

‘tat’ and ‘tvam’ are the two words in the famous maxim (mahāvākya), of the Vedas, ‘tat tvam asi’, ‘tat’ means ‘Brahman’ and ‘tvam’ means ‘Ātman’. These two are one and the same (asi), is the meaning indicated by the Upaniṣads. When the mahāvākya says, ‘You are God’, you the body can never be God. Neither can you the mind, nor can you the intellect ever be God. When all the five kośas are transcended, the divine Spark of Existence is to be known. In all the previous verses, the Ātman, the Self, functioning in man has been explained.

Brahman, the universal Consciousness, functioning in the physical body is called ‘subjective Self’ (adhyātma). This Ātman functioning in you is the Self, present everywhere (Brahman). This is indicated by this mahāvākya, this great declaration of the Upaniṣads.

When the nature of the three bodies is investigated, we come to apprehend that there is a Consciousness which is illumining all our thoughts. That Consciousness in us is the Consciousness everywhere, is the meaning of the pregnant statement, ‘tat tvam asi’. This declaration of the Upaniṣads again and again indicates the identity (ekattvam), of Ātman and Brahman.

According to the literal word meaning, the identity of man (tvam) and God (tat) is impossible. How can I, a limited mortal, finite, miserable creature be that infinite Sacchidānanda? Between the two there is as much difference as there is between a lamb and an elephant. How can they be one and the same?

The identity, of the Ātman and Brahman is derived from the indicative meaning or the implied meaning¹ of the mahāvākya. In the declaration, the identity is implied. It is trying to explain that the essential core in each one of us is one and the same, and that is God. God is all-pervading, and therefore, omnipresent. Thus, the Upaniṣad is trying to make us understand the oneness of the

¹ vākyārtha – ‘word meaning’; lakṣyārtha – ‘indicative meaning’.

essence of the individual and the essence of the whole universe. The distinction between the two is obvious. Man is ‘born’, God is ‘unborn’. Man is ‘growing’, God is ‘changeless’. Man is ‘perishable’, God is ‘imperishable’. Man is ‘mortal’, God is ‘immortal’. Man’s knowledge is ‘limited’, God’s knowledge is ‘unlimited’.

Hence the mahāvākya does not declare the literal meaning but suggests the implied, the indicative meaning. The essence, the core, the very existence in us, is the substratum and vitality of the whole universe. The Reality behind the universe is the Reality behind each individual also.

When from the universe the names and forms are removed and from the individual the five kośas are negated, what is left over in the outer and the inner world, is the one infinite Consciousness which has no such distinctions as outside or inside.

To indicate this obvious distinction between man and God, four examples are given here by Ācārya Śaṅkara –

(1) The glow-worm and the sun, (2) the servant and the king, (3) the well and the ocean and (4) the atom and the mount Merū.

In these examples, the limited light of the glow-worm (jīva) and the unlimited light of the sun (Īśvara); the ruled servant (jīva) and the ruler king (Īśvara); the limited space of the well (jīva) and the unlimited expanse of the ocean (Īśvara); the minute atom (jīva) and the gigantic Merū (Īśvara) – between these, how can there be any identity?



तयोर्विरोधोऽयमुपाधिकल्पितो
न वास्तवः कश्चिदुपाधिरेषः ।
ईशस्य माया महदादिकारणं
जीवस्य कार्यं शृणु पञ्चकोशम् ॥ २४३ ॥