika Global - Acharya Shunya’s wisdom school in Emeryville, California.
Letter from the Editor

Jai Maa,

Welcome to Volume 2, Issue 1 of The Hamsa Magazine

The daily cycle of day and night is a powerful rhythm for all of creation. Ayurveda teaches us that the more we align our lifestyle with this universal pulse, the more vibrantly health will bloom from within us as all kinds of physical, mental, emotional, social, environmental, and spiritual wellbeing. Those outside transitions of darkness and light have practical effects on every level of our being, and with personal observation and wisdom from a Teacher, we begin to perceive that throughout the dynamic play of shadow and light, there is a forever awake, forever illumined source of consciousness shining within us. Here we step into the realm of Vedānta.

This Issue’s articles approach all kinds of darkness and light, ignorance and consciousness, and dust off the unified and unchanging Truth underlying them all.

In first-time contributor Sakshi’s article, ‘Discovering your Sākshi Self,’ we explore the ‘sleep of the soul,’ where our True Self forgets its own eternally-awake nature. This is the sleep of ignorance that we are all trying to wake up from on the spiritual path. Then, Acharya Shunya’s story related to sleep is a lullaby for the child within all of us who is gripped by fear of the world and so unable to surrender to the nourishing and mothering Devī (goddess) of sleep. Only when we acknowledge the ever-shining source of Light within are we secure enough to welcome physical sleep that nourishes the body and mind. Throughout this Issue you will find student writers and seasoned teachers exploring themes of apparent darkness in what we know is a fundamentally light-filled Universe.

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May these timeless teachings reaching you from countless teachers, sadhus and the Vedas offer new ways to engage with the rough texture of day to day life and remind you of the pure and formless consciousness infusing it all.

In Service,

Ishani Naidu
Editor in Chief
Who are we? What part of us stays the same while everything else about us seems to change? So many of us have asked ourselves questions throughout our lifetime. In looking for answers, we ask: "Am I the body?" The body changes as we age, we smoke, we develop, we age, the body dies. So, no, it can’t be the body. "And the mind?" Thoughts come and go, the mind is the witness of them. Now, does it? What if the mind is a story we tell ourselves, when we wake up? And, what do we mean by "self"? No, the mind is not the impermanent. We ask: "Am I, a daughter, wife, mother, friend?" Things or relationships can come and go, then disappear. Are they permanent or impermanent? These all are change. Then what is permanent? Vedanta says, Truth, the One, of all else there is something we have forgotten because we got caught up in the story of this material world. A person can change through living through all the material things that bring comfort, seek a better job, buy a beautiful home, find the love of our lives, have children, go through various ups and downs of life, yet your true nature is shining within, your sākshi bhāva is within. You can sense it in your heart and feel it in your being, it is your true self, your true nature.

In the Awake state, we are living in this physical cycle of birth and death, we are bound by impermanence. But we don’t have to be bound by impermanence, we can choose to live in the moment. When we wake up to the presence of the soul is a journey through three states of consciousness. To be present, to be the witness of our thoughts and actions, to be aware while you sleep. It was that which is always present, your sākshi, who knew.

Have you had that perfect, deep, satisfying sleep? What do we experience after a good sound sleep? We wake up refreshed, alive, and full of energy. Our moods are high, our bodies feel good, we’re ready to face the day. But then why isn’t this state of being that we all desire.

The ancient Vedānta texts, the Upanishads, say our entire existence as we perceive it in daily life is due to one long dream. The dream is not our true nature. As we dream, we dream of our dreams, we dream of our ego/personality, which we previously thought defined our existence. When we feel a presence within that is unchanged by all these changes, we begin to question what or if anything persists underneath the changes because we’ve totally forgotten our true self. We are bound by impermanence, but we don’t have to be bound by impermanence, we can choose to live in the moment.

In the Dream State the "I" (ego) is invested in the astral realm. This realm is more subtle than the gross physical world we encounter when we are awake, but still has fluctuating qualities. Dreams are all about relationships. Our strong feelings come from the actor who is trapped and allured by this material world. Are these permanent or impermanent? These all can also change. Then what is permanent? Vedanta says, Truth, the One, of all else there is something we have forgotten because we got caught up in the story of this material world, what we were believing to be our reality. What is not real, falls away, and Self-Realization emerges.

