



Advaita Vedanta

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Based on the words of Swami Dayananda and Swami Paramarthananda

Are we all one?

The uniqueness of yourself is evident from the fact that you are the only one you can refer to by the word “I”. You cannot refer to any other object with the word I. There are many objects in the world, some known, many unknown. Even among the known object there are things I do not know. I do not know Russian or Chinese but I know they exist as languages. Only a known object can be referred by the word “I”. An unknown object cannot be referred by the word “I”. I can only refer to myself by the word “I”.

This is a unique position. We can therefore divide the things that exist in the universe into two groups for the time being. One is what you come to know by your means of knowledge. That you can hear or read these words is because of a means of knowledge. We can extend this further. We know that there are galaxies because we have a valid means of knowledge. That there are black holes, quasars, the sun, whatever we think exists – whether it is true or not – is by a means of knowledge. Suppose we say there is heaven, again it is by a means of knowledge. We believe indirectly, we come to accept the belief of heaven because of a means of knowledge. That there is re-birth is also accepted in good faith by a means of knowledge. So, whether you believe that it exists or you know that it exists, you are required to know it through a means of knowledge.

If I ask you “do you have a physical body”, you have to say, “yes I have a body”. That it is healthy or ill, tall or short, white, brown or black, these things you come to know by means of knowledge. That my senses function well is by a means of knowledge. That my eyes see or not, or my ears hear or not is all via a means of knowledge.

That there are thoughts right now is again a certain form of perception. You “see” what is happening in your mind, whether it is a condition of emotion or a simple cognition of an object, you see what occurs in your mind. You have knowledge of memories. You recollect experiences you have gone through. That you have collected these experiences and that they exist as memories, these too you come to know by a means of knowledge, a means of knowing it. That the memories exist, the mind exists, the senses exist and the physical body exists in this condition enjoying their attributes. That the world exists, as I know it comes to be known to you because of a means of knowledge.

Now I ask the question “do you exist”. There are only two answers possible, either yes or no. If you say you exist, do you say ‘probably’ or ‘certainly’? You may say that heaven ‘probably’ exists but you know that you exist for certain. How did you come to arrive at this self-existence? There should be some means of knowledge. Someone who is conscious of the mind and the eyes through which it sees the body.

How do you come to arrive at the existence of yourself to say, “I exist”? How do you do that? It is not a belief; there is no probability. On what basis can you say that? By what means of knowledge do you arrive at that conclusion. You could say “by perception”. That means that you perceive the “I” by the senses. However, perception pre-supposes you. Before you come to see, you are there. You are not an object of your eyes. Eyes do not jump out of yourself for the eyes to see. The eyes are not I. The eyes are FOR the I. You cannot be an object that is objectifiable for the sense organs. I is neither heard, seen, felt or tasted. In other words, I is not an object of your perception.

If it is not an object of your perception, then do you infer? Inference also requires certain basis data. All our higher order knowledge have their roots in simple perception. Without perception, no initial knowledge is possible. Inference and presumption require data gathered through perception. On what basis can you say “I infer that I exist”. The great philosopher Descartes STARTED his enquiry with “I think, therefore, I am”. He only started with that. That is not where he ended. He ended with “I am therefore I think.”

How do you infer? You could say, “I am married, therefore I must exist”. That is a good inference since women are very smart and they do not marry dead people. Through these two postulates I can say that she married me, therefore I must not be dead, i.e. I must exist. No, that is not true. She married you because you existed and the minimum qualification on your part was that you knew that you existed. Before you can make the statement “I love you”, you must exist.

So, I exist because of what? I cannot say because of memories I exist since you existed even before you collected your memories. I exist therefore I have memories. Similarly, I exist therefore I have ignorance, I exist therefore I have knowledge. I exist therefore I have love and other emotions. I exist therefore everything. That I exist does not involve ANY means of knowledge. There is only one thing in this world that is NOT arrived at by a means of knowledge, and that is YOU. If the self has to be known through a means of knowledge, then any means of knowledge must be used by a subject who wields those means and that subject would be I.

