TRUTH AS ENCOUNTER
A VAIṢṆAVA VEDĀNTA EXPOSITION ON THE GURU'S GRACE

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One of the most contented issues in Vedānta, a school of Indian systematic thought, is whether Brahman, the absolute reality, possesses qualities or not. The tradition of Advaita Vedānta associated with figures such as Gauḍapāda, Śaṅkara, and Maṇḍana Miśra, teaches that Brahman is ultimately without any qualities (*nirviśeṣa*) and devoid of agency. The Vaiṣṇava schools of Vedānta founded by thinkers like Rāmānuja, Madhva, and Caitanya reject the Advaita view and argue that Brahman does possess qualities (*saviśeṣa*), including agency.[1]

In this paper I will present the personal understanding of Brahman in Vaiṣṇava Vedānta from the perspective of the role of guru's mercy. The tradition of Vaiṣṇava Vedānta, especially articulated by Madhva and Baladeva, emphasises that guru's mercy is essential in realising Brahman. They both base their arguments on *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4.4–17 where we can observe the principle of dialogical exchange, that is, a student must first serve his guru to receive his mercy. Moreover, from Madhva's and Baladeva's perspective invoking a guru's mercy is identical with invoking Brahman's mercy. As we shall see, this need for receiving Brahman's mercy is directly co-related to the Vaiṣṇava view of Brahman as the supreme person.

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[*]This paper is dedicated to late Prof. Minoru Kasai. He was a student of the eminent Swiss theologian Emil Brunner who taught at the International Christian University (ICU, Tokyo) in postwar Japan. Prof. Kasai later taught the history of Indian intellectual thought at ICU. I was among his last students.

[1] Jīva Gosvāmī, though a Vaiṣṇava Vedāntin, notably accepts Brahman as without qualities (*nirviśeṣa*). However he also agrees that the highest manifestation of reality is Bhagavān with qualities.

It was Madhva (1238–1317) (Sharma, 2000, p. 79), the founder of the dualistic (*dvaita*) school of Vaiṣṇava Vedānta, who first directly examined the topic of the guru's grace in the *Brahmasūtra*s, allocating two *sūtra*s on this topic.[2] Since neither Śaṅkara nor Rāmānuja explicitly discussed the *Brahmasūtra*s' views on the guru in their commentaries on this text, Madhva's commentary on these *sūtra*s is an ideal place start our study of the place of the guru in Vedānta.

Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, one of the greatest Caitanya Vaiṣṇava authors of the eighteenth century, also discusses the same topic in his *Govindabhāṣya* commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*s. He was trained in the Mādhva tradition but later converted to Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism.[3] To accommodate the teachings of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, his *Brahmasūtra* commentary diverts from Madhva's commentary on many significant points, but commenting on *sūtras* 3.3.44–45, which Madhva claims are on the role of the guru, he repeats Madhva's commentary almost verbatim. This shows the importance of Madhva's explanation on the role of guru. In this article, I will examine Baladeva's commentary on the *sūtras* along side Madhva's since the former explains the latter more in detail.

In what follows, first I examine Madhva's and Baladeva's understanding on the role of the guru's grace, focusing on their commentaries on *Brahmasūtra*s 3.3.44–45. When necessary, however, I will also incorporate relevant materials from their commentaries on other texts. In this context, I discuss in detail the story of Satyakāma Jābāla and Upakosala Kāmalāyana, as told in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (4.4–17), which Madhva and Baladeva refer to in their *Brahmasūtra* commentaries. I offer a structuralist analysis of these stories and point out that the principle of dialogical exchange plays a major role in the revelation of Brahman.

To better understand this principle of dialogical exchange I discuss in the second part by way of comparison Martin Buber's concept of 'I and You' (*Ich und Du*) and Emil Brunner's idea of 'Truth as encounter' (*Wahrheit als Begegnung*). Finally, I will conclude by pointing out two parallels between

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[2] *Brahmasūtra*s 3.3.44–45. As Sharma notes: 'In his commentary on BS [*Brahmasūtra*] iii.3.44–46 Madhva discusses the place and importance of the ideal Guru and the importance of his grace in the final flowering of the spiritual personality of the aspirant [...] *The importance of Guru-Bhakti has not been so well brought out as an integral part of the Theism of the Brahma Sūtras by any other Bhāṣyakāra than Madhva.*' (Sharma, 1986, pp. 378–9. Italics original).

[3] See Buchta (2007), pp. 85–86, Elkman (1986), pp. 25–6, Narang (1984), pp. 1–4, Wright (1993), pp. 158–165.

Madhva and Baladeva on the one hand, and Buber and Brunner on the other hand.

