

Nature of Paramatman

Chapter 8

In **Lessons 5, 6, and 7**, we addressed the question, "**What is the anAtman or the not-Self?**" We found that the sthūla-śarīra (gross body), sūkṣma-śarīra (subtle body), and kāraṇa-śarīra (causal body) together form the anAtman.

Now, we will explore the question, "**What is the ParamAtman (Supreme Self)?**" in this and the next lesson.

paramatman

The Sanskrit term 'Atman' translates to 'Self.'

Atman, the **core of one's personality, embodies Sat-Chit-Ananda** (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss) and eternally **shines as the 'I' factor, witnessing the anAtman (not-Self)**: the sthūla-śarīra (gross body), sūkṣma-śarīra (subtle body), and kāraṇa-śarīra (causal body). This Atman or Self is the true 'I'.

When we don't recognize the Self's true nature of Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss), we mistakenly identify the Self with the not-Self.

This misidentification, called 'tādātmya,' makes us think "I am the body and mind." **This false sense of self is the 'ahaṅkāra' or ego.**

The true 'I' is the higher Self, embodying Sat-Chit-Ananda, while the false 'I' is just a mistaken notion without real existence.

This table summarizes the terms used for the true 'I' and false 'I'.

Effects of Taadaatmya

Self-identification with the anAtman (not-Self) leads to **many false notions:**

"I am a man/woman,"

"I am tall/short,"

"I am agitated/calm,"

"I am a fool/intelligent,"

"This is my mother/father,"

"This is my spouse/children,"

"I am Bengali/Gujarati/Keralite/American,"

"I am sick/healthy,"

"I am getting old,"

"I will die soon,"

"I am frightened,"

"I am suffering,"

These statements express the **false 'I'** or lower self.

In reality,

one is neither man nor woman,
neither short nor tall,
neither calm nor agitated,
neither spouse nor parent,
neither Indian nor American,
and neither sick nor healthy.

The true nature of the Self is Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss).

Blind to this true 'I,' we mistakenly identify with the false 'I' and build our lives on these erroneous notions, leading to discontent and a mix of joy and pain instead of unbroken happiness.

Tādātmya, identification with the not-Self, is the foundation of samsara (worldly existence).

Ātma-anātma-viveka

Self-Knowledge is the solution to tādātmya (identification with the not-Self).

It involves understanding **oneself as distinct from the anAtman** (sthūla-śarīra, sūkṣma-śarīra, and kāraṇa-śarīra).

This knowledge is achieved through **ātma-anātma-viveka**, the differentiation between the Self (Atman) and the not-Self (anAtman).

In Tattva-bodha, Shankaracharya explains the methodology of ātma-anātma-viveka as follows:

"My body, my prāṇas (vital airs), my mind, my intellect, and my ignorance are all perceived as mine and not as the Self. Just as objects like bracelets, earrings, and houses are known as separate from oneself, similarly, the five sheaths (pañcakoṣa) are understood to be distinct from the Self. What is recognized as 'mine' is not the Self."

The phrase "**whatever is described as 'mine' is different from me**" suggests a **logical distinction between the Self and its possessions**.

When I say, "my bangle," "my house," or "my pen," it indicates that **these objects are separate from me**.

Similarly, when I refer to "my body" or "my mind," the same logic applies: **the Self, which owns the body and mind, is distinct from them.**

Thus, the owner (the Self) is separate from what is owned (the body and mind).

According to the Tattva-bodha text, the **ParamAtman (Supreme Self)** is **distinct from the five sheaths (koṣas)**.

The body (food sheath), vital airs (vital-air sheath), mind (mental sheath), intellect (intellectual sheath), and the bliss of deep sleep (bliss sheath) are all **experienced as "mine," indicating they are not the Self.**

Therefore, the Self must be distinct from these sheaths, following the logic that "whatever is described as 'mine' is different from the Self."

"dṛg-dṛśya-viveka"

The concept of "dṛg-dṛśya-viveka" in Vedāntic texts helps distinguish the Self (dṛg, the seer) from the not-Self (dṛśya, the seen).

The knower (Self) must be distinct from the known (perceived objects), as knowledge requires this distinction.

This principle is evident in daily life: for example, **the pen I see is different from me, the seer.**

Therefore, as the knower-witness of the body and mind, the Self stands distinct from them.

This differentiation between the seer and the seen conclusively proves the distinction between the Self (Ātman) and the not-Self (anātman).

Both logical principles—

(1) **"what is described as 'mine' is different from 'me'"**

(2) **the seer is different from the seen (dṛg-dṛśya-viveka)—highlight that the Self (Ātman) is distinct from the not-Self (anātman), including the three bodies (śarīras) and the five sheaths (koṣas).**

This understanding, called ātma-anātma-viveka, differentiates the Self from the not-Self, eliminating the mistaken identification of the two.

Exercise

You might wonder why you mistake your body for yourself when you don't mistake your car for yourself. Beyond technical explanations like ignorance (ajñāna) and identification (tādātmya), there's a simple reason.