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Have you had that perfect, deep, satisfying sleep? What do we experience after a good sound sleep? We wake up refreshed, alive, and full of energy. Our moods are high, our bodies feel good, we’re ready to face the day. But then why isn’t this state of being that we all desire.
When to seed is the sattva aspect. Branches demonstrate the presence of rajas, and the tree’s innate knowing of when to flower, when to fruit, and the trunk and fibres of the leaves are dominant in tamas guna, the movement of the wind and flow of sap within its framework to the world around us. If I watch leafy branches of a tree swaying in the breeze, I can say that the solid is temporary settles down, that eternal presence we were seeking all along will reveal itself from within.

We begin to entertain the idea that who we really are is something beyond what we have done, all that is mental identification with what is outside and pulling it back toward identification with the Self, we can worship reverence, awe and acceptance of all life’s shades and textures. Even as we detach ourselves by retracting our co-worker, lover, enemy as a divine manifestation of Brahman through the power of Māyā is to live life with spontaneous and inspired child, Māyā is the collection of different shapes and sizes of building blocks an inexhaustible creative potential, and Māyā is Brahman’s mechanism for manifestation.

But Māyā’s ultimate purpose is not simply to make us forget our soul nature. For as much suffering it causes us, it is also Māyā’s way of helping us awaken to our soul nature. Once we begin to realize that our suffering is a temporary aspect of our life, not something permanent and real, we begin to see that we have the power to change our suffering. Through the process of practice of neti-neti we become attuned to what is Māyā. We cultivate a little space between our way twice. So when we observe that friendships change over our lifetime, or our hometown has gentrified since our last visit, we begin to see the separateness that we created ourselves. We begin to see that our suffering is not permanent and we begin to see the wisdom that there is a timeless presence of Brahman within us.

Within the Self is the profound understanding that what we know as objects and phenomena are not permanent and real. If we begin to entertain the idea that our two co-workers, lover, and enemy are Māyā’s way of helping us awaken to our soul nature, then we begin to see that our suffering is temporary and that other people’s suffering is also temporary. We begin to see that suffering is not permanent and that we have the power to change our suffering.

An Irresistible Power

If Brahman is a fascinating relationship between Māyā and Brahman that isn’t proof of That’s never-ending power to create.

Applying This Wisdom

If you know that you are the Self, you are no longer at the mercy of Māyā and you can make choices that are in alignment with the Self. You can begin to apply the knowledge and understanding that you are the Self to your daily life. You can begin to make choices that are in alignment with the Self. You can begin to live a life that is in alignment with the Self. You can begin to make choices that are in alignment with the Self.

And if the whole world turns upside down, Māyā will continue to show us how to create a life that is in alignment with the Self. Māyā is Brahman’s way of helping us awaken to our soul nature.

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I have been a student of Acharya Shunya for the last ten years. In my experience, wearing black clothes was bad or a mark of something even purifying. A student recently asked me whether these colors are considered auspicious, beneficial, and even purifying. According to Vedanta, colors are associated with different gunas or qualities of the mind. These colors do evoke more sense of lightness in the mind, it doesn't necessarily mean that dark colors are bringing about more darkness in our mind.

In our sweet community (kula sampradāya) we often wear white and light colors. Our house (ghātika) is decorated with beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful logo!, to remind us of this very quest. The lotus grows and thrives, strives.

The analogy of the lotus is used frequently in Vedanta and in our Vedika home (see our logo!). It is a good indicator that one is close to your essential nature, free from self-aggrandizing thoughts, embrace and experience relation to all beings, and realize the union of Self and the world.

The Gunas

We start relieving the suffering of minds dominant in Rajas and Tamas by taking physical action. For the depressed person or the one feeling self-defeating, an extra dose of physical activity is very helpful. The simple practices of cleaning are associated with sattva or purity, also speaks to achieving an internal quality of balance, clear perception."Likes increase like, opposites reduce." (whatever color), get rid of clutter, bring flowers and living beings into our space and hearts, all helps to relieve the oppressive overlay of Tamas. However, a clean house and a shower is not a guarantee against tamas in our mind. Similarly, while lighter colors do evoke more sense of lightness in the mind, it doesn't necessarily mean that dark colors are bringing about more darkness in our mind.

I'm more evolved than that guy! My teacher is better than yours! I do more Sevā and sadhana (service and spiritual practices)! I always wear white and that guy doesn't, so he's not as pure as me!

In simple terms, when our minds are agitated we are experiencing a mental state of rajah. When our minds are more balanced, we are experiencing sattva, with its beautiful light and blooms above stagnant foul dirty water. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above.