MADHVA AND BALADEVA ON BRAHMASŪTRAS 3.3.44–45

Commenting on *Brahmasūtra* 3.3.44,[4] Madhva writes:

> Moreover, the sight of Brahman does not come about just by listening and so on. Rather, [it comes about by listening and so on] together with procedure. Just as what is given by a guru, exactly in that way it is. For it is said 'A person who has a teacher (*ācārya*) knows' (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.14.2).[5]

The *Chāndogya* passage Madhva cites here to highlight the importance of having a guru to realise Brahman, occurs in Uddalāka Āruṇi's instruction to his son Śvetaketu. The father uses an analogy: a man is brought to an unknown place blindfolded. Subsequently he finds his way back by the guidance of another person who knows the location of his homeland, and can guide him into the proper direction. Commenting on this section of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* Madhva writes:

> How can we understand Viṣṇu, who is distinct [from us]? To this [question posed by his son Śvetaketu, Uddalāka Āruṇi] said: 'Just like a person, who was blindfolded, reaches his home by the instruction of other person, in the same way one reaches Viṣṇu, who is distinct [from the living entity], by the instruction of his guru.'[6]

Since we are spiritually blind we are unable to understand Viṣṇu on our own. Only through the instruction of the guru, who is no longer blindfolded like us, are we able to reach Viṣṇu, the supreme person. Madhva however, states that receiving instruction from one's guru is a necessity but

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[4] *Brahmasūtra* 3.3.44: *pradānavad eva tad uktam.*

[5] *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 3.3.44: *na ca śravaṇādimātreṇa brahmadṛṣṭir bhavati, kintu setikartavyena. Yathā gurudattaṃ tathaiva bhavati, 'ācāryavān puruṣo veda' (Chāndogya 6.14.2) iti hy uktam.*

[6] Madhva's *Chāndogyopaniṣadbhāṣya* 6.14: *kathaṃ sa jñāyate viṣṇur bhinna ity atra cābravīt. yathānyopadeśena baddhākṣaḥ svagṛhaṃ vrajet / tathācāryopadeśena bhinnam īśaṃ vrajet pumān.*

not sufficient for the realisation of Brahman (*brahmadṛṣṭi*). In the above-cited commentary on *Brahmasūtra* 3.3.44, he teaches that the realisation of Brahman comes only when hearing from the guru is 'accompanied by procedure' (*setikartavyena*). Unfortunatel, Madhva does not clarify what he means by 'procedure'. The rest of his commentary is also rather obscure.

To unpack Madhva's somewhat terse comments, it is useful to look at Baladeva's *Govindabhāṣya* on the same *sūtra* where he elaborates on Madhva's commentary. According to Baladeva, each *sūtra* is to be examined in terms of five auxiliaries of the Nyāya school namely: 1) the topic or the object to be examined (*viṣaya*); 2) doubt (*saṃśaya*); 3) the *prima facie* view (*pūrvapakṣa*); 4) the established view (*siddhānta*); 5) consistency (*saṅgati*).[7] In the case of *sūtra* 3.3.44, Baladeva takes the following three passages from the Upaniṣads as the statements to be examined (*viṣaya*):

> 'He who has the highest devotion to God, and as to God, so to his guru, to that great soul, the realities that are taught certainly become manifest.'[8] 'Exactly in this way, in this world a person who resorts to a guru knows.'[9] 'After examining the worlds obtained by ritual performances a *brāhmaṇa* becomes indifferent. It is not possible [to obtain] through action [a world] which is not created. To understand it [i.e. Brahman] he should certainly approach a guru who perceives the supreme person.'[10]

Concerning these three passages on the role of guru, Baladeva raises a doubt (*saṃśaya*): is, in addition to receiving his instruction, the grace of a guru necessary in obtaining Brahman?[11] The *prima facie* view (*pūrvapakṣa*) says the guru's mercy is not necessary since the student obtains Brahman just by receiving instruction from him.[12] Baladeva rejects this opinion and states the established view (*siddhānta*):

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[7] *Govindabhāṣya* 1.1.1:   *yasyāṃ khalu viṣayasaṃśayapūrvapakṣasiddhāntasaṅgatibhedāt pañca nyāyāṅgāni bhavanti.*

[8] *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.23: *yasya deve parā bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau / tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ prakāśante mahātmanaḥ.*

[9] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.14.2: *evam evehācāryavān puruṣo veda.* Baladeva's *Sūkṣmāṭīkā*: *ācāryavān iti. kṛtagurvāśrayaṇaḥ sarvadā tatsevī cety arthaḥ.*

[10] *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.12: *parīkṣya lokān karmacitān brāhmaṇo nirvedam āyān nāsty akṛtaḥ kṛtena / tadvijñānārthaṃ sa gurum evābhigacchet samitpāṇiḥ śrotriyaṃ brahmaniṣṭham.* In the *Sūkṣmāṭīkā* Baladeva glosses '*brahmaniṣṭham*' as '*bhagavadanubhāvinam*'.