In any knowledge, there are three things. The **knower**, the **object of knowledge** i.e. that which is known and the **means of knowing**. If you say “I exist” then ‘I’ has to become an object of knowledge. If so, who is the knower and what is the means of

knowing? You have to establish the “I” before the “I” can be the knower of an object of knowledge.

“I” does not require a means of knowledge as an object does. An object exists for you because of a means of knowledge, but I exist because I exist, without any other means of knowledge. Things keep on changing but I exist. If there is anything that does not require a means of knowledge for its existence, that is I. Therefore, we should be able to divide things into those that are “self-existent” and those that are not. When you say, “I am” it is self-existent requiring no other reference, no means of knowledge. I am self-existent. Everything else is known to be existent.

Anything that is known to be existent has an element of doubt surrounding it. You are not absolutely sure. Anything you come to know as an existent thing via a means of knowledge is open to further proof and your conclusions are revisable and you generally keep your mind open. You doubt... did you lock the door ...doubt. Is this a so and so ... doubt. How did we develop this doubt.

Imagine that we are all Stone Age people. You look at the sky, the stars, the sun rising and travelling in the same direction, getting lost and coming up again in another part of the sky. Therefore, you have a thing called East and a thing called West. Whether you have language or not, you have perception. With this perception, you conclude that the sun rises. Now at your current age, you have figured everything out. What are you going to conclude as a child? The sun rises and sets and travels in between. Good thing is that it always arrives. The sun rises in the Eastern sky and travels and the sky appears to have a ceiling. A space has limits. You see stars at night and you conclude that the stars come at night and go away in the day. There is a sun in the night called the moon and it gets thinner and then fatter like a person on a series of endless diets.

If I see the earth as flat, I will assume that it is flat unless I am told otherwise. We have to reshuffle our ideas that the sun does not rise and set, that there is no ceiling in space and there are no diamonds twinkling at night. This is difficult to swallow, but from a respected source, we come to reshuffle our ideas. As you may think that anything washed is clean but observe water under a microscope and you will have to modify your ideas on cleanliness. This is day-to-day life. The more I study, the more I have to reshuffle my ideas. The more informed a person, the more they become uncertain about anything.

Nobody takes anything for granted. A word, action, medicine or even food is doubted. Some say that tomatoes are not meant for the human body. Tomatoes, like eggplant, bell peppers and potatoes all come from the group of plants known as deadly nightshade. People repeat like parrots without knowing. They spread the doubt. So we, unlike animals, are told what to eat and what not to eat. We do not know what to eat.

Every lemon tree knows what it must draw from the earth, the same earth where sugar cane grows. Each will take what it needs to be sour or sweet. Plants, and animals know what to eat. We cannot because we are not programmed by our senses. We have the ability to think, to be aware.

The more we think, the more we are doubtful. You therefore cannot have final knowledge about anything that is known to be existent. The only thing of which you can be definite of is that “I am”. When you come to yourself, you never doubt. Thus, most people do not question self-existence. All our pursuits are regarding things we come to know. I do not enquire about the knower. I take myself for granted and plead with everyone else not to be taken for granted.

So, there is a division. “I” is self-existent and everything else that is known to be existent. If this division is clear, then we need to understand the relationship between the “I” and the other objects. If the objects I come to know are distinct from me then the objects would definitely isolate me because what I know is overwhelmingly huge. In the vast expanding universe, there are so many things I know, more that I do not know and even more that I don’t even realise are there. If that world of objects is something different from me then I am isolated by the world. Therefore, I become one among many things in the world but there is a certain uniqueness. I cannot pass as one of those objects because I am a self-existent being. I am not one among many. There is no other thing in the world the same as me. I am therefore unique.

We are told that this self-existent “I” is so unique that we should recognise it as Brahman. To understand that, I need to know what Brahman is. I am told Brahman is Sat-Chit-Ananda (unlimited presence and intelligence). If I fulfil the definition of Brahman, then I am Brahman. This is what we now must understand.

The existence of oneself requires no proof. One is therefore self-existent in the sense of self-evident. When we say self-evident, we are saying that it requires no proof. Everything else is known to exist or known not to exist. There are things that you know exist, things that you know don’t exist and yet more that you do not know whether they exist or not. There are things that doubtfully exist, there are things that are believed to exist, there are things that may exist but I do not know. But any form of existence that is known to you, is known to you through a certain means of knowledge.