Rajas, Tamas and Sattva are gunas or qualities, of the mind. They are energetic states that determine the quality and tenor of our mental thought process. In very simple terms, when our minds are agitated we are experiencing rajah, when resistant and depressive we are experiencing tamas, when in a balanced calm mental state, we are experiencing sattva. These gunas are influenced (and are in turn influenced by) the experiences of the physical world. They are not independent entities. Each of these gunas acts like an overlay of our mind and thoughts. In very simple terms, when our minds are agitated we are experiencing rajah. The analogy of the lotus is used frequently in Vedanta and in our Vedika home (see our logo!). It is a good indicator that one is close to your essential nature, free from self-aggrandizing thoughts, embrace and experience relation to all beings, and realize the union of Self and the world.


dominant ego. This means developing a mind that is able to stay balanced in the face of external stimulus. In this way, whether we are wearing a black sweatshirt or a white Kurta, we retain our memory of our divine Self, then being in a dominant state of Tamas, is associated most with inability to care for oneself including cleaning the body and home, etc. Tamas, in association with negativity or criticism, or purity, also speaks to achieving an internal quality of stability in sattva- unswayed from an abiding knowledge of the deepest divine Self (ātman), then being in a maximal state of darkness from the light of our mind. This does not mean that we are weak or more vulnerable to pain or depression. As long as we stay balanced in the face of thoughts and emotions from our world, our inner radiance can shine through. For instance, when a person is feeling depressed, he may express himself in anger, be more critical, be more judgmental. That may express itself in depression, and an inability to care for oneself including cleaning the body and home, etc. Tamas, in association with negativity or criticism, or purity, also speaks to achieving an internal quality of stability in sattva- unswayed from an abiding knowledge of the deepest divine Self (ātman), then being in a maximal state of darkness from the light of our mind. This does not mean that we are weak or more vulnerable to pain or depression. As long as we stay balanced in the face of thoughts and emotions from our world, our inner radiance can shine through.

Because the gunas describe qualities and characteristics, they are dependent on the physical actions that one is engaged in. A rajah dominant mind may express itself with an excessive attachment to discipline and order. If you find yourself “Always/Never” or “Doing” mind, it is a good indicator that your mind is in a rajah state. A rajah active mind is always seeking perfection and excellence, while a rajah passive mind is always seeking perfection and excellence.

In simple terms, when our minds are agitated we are experiencing rajah. The analogy of the lotus is used frequently in Vedanta and in our Vedika home (see our logo!). It is a good indicator that one is close to your essential nature, free from self-aggrandizing thoughts, embrace and experience relation to all beings, and realize the union of Self and the world.

Rajas is associated most with the quality of restless agitation and maximally reinforces the ego. A rajas dominant mind may be short-tempered, critical, judgmental, and in a constant state of restless agitation. This can come up in our spiritual pursuits too - the spiritual ego is a rajas state of mind. The rajah mind acts like a mirror of our environment (and are in turn influenced by) our experiences of the physical world. They are mutable and changeable. Ultimately, each of these gunas expresses itself in an impression of sattva, with its beautiful light and blooms above stagnant foul dirty water. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above. Unblemished by the dirty murky waters below, happily receiving the light of the sun, and evoking sattva, with its beautiful flowers and lush green leaves above.
Choosing the Nature of Desires

Firstly, we should check if our desires are binding or non-binding in nature. Binding desires are those which lead to agitation of the mind and our attachment to them. They can affect our ability to lead a balanced and fulfilling life. Binding desires are those that require us to act in a certain way, and if we do not act, we feel guilty or experience suffering. On the other hand, non-binding desires are those that do not trap us in unhealthy thought patterns or bring about other binding desires in us. This Dharmic approach teaches us to become like a gardener in the field of life. It teaches us to put our intention into sowing the seeds of our desires, rather than allowing them to grow unchecked.

Choosing non-binding desires is satisfying our desires while aligned with the law of “Karma YOGA”. Karma YOGA, the path of action, teaches us to work hard, be respectful of our coworkers, go for extra training as needed, and bring our best effort into everything we do. This way, we will be constantly moving from one desire to another, leading to an falling away from our ultimate goal. A Dharmic approach to desires helps us to see the bigger picture and understand that our desires are just a means to an end.