[11] *Govindabhāṣya* 3.3.44:   *iha saṃśayaḥ.   gurulabdhāc chravaṇāditaḥ phalaṃ guru-prasādasahitāt tasmād veti.*

[12] *Govindabhāṣya* 3.3.44: *tatra śravaṇāditaḥ phalābhidhānāt kiṃ tatprasādeneti [...].*

> Just as the means like hearing [from the guru] which is the
> cause of obtaining Brahman, is given [only] by a guru who is
> pleased, in the very same way its fruit, which is the obtainment
> of it [i.e. Brahman], [is given by a guru who is pleased].[13]

Baladeva here echoes and elaborates on Madhva's commentary cited above:
'Just as what is given by a guru, exactly in that way it is (*yathā gurudattaṃ
tathaiva bhavati*).' Baladeva makes it clear that in order to receive instruction
to obtain Brahman, the guru must be pleased (*prasanna*). In the same
manner, Baladeva says, the realisation of Brahman is given by the grace of the
guru who is pleased. This accompaniment of guru's grace (*guruprasādasahita*)
corresponds to Madhva's phrase 'accompanied by procedure (*setikartavyena*)'.
Now we understand that Madhva's point in his commentary is that in real-
ising Brahman one must receive instruction together with guru's grace.

Moving on to the next *sūtra* ,[14] Madhva asks whether the guru's grace
or self-effort is more efficient in obtaining Brahman.[15] Following Madhva,
Baladeva asks virtually the same question.[16] Then the *prima facie* view
according to Baladeva states: 'Self-effort is more powerful, because when
[a disciple] makes no effort, his [i.e. the guru's] favour is not able to do
anything.'[17] The established view according to Madhva and Baladeva is that
guru's grace is stronger.[18] Madhva says:

> [The guru's grace is stronger] since there is ample evidence.
> [For example] even after receiving knowledge from a bull and
> so on, Satyakāma said [to his guru Gautama]: 'However, may
> the reverend one speak to me about the desired object. For
> I have heard from people like you that knowledge leads to
> the most excellent state if it is obtained from a guru.' Then
> [Gautama the guru to Satyakāma, the student] authorises this:
> 'Nothing concerning this [knowledge] goes away [from you].'

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[13] *Govindabhāṣya* 3.3.44: *yathā prasannena guruṇā brahmāptihetuḥ śravaṇādi sādhanaṃ
dattaṃ tathaiva tatprāptirūpaṃ phalam bhavati*.

[14] *Brahmasūtra* 3.3.45: *liṅgabhūyastvāt tad dhi balīyas tad api*.

[15] *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 3.3.45: *guruprasādaḥ svaprayatno vā balavān iti nigadyate*.

[16] *Govindabhāṣya* 3.3.45: *atha svaprayatno balavān śrīguruprasādo veti sandehe* [...].

[17] *Govindabhāṣya* 3.3.45: *akṛte prayatne tatprasādasyākiṃcitkaratvāt svaprayatno balavān*.

[18] *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 3.3.45: *guruprasāda eva balavān*; *Govindabhāṣya* 3.3.45: *tat-
prasādanam eva baliṣṭham*.

> Moreover, there are the statements of Upakosala [to his guru Satyakāma].[19]

The evidence Madhva refers to are the well-known stories of Satyakāma Jabālā[20] and of Upakosala Kāmalāyana[21] told in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. Since these stories are crucial in Madhva's and Baladeva's discussions on the mercy of the guru, I will examine them in detail. To understand the stories Madhva and Baladeva refer to, I summarise them first, using the commentaries of Śaṅkara and Madhva when appropriate. Then I attempt to extract some general principles from these two stories, applying a structuralist analysis to them.

In the first story, Satyakāma approaches his teacher Gautama: 'I want to stay with you to study the Vedas. I approach you.' Śaṅkara glosses that Satyakāma approaches Gautama as his student (*śiṣyatayā*).[22] In the Upaniṣadic tradition, the student's desire for leaning is considered to be the starting point of education. A teacher does not teach unless and until he is approached by the student.

After accepting Satyakāma as his student, Gautama asks Satyakāma to take care of four hundred feeble cows and sends him away.[23] When the number of cows increases to a thousand, a bull, a fire, a goose and a king-fisher approach Satyakāma and each teaches a quarter of Brahman. According to Śaṅkara, these beings are in fact the gods Vāyu, Agni, Āditya and Prāṇa.[24]

After being instructed by these four beings, Satyakāma returns to his teacher Gautama. The guru notices Satyakāma is glowing with the knowledge of Brahman and asks who taught him.[25] Satyakāma replies his gurus

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[19] *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 3.3.45: *ṛṣabhādibhyo vidyāṃ jñātvāpi satyakāmena 'bhagavāṃs tv eva kāmaṃ brūyāt'* [*Chāndogya* 4.9.2], *'śrutaṃ hy eva me bhagavaddṛśebhya ācāryād dhaiva vidyā viditā sādhiṣṭhaṃ prāpayati'* [*Chāndogya* 4.9.3] *itivacanāt, 'atra ha na kiṃcana vīyāya'* [*Chāndogya* 4.9.3] *ityanujñānād upakosalavacanāc ca liṅgabhūyastvād.*

[20] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4.4–9.