List all the things you see in this room. You probably missed noting items like your spectacles, dentures, or hairclips. This shows that objects closely and constantly near us, like the body, can be mistaken for the Self.

For example, when using a pen or your hand to write, you say, "I write." Vedānta teaches that both the pen and the hand are instruments, yet their constant proximity leads to the mistaken belief that they are the Self. While it's convenient to say, "I write," remember that it's actually your instruments—pen and hand—doing the writing.

Practice of Ātma-anātma-viveka

Since I am distinct from the anātman (three bodies or five sheaths), the qualities of the not-Self cannot affect the pure Self, the Ātman.

For example, if my pen's nib breaks or my house burns, I remain unaffected because I am separate from them.

Similarly, whether my body (annamaya-koṣa) is healthy or sick, it doesn't affect me, the Self.

The body experiences birth and relationships, but I, the Self, do not. Therefore, I am not truly a mother, father, spouse, or child.

Vital-Air Sheath (Prāṇamaya-kośa): Hunger, thirst, energy, and lethargy belong to the prāṇamaya-kośa.

As I am distinct from the prāṇas, these do not affect me, the Self.

Mental Sheath (Manomaya-kośa):

Indecisiveness and confusion are properties of the manomaya-kośa.

Since I am different from my thoughts, these mental states do not affect me, the Self.

Intellectual Sheath (Vijñānamaya-kośa):

Resoluteness and decisiveness are qualities of the vijñānamaya-kośa.

These do not change my status as I remain separate from the intellect.

Bliss Sheath (Ānandamaya-kośa): Even the blissful ignorance of deep sleep belongs to the ānandamaya-kośa and is observed by me, the Self. I have no tendencies (vāsanās), neither good (puṇya) nor bad (pāpa).

The practice of ātma-anātma-viveka thus profoundly transforms one's understanding and life.

Continuous application of ātma-anātma-viveka is essential for spiritual aspirants, both in meditation and daily life.

It helps recognize and eliminate the mischief caused by identification with the not-Self (tādātmya) in every experience.

Like a hidden computer virus, tādātmya superimposes qualities of the not-Self onto the Self.

Just as a computer scans for viruses, we **must use ātma-anātma-viveka to scan every sense experience and thought.**

Install the ātma-anātma-viveka "virus scanner" today and keep it updated through regular study of Scriptures.

Nature
of paramatman

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Vedanta describes the supreme Self (ParamAtman) as Sat-Chit-Ananda, meaning **Existence** (Sat), **Consciousness** (Chit), and **Bliss** (Ananda).

Shankaracharya in Tattva-bodha defines these terms succinctly:

- **Sat:** Existence
- **Chit:** Consciousness
- **Ananda:** Bliss

sat

Existence

Sat - Existence

In Vedanta, the term "Sat" signifies **more than just "being" or "noble."**

It refers to **that which is permanent (nitya) and exists across all three periods of time: past, present, and future.**

Only the Atman, which has always existed and will never cease to be, can be described as **Sat or Existence**.

This Sat aspect of the Atman can be understood by analysis as follows:

1. That which is made up of parts can be destroyed when its parts are destroyed. The Self, being a homogeneous whole (akhaṇḍa) with no parts, **is beyond destruction**.
2. **Modification implies the death of the earlier form and the birth of a new one**, like a bud becoming a flower or a flower becoming a fruit.

However, the Self (Atman) is nirvikara (unchanging) and sadā-eka-rūpa (always the same). While the body dies and thoughts change, the ParamAtman remains beyond any modification.

chith

Consciousness

Chith - consciousness

Every object can be known at some time.

Even ignorance of an object is known.

For example, I can say "Yes" or "No" to whether my brother is in the room because I can know both his presence and absence. I know what I know and what I don't know.

The body, mind, intellect, and ignorance (as in deep sleep) are all known. The subject "I," which knows all these objects, must be of the very nature of Knowledge.

The senses, mind, and intellect are inert as they originate from the subtle aspects of the five inert elements (tanmātras).

Their ability to reveal objects is not inherent but **borrowed from the ParamAtman**.

Just as a crystal shines due to its proximity to light, these inert faculties reveal their objects **because of their closeness to the Self**.

The Self, being Consciousness, lends sentiency to them.

Thus, the Self, which enables these faculties to function, is of the very nature of Knowledge.

The effulgence of the Self is **present in all three states** of awareness—waking, dream, and deep sleep.

In waking, we are aware of the external world; in dreams, we are aware of the internal world; in deep sleep, we are aware of the absence of both.

Thus, the Self, present in all these states, is of the nature of eternal Knowledge (nitya-jyoti).

All objects are known through thoughts, but the **Self (or "I") is known without thoughts**.

The **Self is known immediately**, as it is of the nature of Knowledge (jnana-svarupa).

Like the sun, which is seen by its own light, **the Self is self-luminous and doesn't need instruments** like senses, mind, or intellect to be known.