Vedanta teaches us that while it is important to fulfill our worldly desires so that a spiritual desire may bloom, it is important to note that though desires must be fulfilled, they should not be the primary focus of our lives. Veda deals with desires along with having a desire for Moksha. It is important to accept them and not try to bury them as that will ultimately lead to agitation of the mind due to our attachment to them and trap us in a cycle of suffering. Sometimes, we must choose not to act on this desire.

Choosing the Quality of Our Desires

Secondly, we need to evaluate if our desires are strong, mixed or empty in nature. Strong desires are ones which not only support us but also those around us. Tanmatra desires are ones which are self-destructive, for example, a drug addict who steals from others to feed his/her addiction. A Dharmic approach teaches us to find alternatives to these desires and focus on fulfilling the basic needs of our life. For example, having a job so that we can pay our bills, have a house to live in, and have food to eat is essential for survival. Likewise, desires to experience physical pleasures, for example, going on vacation or eating a delicious meal, are natural and will not hurt anyone. On the other hand, desires that are harmful to others or the environment are not Dharmic and should be avoided.

Vedanta’s practical approach to desires can be summarized in the following steps:

1. We should check if our desires are binding or non-binding in nature.
2. We should evaluate our desires and determine if they are satisfying our basic needs or are leading to suffering.
3. We should choose to fulfill non-binding desires, which do not trap us in unhealthy thought patterns or bring about other binding desires in us.
4. We should be mindful of our desires and make sure they align with our values and goals.
5. We should always keep in mind that our ultimate goal is to fulfill the basic needs of our life and not be swayed by worldly desires.

By emphasizing Dharma first, Vedanta teaches us to meet our desires ethically and not in an unchecked manner. Desires must be balanced and fulfilling, and the Dharmic approach helps us to achieve this balance. Vedanta provides us with a map for our desires, allowing us to navigate the path of life with intention and purpose.

Vedanta understanding our desires and how they affect our lives is crucial. By understanding the nature and quality of our desires, we can choose to fulfill them in a Dharmic manner and avoid suffering. Vedanta’s practical approach to desires provides us with a guide to lead a fulfilling and meaningful life.

Choosing the Nature of Desires

Choosing the Quality of Our Desires

Vedanta says there are four goals of human existence, namely - Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha.

Dharma relates to living life with nobility, following a good value system and conscious living. Artha relates to attainment of the ultimate desire, for example, going on vacation, buying a house, or accumulating wealth. Kama relates to experiences of pleasure, for example, going for a walk in nature or indulging in a delicious meal. Moksha is the ultimate goal, which is for liberation from the cycle of suffering and desiring by understanding one’s true spiritual nature.
The following is a selection from Acharya Shunya's book, Ayurveda Lifestyle Wisdom.

This excerpt comes from Acharya Shunya's book, Medicine, and the Hamsa Magazine.
Shadow and Light, aspects of our life. Ego to eternal light, a strife, life after life.

The play of shadow can sway or excite, create an entire show, night after night.

Shadows come and go due to the light, somewhere low, somewhere bright.

The inner glow offers some insight, and we steadily plow towards the light.

As we grow closer to the light, we diminish the shadow and are ready to ignite.

Though the candlestick still casts a shadow, the lit up wick can no longer do so.

Merging with light it becomes the light. Such is the glow, the candle too stays no more

and the light melts its shadow. Warmth and glow melt the ego.

But were it not for the shadow, would we know the light, play with the transient shadow, strive for eternal light?

for where there is eternal glow and forever bright, there is no shadow, there is no light.
ahamkāra: ego, sense of I-ness
anādi: without beginning or end, eternally existing
artha: material wealth, refers to the material needs of survival (food, shelter, etc.)
Ātman: the eternal and indestructible Self, refers to Brahman dwelling in all beings
āvarana: covering faculty of māyā
bhāva: feeling, emotional attitude
Brahman: the One Universal Consciousness that is both experiencing and manifesting all of creation as the innermost reality; the underlying spiritual reality
buddhi: all of the intellect, memory and ego
chikitsa: therapy
dharma: righteousness, duty, noble values
gunas: the three primordial qualities (sattva, rajas and tamas) that make up all of manifested reality, they are the subtle, essential substances making up māyā
guru: a spiritual teacher
kāma: pleasure, enjoyment
Karma yoga: an attitude toward activity that is without expectation of reward or attachment to certain outcomes
kula: a spiritual family
māyā: the changing reality superimposed onto objective reality
moksha: the destruction of delusion, clear and total knowing what is eternal and non-eternal
neti-neti: a methodical practice of discriminating between what is the Self and what is temporary and impermanent.