[21] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4.10–17.

[22] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4.4: *brahmacaryaṃ bhagavati vatsyāmi, upeyāṃ bhagavantam iti.* Śaṅkara's *Chāndogyopaniṣadbhāṣya*: *brahmacaryaṃ bhagavati pūjāvati tvayi vatsyāmy ata upeyām upagaccheyaṃ śiṣyatayā bhagavantam.*

[23] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4.4: *tam upanīya kṛśānām abalānāṃ catuḥśatā gā nirākṛtya uvācemāḥ somyānusaṃvrajeti.*

[24] Śaṅkara's *Chāndogyopaniṣadbhāṣya* 4.5.1: *tam etaṃ śraddhātapobhyāṃ siddhaṃ vāyudevatā dikṣaṃ bandhinī tuṣṭā saty ṛṣabham anupraviśya ṛṣabhāpannānugrahāyā* [...]; *Chāndogyopaniṣadbhāṣya* 4.7.1: *haṃsa ādityaḥ*; *Chāndogyopaniṣadbhāṣya* 4.8.2: *sa ca madguḥ prāṇaḥ.*

[25] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4.9.2: *brahmavid iva vai somya bhāsi. ko nu tvānuśāsāseti.*

were non-human,[26] and then requests Gautama to instruct him: 'However, may the reverend one speak to me about the desired object. For, I have heard from people like you that knowledge obtains the most excellent state if it is obtained from a teacher.' It is noteworthy that Satyakāma asks Gautama to teach him about Brahman even though he was already taught on the subject in its entirety by the gods. Subsequently Gautama teaches on the same subject again, and Śaṅkara points out that what Gautama taught was exactly the same as what the gods had taught Satyakāma.[27] At the end Gautama assures his student: 'Nothing concerning this [knowledge] goes away [from you]'.

In the second story, Satyakāma has himself become a teacher and a student called Upakosala lives with him to learn. The teacher asks the student to attend the household fires. Upakosala faithfully executes his service to the guru, while Satyakāma leaves the house without teaching him. The various household fires speak to him and teach him Brahman. Satyakāma returns to the home and notices Upakosala glowing with knowledge. Upakosala too asks his guru to teach Brahman and Satyakāma finally teaches Upakosala.

Since there are many parallels between the two stories, it is useful to analyze their underlying scheme from the perspective of structuralism. According to the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), the father of structuralism, language consists of linguistic signs and the task of linguistics is to study the structure of these linguistic signs (*langue*), which underlies their concrete manifestation (*parole*) (1983, p. 14). The French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) later applied Saussurian structuralism to the disciplines outside linguistics. He argued not only language but also other human phenomena such as family structure, ritual performance, and myth can be understood in terms of structures consisting of various signs. According to Levi-Strauss a myth is a particular language, which has the aspects of *langue* and *parole* simultaneously. A myth is *parole* in the sense that it tells you a specific story. However, it is at the same time *langue* since it has a structure consisting of various signs. In the case of a myth, signs are individual events and the characters described in the story. Categorising these elements into various groups and analyzing the relations between these groups, Lévi-Strauss suggests we can understand the structure of a particular myth (Lévi-Strauss, 1998, p. 103).

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[26] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4.9.2: *anye manuṣyebhya iti ha pratijajñe.*
[27] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4.9.3: *tasmai ha etad eva uvāca.* Śaṅkara's *Chāndogyopaniṣad-bhāṣya*: *ācāryo 'bravīt tasmai tām eva daivatair uktāṃ vidyām.*

1 APPROACH	2 ORDER	3 SEPARATION	4 QUASI-FULFILMENT	5 REUNION	6 REQUEST	7 FULFILMENT
Satyakāma approaches Gautama to live as his student.	Gautama orders Satyakāma to tend his cows.	Satyakāma leaves Gautama.	Various beings teach Brahman to Satyakāma.	Satyakāma returns to his teacher Gautama.	Satyakāma asks Gautama for instruction.	Gautama instructs Satyakāma.
Upakosala lives as a student with Satyakāma.	Upakosala tends Satyakāma's fire for twelve years.	Satyakāma leaves without having taught Upakosala.	Various types of fires teach Brahman to Upakosala.	Satyakāma returns.	Upakosala asks Satyakāma for instruction.	Satyakāma instructs Upakosala.