The Self reveals itself through its own effulgence (svayam-prakāsha or svayam-jyoti).

This evershining (nitya-jyoti), self-shining (svayam-jyoti) Principle of absolute Knowledge (jnana-svarupa) is called Cit.

Ananda

Bliss

Ananda - Bliss

The Self is inherently of the nature of happiness, as evidenced by the fact that **one is always dear to oneself.**

Despite illness, handicap, old age, or even death approaching, individuals desire health and life, demonstrating an innate love for the Self.

This universal affection suggests that the **Self cannot be of the nature of sorrow.**

Even the thought of **suicide**, which is essentially the wish to end the body and mind, **arises from the love for the Self.**

When faced with unbearable pain or situations, death may seem like the only solution to escape suffering.

This profound love for the Self is evident even in such extreme thoughts.

The **Self is most cherished** by all beings.

Other desirable objects like wealth, family, and relationships are **valued only for their role** in serving the Self.

If they cause unbearable pain, even the closest relationships are willingly renounced.

This illustrates that **one's greatest love is for oneself.**

Whether pursuing **acquisition or renunciation, it is ultimately for the sake of the Self.**

The **love for the Self proves its nature of Bliss**, as nobody loves what is sorrowful or painful.

Despite being inherently Blissful, individuals forget their own nature and pursue worldly objects for happiness, **akin to a king mistaking himself as a beggar and seeking mercy.**

This is the power of **ignorance**.

Another important aspect of the **Self's blissful nature** is that this Bliss, unlike the happiness gained through objects, **is neither conditional nor relative; it is absolute.**

This concept of non-relative, non-conditional absolute Bliss can be understood from the **following analysis:**

- In life, happiness varies in intensity: from the joy of perceiving something pleasant (priya), to the increased delight upon gaining it (moda), and finally to the peak happiness when enjoying it (pramoda).
- Even the static joy of ignorance in deep sleep is a part of this gradation.

- However, the **Bliss of the Self stands apart**—it's not a modification of the bliss sheath, as it remains uniformly full and absolute, devoid of any gradation.

Various **types of joy** arise from different objects, like

sattvic happiness from spiritual discourses,
rajasic excitement from sensory stimulation,
and tamasic delight in stupor.

These joys depend on external factors like preferences, timing, and mental state.

However, the **Bliss of the ParamAtman remains constant and independent of such factors.**

Happiness varies among beings based on the complexity and subtlety of their faculties of experience.

Multicellular organisms experience greater joy than **unicellular microbes**.

Humans, with their heightened awareness, creativity, and innovation, experience more happiness than **animals and plants**.

Even among humans, the joy of individuals like innocent children, sensitive poets, creative artists, and persevering scientists surpasses that of others.

The Upanishads describe a **hierarchy of happiness among beings in the cosmos**.

The joy of **Gandharvas** surpasses that of **humans**,

while **celestial gods** like Agni and Vayu experience greater happiness than Gandharvas.

Indra, the king of gods, enjoys even greater happiness.

The **happiness of Brahma, the Creator**, is immense but finite, just **a fraction of the infinite Self-Bliss**.

The gradations of happiness **arise from the merits and demerits accrued in past lives**, determining one's birth.

However, the **Bliss of the Self is not relative to birth** but remains the same for all beings, whether microbe or man, pauper or prince, saint or sinner.

Being infinite, it transcends all gradations.

This brings us to an important question:

"If I am the ParamAtman and if the Bliss of the ParamAtman is infinite and independent of all factors such as time, place, object, birth, body, mind, intellect and every possible external factor, why am I not experiencing that infinite Bliss NOW?"

Answer:

The answer Vedanta gives for this question is utterly down to earth:

Even if one stands in front of the tall and gigantic Himalayas, if one does not look in the direction of the mountain there can be no scope of perceiving it.

So too, the problem here lies in the **direction of our vision**.

Say, for instance, the effulgent sun is rising, but our attention is turned towards the west. Is the sun to be blamed if we do not see it?

There is a Chinese proverb which is apt in this context: "**It is sure to be dark if you close your eyes!**" "**Our attention is presently turned outwards** towards the anAtman (body- mind-intellect) and the world of objects (object-emotion-thought) and, hence, even though the ParamAtman is present as the very Self of the seeker, we do not experience It.

The fault is not that of ParamAtman but that of our perception.

Turn within and perceive the Blissful Self.

Beware!!

To truly absorb and internalize these teachings, thorough study and reflection are essential. Just as undigested or partially digested food can lead to physical illness, incompletely processed ideas can result in confusion and intellectual decay. Moreover, misinterpretation of these teachings can lead to misuse, akin to the proverbial "devil quoting Scripture", wherein this knowledge can even be misused to justify our weaknesses and wrong doings.

To avoid such pitfalls, devote ample time to understanding these lessons fully. Only then can this knowledge contribute to genuine growth and spiritual well-being.

Om Namah Shivaya