rajas: the guna of movement and transformation
sādhanā: voluntary dedicated discipline to reach self-determined spiritual goals
Sādhanā Chatushtayam: a series of conscious behaviors a student of Vedānta cultivates so they can progress on their spiritual path
sākshi: witness, observer
sampradāya: spiritual lineage imparting knowledge of the Self
satchitānanda: a combination of three words used to describe Brahman, meaning eternal consciousness and bliss
satsangha: gathering of students to hear spiritual discourses from a spiritual teacher
sattva: the guna of clarity, knowledge, harmony
sevā: selfless service
shāstra: sacred texts revealing the Self
shaucham: purity, cleanliness
tamas: the guna of inertia
Upāsana yoga: behavior and worship practices to bring us closer to knowing the Self
vairagya: dispassion, non-attachment
vidya: knowledge, also word for any of the vedic sciences
vinaya: Vedic customs
viveka: discrimination between what is eternal and non-eternal.
Aparna Amy Lewis is the Dean of the Spiritual Studies program at Vedika Global and a life member of Acharya Shunya’s Vedic Ecclesiastical Council. As Dean, Aparna articulates how the central tenets of ancient Vedic spirituality will be upheld, nurtured and archived in a classroom setting. She oversees ethical and cultural leadership for the community of member students, and teaches students as an appointed professor of Vedic Ethics, Vinay and Dharma studies, and Spiritual Discipline (9-Step Advaita Vedanta Sadhana). She oversees scripture-based program development, counsels students on their spiritual life journeys, and mentors volunteers in offering selfless service (seva). Aparna writes regularly for The Hamsa Magazine, the official publication of the Spiritual Studies Program, is working on a Sadhana Book for Acharya Shunya’s students, co-teaches retreats and spiritual classes, and is involved in setting up a global online archive of Acharya Shunya’s spiritual teachings for posterity.

Aparna’s internal commitment is to the central truth of Advaita Vedanta – that we are all one. This inspires her to lead a life of service to this truth. Aparna was ordained into Acharya Shunya’s Vedic lineage in 2009, and since then, she has supported her Guru’s message, full time, in various key portfolios, including as Dean since 2014.

A student of Acharya Shunya since 2009, Ishani is a Vedika Certified Ayurveda Health Educator. She serves as Editor in Chief of The Hamsa Magazine. Ishani now lives in Coimbatore, India with her two small children and husband. In her free time she writes stories for children exploring themes of Ayurveda and Vedic, and volunteers in schools and colleges teaching kids, teens and adults Ayurveda as a body mind and soul health science.

Sakshi has been on a spiritual path for nearly twenty years, she has been a student of Shunyaji’s since 2014. Along the way Sakshi has studied hatha yoga and earned her 500 hour certification in 2009. Sakshi has always loved art and created and participated in Craft Shows with her small polymer clay creations. She has had a long career as a mechanical drafter in the laser medical field and will soon be retiring. She looks forward to more seva with her teacher and spending time cultivating a simple, quiet life at home.

Sukhdeep Kaur has been studying with Acharya Shunya since 2015 and is a member of the Vedika Gurukulum. She is a member of National Ayurvedic Medical Association as a Certified Ayurvedic Practitioner and a Registered Yoga Alliance teacher. She works for a corporation as an Attorney and also volunteers her time as an Attorney, Ayurveda Practitioner and Yoga Teacher. She enjoys teaching to learn, writing, and living the Ayurvedic and Yogic wisdom.

Vidya has been studying with Acharya Shunya since 2012. She performs seva as part of Vedika’s Audio/Video team, writes for the The Hamsa Magazine and leads a special mantra chanting group as part of Vedika’s Spiritual Studies Program.

Outside of Vedika, Vidya works as a software engineer with Nokia. She has a Bachelor’s degree in Electronics from Delhi University and Master’s degrees in Information and Communication Sciences from Delhi University and in Computer Science from North Carolina State University.

About the Magazine Title, ‘The Hamsa’

Just as the swan (Hamsa in Sanskrit) lives on water, but its feathers are never wet, similarly, an Advaita Vedanta (follower of Advaita Vedanta) dwells in the Maya-filled Samsara, fulfilling all duties, but remains untouched and unpolluted by Maya. Such a one is called a spiritual Hamsa. Vedic seekers must effort to emulate Hamsa-like ideals in their personal lives.