Table 1: Satyakāma and Upakosala

Following Lévi-Strauss' methodology, we may divide the stories of Satya-kāma and Upakosala into the smallest possible events and present them as in Table 1. When we read the table horizontally from left to right, we simply read particular stories (*parole*) of Satyakāma and Upakosala. However, when we examine the chart vertically, we notice each column contains the events of the same nature. When we examine relationships between different columns, we start seeing the underlying structure (*langue*) of these stories. In the chart above, each column may be named as follows:

1. Approach—a student approaches a guru.

2. Order—the guru asks for the student's service.

3. Separation—the guru and the student are separated.

4. Quasi-fulfilment—various beings instruct the student.

5. Reunion—the guru and the student are reunited.

6. Request—the student asks for the guru's instruction.

7. Fulfilment—the guru gives the student instruction.

Observing these seven columns we realise the underlying symmetrical structure of the two stories, which consists of three pairs of correspon-dences: Approach–Fulfilment (1–7); Order–Request (2–6); and Separation–Reunion (3–5). From this analysis of the underlying structure, we may note the following two points. First of all, it is the performance of service that qualifies the student to receive the instruction from the guru, as the second pair (2–6) shows. Secondly, the instructions from those who are not one's guru (the fourth column) are essentially superfluous. Although initially it may appear to correspond with the first column, the value of the teachings the students receive in the fourth column is ultimately made obsolete by the actual fulfilment in the seventh column. This implies that the structure of these two stories is maintainable *without* the fourth column. Of course from the perspective of a reader the fourth column is not meaningless since this is precisely the section that teaches the necessity of receiving knowledge from one's own guru. However from the perspective of Satyakāma or of Upakosala, the fourth column is superfluous in the sense that it is redundant and does not fulfil their goal to gain full understanding of Brahman. In other

words, the fourth column is meaningful to a reader precisely because of its redundancy in Satyakāma's and Upakosala's search of knowledge.

These two structural observations bring us to the fundamental point of these two stories: the idea of a dialogical relation. The first observation informs us that the instruction concerning Brahman leads to the fulfilment only when there is a relationship of communicative exchange between the guru and the student. As a student approaches a guru, the guru gives an order in response. The student fulfils the request and in turn asks for the instruction. Only then the guru gives a full instruction to the students. In other words, the full instruction is given to the student only after he establishes a personal relation with his guru through service.

The second observation negatively confirms the same point. In both stories, the students perform their respective service to their gurus, not to those who teach them in the fourth column. Nor did the students approach them for instruction in the first place. The instructors in the fourth column could not give full enlightenment to the students since there was no guru-student relation between them. Madhva confirms this point in his commentary on the story of Satyakāma: 'What was spoken by them [i.e. gods who taught Satyakāma] was not according to the understanding of the guru since he [i.e. Satyakāma] pursued the assent of [his] guru [but not of the gods].'[28] Thus the stories of Satyakāma and Upakosala teach us that the dialogical relation based on the student's service and the guru's favour is central in the realisation of Brahman.

The significance of serving one's guru is also well expressed in the *Bhagavadgītā*, one of the central texts in Vedānta: 'Know that [i.e. Brahman] by falling at the feet of [the guru], by asking questions, and by serving [him]. Wise people who have seen the truth will teach you knowledge [about Brahman].'[29] Commenting on the verse, Baladeva explains that service (*sevā*) means to attend one's guru like his servant,[30] exactly as both Satyakāma and Upakosala did in relation to their gurus.

Serving one's guru is essential because it evokes the guru's grace without which full realisation of Brahman is not possible. Commenting on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, another important Vaiṣṇava text, Madhva says, 'If it is

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[28] Madhva's *Chāndogyopaniṣadbhāṣya* 4.2: *nācāryabudhyā tair uktam ato 'nujñāṃ guror agāt.*

[29] *Bhagavadgītā* 4.34: *tad viddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā / upadekṣyanti te jñānaṃ jñāninas tattvadarśinaḥ.*

[30] *Gītābhūṣaṇa* 4.34: *sevā bhṛtyavat teṣāṃ paricaryā.*

devoid of the guru's favour, one's spiritual practice is not pleasing to the supreme person. However, one certainly obtains the Supreme by the guru's instruction. There is no doubt [about this].'[31] Madhva points out that one's practice does not bear its fruits unless the student obtains the guru's favour (*anugraha*).

Based primarily on an examination of Madhva's and Baladeva's commentaries on *Brahmasūtra*s 3.3.44–45, it has become clear that according to these two Vedāntists one cannot obtain Brahman without the guru's grace, and, secondly, the student obtains that grace by developing a personal relationship with his guru through service.

However, why are the guru's mercy and a personal relationship with the guru so important? How does receiving the guru's mercy lead to the realisation of Brahman? Since Madhva and Baladeva do not address these questions in the section of their *Brahmasūtra*s commentaries we examined here, we have to look elsewhere. In Madhva's commentary on the *Mahābhārata*, he explains the guru's intimate connection with Brahman:

> If he is kindly disposed, [a guru] endowed with proper characteristics may grant the complete truth to [his] student. There is no doubt in this regard. Since Hari, the bestower of liberation, is inaccessible, he enters into him [i.e. the guru]. If the guru is not very pleased [however], even what he bestows would not be the [complete] truth. Therefore the guru must always be worshipped.[32]

Madhva confirms that the instruction of the guru is effective only when he is pleased (*prasanna*). Besides this, however, Madhva makes another important point that the supreme person enters (*āviṣṭa*) into the guru to make himself accessible to the student. What is implied is that obtaining the grace of the guru is important since it is equal to obtaining the Lord's grace.

Viśvanātha Cakravartin, one of Baladeva's Gauḍīya teachers, articulates the closeness of the guru and Brahman even more clearly:

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[31] *Bhāgavatatātparyanirṇaya* 10.94.34: *guror anugraham ṛte sādhanaṃ na hareḥ priyam / gurūpadeśāt tu paraṃ prāpnoty eva na saṃśayaḥ.*

[32] *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* 1.124–125: *samyaglakṣaṇasampanno yad dadyāt suprasannadhīḥ / śiṣyāya satyaṃ bhavati tat sarvaṃ nātra saṃśayaḥ / agamyatvād dharis tasminn āviṣṭo muktido bhavet / nātiprasannahṛdayo yad dadyād gurur apy asau / na tat satyaṃ bhavet tasmād arcanīyo guruḥ sadā.*

> He who is said to be actually Hari by all the scriptures, and he who is considered as such by the saintly people, but he who is certainly dear to the Lord, I praise the lotus like feet of such a guru.[33]

According to Viśvanātha, all the scriptures (*samastaśāstra*) declare a guru to be the God himself (*sākṣāddharitvena*). The indeclinable particle *sākṣāt* meaning 'directly, clearly', and the instrumental case of the abstract noun suffix *-tva* (i.e. *-tvena*) indicate that Viśvanātha teaches the real identicalness of the guru and the supreme person. The saintly people (*sadbhiḥ*), he continues, consider (*bhāvyate*) the same. Nonetheless (*kintu*), the guru is also dear (*priya*) to the Lord (*prabhoḥ*). The last description of the guru indicates that despite being identical, the guru and God are nevertheless distinct from each other. Otherwise their relationship, indicated by the statement that the teacher is dear (*priya*) to the Lord, would not be possible.

Given the strong dualism in the Mādhva and the Gauḍīya traditions, the identicalness of the supreme person and the guru explained above should not be taken in the sense of their ontological oneness. Both traditions are vehemently against the idea of such oneness expressed by the absolute monists (*kevalādvaitin*s). Rather, according to Madhva and Viśvanātha, they are identical in the sense that the Lord manifests himself through the guru. This type of oneness between the God and the guru is the key to understanding the significance of the guru's grace, as this is considered to be a manifestation of God's grace. Developing a personal relationship with one's guru is equal to developing a personal relationship with God. Therefore, when Madhva and Baladeva teach that Brahman cannot be realised without having a personal relationship with a guru, it implies that Brahman cannot be realised without having a personal relationship with Brahman. This is fundamentally related to the way Madhva and Baladeva conceive of the ultimate reality Brahman as the supreme person.

A fundamental question still remains, however. Why is it necessary to develop a personal relationship with Brahman? Can we not obtain information about Brahman through the scriptures? Is there any critical difference between the knowledge of Brahman obtained simply by reading the texts, and the knowledge of Brahman realised through a personal relationship?

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[33] *Gurvaṣṭakam* 7: *sākṣāddharitvena samastaśāstrair uktas tathā bhāvyate eva sadbhiḥ / kintu prabhor yaḥ priya eva tasya vande guroḥ śrīcaraṇāravindam.* For a fuller discussion of Viśvanātha's *Guruvaṣṭakam*, see Schweig (2003).

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the significance of developing a personal relationship with the ultimate reality was well articulated by a Jewish philosopher Martin Buber and a protestant theologian Emil Brunner. Therefore, a comparative study of Buber and Brunner with Madhva and Baladeva may shed a light on these questions.

MADHVA AND BALADEVA THROUGH THE EYES OF BUBER AND BRUNNER

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the significance of developing a personal relationship with the ultimate reality was well articulated by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (1878–1965) and the protestant theologian Emil Brunner (1889–1966). These two Judeo-Christian thinkers certainly conceive of the ultimate reality differently then the way the two South Asian theologians examined here conceived of it. A notable difference is that unlike Madhva and Baladeva, Buber and Brunner do not discuss the importance of serving one's teacher. Nevertheless, their comparison will prove to be fruitful, I believe, since they both theologically conceive of the ultimate reality as the supreme person.

Buber was one of the most distinguished Jewish philosophers of the last century. He is best known for his penetrating insights in *I and You* (*Ich und Du*), where he examines his two primary words (*die Grundworte*) of *I-You* (*Ich-Du*) and *I-It* (*Ich-Es*).[34]

According to Buber, a person relates to the world in twofold attitude of *I-It* and *I-You*. In the former, the world appears as an object (*It*) to the subject *I*: 'I perceive something. I am sensible of something. I imagine something. I will something. I feel something. I think something. This and the like together establish the realm of *It*' (1937, p. 4). This is the attitude of analysis, categorisation and utilisation. The *I* takes the complete initiative and dominates the *It*, the other. In contrast, the attitude of *I-You* has an entirely different orientation: 'When *You* is spoken the speaker has

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[34] I use Smith's translation of Buber's *Ich und Du*. Smith translates *Du* in Buber's work as 'Thou'. However, I replace 'Thou' in Smith's translation with 'You', because in English 'Thou' does not convey the sense of intimacy expressed by the German *Du*, which is used in contrast to *Sie*, a politer form of addressing the second person. In this regard I follow scholars such as Pamela Vermes and Walter Kaufmann. However, this rendering is not without contention. For example, Maurice Friedman (1982, pp. 428–9), a leading scholar on Buber, argues against translating *Du* into 'You' on the ground that in English 'You' sounds more impersonal than 'Thou'.

no thing for his object [...] But he takes his stand in relation' (1937, p. 4). Therefore, 'as experience, the world belongs to the primary word *I-It*. The primary word *I-You* establishes the world of relation' (1937, p. 6).

In the world of relation, the *I* is no longer the one who controls, domi-nates and utilises. Nor is the other the object: 'If I face a human being as my *You*, and say the primary word *I-You* to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things' (1937, p. 8). This *I-You* relation is possible only when the other decides to become *You* to *I* and *I* decides to respond to the other as *You*. Therefore, this encounter between *I* and *You* is that which is inherently *given*, one which is always beyond the control of *I* (1937, p. 11). It is important to note that according to Buber the *I-You* relation requires both the grace of *You* and the will of *I* for the mutual openness.

In proposing this twofold distinction of *I-It* and *I-You*, Buber is not dividing the world into *It* and *You* in relation to *I*. Rather, his point is that the very same world can become *It* or *You* depending on the attitude of *I*. Buber says this twofold attitude can manifest in relation to nature, to men and to mental entities (*die geistige Wesenheiten*) (1937, p. 6).[35] Among them, the easiest to understand is between two human beings. As soon as the mutual openness disappears between *I* and *You*, both of them become *It* to each other (1937, pp. 16–17). In relation to another human being therefore, the other oscillates between *It* and *You* in relation to *I*.

There is however, the other who can never become *It*, who is eternally *You*, the very source of all the *I-You* relations. 'Every particular *You* is a glimpse through to the eternal *You*; by means of every particular *You*, the primary word addresses the eternal *You*' (1937, p. 75). This eternal *You* never becomes *It* because it is beyond any objectification (1937, p. 112). Since this eternal *You* never becomes *I*, it can be known only through *I-You* relation. This implies that in entering the relation, *I* is always dependent on the grace of the eternal *You* since the *I-You* relation is something inherently given, that which is possible only by the grace of *You*.

In Buber we observe two parallels with Madhva and Baladeva. First, they all agree that the ultimate reality is revealed only through a personal relation-ship. Buber points out the ultimate reality, the eternal *You* is revealed only when there is a personal relation of '*I* and *You*'. Since the ultimate reality is beyond objectification, the eternal *You* cannot be understood through the

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[35] Smith translates this term as 'intelligible forms'. However, I give a more literal translation. For a discussion of various translations of this term, see Vermes (1988), pp. 45–6.

accumulation of impersonal information. Our analysis of the Upaniṣadic stories of Satyakāma and Upakosala showed that the full revelation of Brahman is possible only when there is a personal relation between the guru and the student. We also noted that according to Madhva and Viśvanātha, developing a relationship with one's guru is identical with developing a relationship with Brahman, who enters into the guru to become accessible.

Second, these three thinkers stress the significance of grace. Buber says that the relation between the *I* and the eternal *You* requires the element of grace. It is not enough that the *I* desires to know the eternal *You*. The revelation happens only when the eternal *You* decides to open itself voluntarily, out of grace. Similarly, Madhva and Baladeva explained that the realisation of Brahman is possible only when the teaching is accompanied by the guru's grace (*prasāda*), which represents Brahman's grace.

The parallel between Buber's *I-You* relationship and the Upaniṣadic principle of dialogical exchange put forward by Madhva and Baladeva becomes clearer when we look at the works of Emil Brunner. Brunner was a prominent Swiss Protestant theologian especially known for his dialectical theology, succinctly expressed in his concept of 'Truth as encounter' (*Wahrheit als Begegung*).

According to Brunner, the fundamental problem for Christian theology is that it has been trapped in the antithesis of subjectivism and objectivism. Relying on existentialism, especially of Kierkegaard, Brunner claims that the totality of man cannot be grasped in this dichotomy (1964, p. 12). He argues that objectivism in relation to Christianity is 'a tendency of man's spirit and will to get something into his power—to manipulate it like an object in definite ways and within definite limits—something which by its very nature is not under human control' (1964, p. 71). This objectivism manifests, according to Brunner, in man's attempt to 'possess' God by means of dogmatisation, institutionalisation, and so on.

If we characterise objectivism as a tendency for externalisation of the ultimate reality, subjectivism may be described as a focus on its internalisation. According to Brunner, subjectivism locates God entirely in one's personal inner experience (1964, pp. 74–75). According to subjectivism, what counts is the individual experience of the Spirit of God, which is not bound by any institution, dogma, or even by God's Word in the Bible.

Bringing in Buberian terminology, Brunner rejects both objectivism and subjectivism and argues that the Biblical truth is perceived only by encountering God as person, in the relationship of *I-You*: 'Truth as encounter

is not truth about something [...]. Rather is it that truth [...] that can be adequately expressed *only* in the *I-You* form' (1964, p. 24). In this understanding of truth as encounter, objectivism is at once rejected because God can never be known as *It*.

According to Madhva and Baladeva we cannot gain the full understanding of Brahman merely by reading texts or even by listening to the guru's lectures. Perhaps this is because Brahman, like God in Brunner's thought, can never be known as *It*. Truth as encounter also shatters subjectivism because this encounter is inherently *given*, which approaches man from outside and opens up his enclosure of individualism. Both Madhva and Baladeva emphasise the guru's grace, which we can translate into Brahman's grace. The revelation of Brahman requires the grace of Brahman because it is only when Brahman wills to reveal itself that it becomes known to the seeker as *You*.

This truth as encounter is the everlasting *You* of Buber, who opens up Itself to meet man:

> [...] when God reveals himself to me in his Word, we are not then concerned with a 'something'. [...] In that moment in which he becomes a 'You' he ceases to be an object of my thinking and transforms the object-subject relation into a relation of personal correspondence [...] (1964, pp. 114–115).

The revelation of the ultimate reality, according to Brunner, is not about knowing something as an object. It is about an encounter, a meeting with a person as a person. In Brunner's thought we see again that the nature of knowing the ultimate reality is fundamentally relational.

Finally this relational nature of the ultimate reality inevitably leads Brunner to the idea of grace: 'The truth with which faith is concerned can only be received. It is therefore identical with grace' (1964, p. 28). Brunner thus agrees with the givenness of reality. A relationship between two people is possible only when both agree to relate to each other as a person. In the case of the ultimate reality this willingness on the side of the eternal *You* is what Brunner calls 'grace'.

Again, we observe two parallels between Brunner's concept of truth as encounter, and the Upaniṣadic principle of dialogical exchange. First, Madhva and Baladeva would agree with Brunner that the ultimate reality cannot be known as *It*, as a mere object of knowing. One needs to 'encounter'

with Brahman, to meet with Brahman as a person. This requires developing a personal relationship with Brahman, which, according to Madhva and Baladeva, can be done through developing a connection with one's guru.

Second, Madhva and Baladeva would also agree with Brunner that the grace of the ultimate reality is crucial. A student gains the full realisation of Brahman only when he obtains Brahman's grace by pleasing his guru. This is why the Upaniṣadic principle of dialogical exchange emphasises the significance of serving one's guru.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we first examined Madhva's and Baladeva's exposition on the grace of the guru based on their commentaries on *Brahmasūtras* 3.3.44–45. They explain that the instruction of the guru is efficacious in obtaining Brahman only when it is accompanied by the guru's grace. We then analyzed in detail the stories of Satyakāma and Upakosala in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, which, according to Madhva and Baladeva, are the evidence for the need of guru's mercy. A structuralist analysis on these stories revealed that the idea of dialogical relation plays the central role in the realisation of Brahman. The efficacious instruction from the guru to the student happens only when there is a personal relation between them. It was then pointed out that according to Madhva and Viśvanātha a guru is a direct manifestation of Brahman and therefore, a student can develop a personal relationship with Brahman by serving his guru.

In the second section we observed that the teachings of Madhva and Baladeva share two points of parallel with Buber and Brunner. According to Buber, the *I-You* relation only, not the *I-It* relation, is appropriate for approaching the ultimate reality since the eternal *You* can never be objectified. Taking the Buberian terms Brunner further says this *I-You* relation is possible only through the grace of the eternal *You* who is at the opposite end of the relation. Buber and Brunner's thought finds a parallel in that of Madhva and Baladeva on the relational nature of the ultimate reality and the need of grace in the relationship.

Thus we observe that the two Vaiṣṇava theologians belonging to a traditional, classical branch of Indian thought present a reading of Vedānta that has remarkable similarities with the thought of two well-known theologians of the Judeo-Christian tradition in the twentieth century. It seems reasonable, therefore, to conclude that from Madhva's and Baladeva's viewpoint, to

know Brahman means to know Brahman as a person, and to know someone as a person, we require a relation with that person. For the two Vaiṣṇava thinkers, this can be done by developing a personal relation with the guru. The seeker of Brahman must first serve Brahman by serving the guru, to have a *personal* encounter with Brahman.

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