This reveals the uniqueness of yourself. The self-existent being is referred to by the word “I” while everything else can be referred by words such as “this object”. The initial enquiry will always be between I and this. This (an object) is never referred to as I. This chair, this floor, this anything is never taken as I. Even things that are dear, valuable or close to your body are not looked upon as I. Even your wife, children or a

wedding ring is not looked upon as I. There is a difference between I and this. We can now draw a vertical line that separates I from this.

To the right of the line are all the things known to me i.e. “not I”. To the left of the line is I. In Sanskrit, we call “I” *Atma* and “not I” *Anatma*. Under anatma lies the entire universe, all beings, all creatures, all plants, they are all anatma. This anatma can be said to be the varieties of sounds I hear, anatma; the varieties of forms that I see, anatma; the varieties of smells, taste, smells, touch, all these are anatma. They are all known through an appropriate means of knowledge. All things that I presume or compare are anatma. All things I believe to exist such as heaven, angels or deities are anatma. Small gods, big gods, they are all anatma i.e. “not I”.

Anatma cannot prove its existence to you without you using a means of knowledge; therefore, the entire anatma ‘shines after’ the atma, meaning comes to be known to exist, because you objectify that which is known. The anatma has to be known to exist whereas the atma is known to exist. Anatma, being something that is known to me, is looked upon as something distinct and different from atma. There must be a line separating me from anatma. This atma/anatma dividing line needs to be understood. Since there is a division, a separation of the two, there must be a place where atma ends and anatma begins. Atma ends somewhere from where anatma begins. If there is a difference between atma and anatma, there must be a dividing line between the two. Where is the dividing line?

Let us consider the physical body as the border. This works because the wedding ring, which is dear and very close to you is not your body and therefore can be anatma while the body itself is atma, looked upon as “I”. So “I” is nothing but the physical body. This is a natural conclusion. If something touches this body, this me, I am touched. If my finger happens to burn itself, I will not say the finger got burnt. Rather I would say I burnt myself. The whole body is I and is not looked upon, as something other than I. The condition of the body is my condition. Let us be very clear. The skin is white, I am white, the body is tall, I am tall. The body has weight, that is my weight, the weight of atma. The body is seated, I am seated. The body stands, I stand. The body runs, I am running. Let this be clear, the body is I therefore I draw the line where the body ends and the world (anatma) begins. When you say “this world” you mean that which is other than the body, that which is beyond the body.

I have the “I sense” in the body, therefore the body is I. But this I sense must be something more than the physical body since a dead body has no sense of I. We appear to have a number of ‘layers’ within the body each with an I sense. For example, I am hungry or I am thirsty. So, that I sense is not only placed within the anatomy but also within the physiology – the life force – that in Sanskrit we call “Prana”.

I also have the mind and senses where we have the I sense, for example if my eyes are blind, I am blind. If anything is happening to the mind, it is happening to me. Deliberate thinking, analysis, reasoning or any cognition are functions of the mind. In Sanskrit, the mind is (for the purposes of analysis) split into three – the knowing mind, the emotional mind and the recollecting mind and in all of them I have the I sense. The I sense is in the mind, therefore it must be I. In the body, prana, the senses and three forms of mind there is an I sense. Additionally, the I sense is to be found in ignorance – when we say “I don’t know” – here too is an I sense.

Should I take any of these as “I”, or should they be taken together? Since there cannot be many “I”s, either the whole thing creates a single “I” or none of them create the “I”. Taken together, the “I”s cannot be separated but they may appear at different points. When I say “I am fat”, the I sense is not only in the body it is in the mind also. I have a thought that I am fat yet my thought is not fat; my memory is not fat; my knowledge is not fat. It is a distinct identification – fat with body. Similarly, I am hungry or I am restless is a distinct identification with the mind and not with the body.

There appears to be many “I”s associated with my body, prana, senses or mind. But this does not work either since the same fellow who says I am fat can also say that I am hungry or restless. It seems that there can be only one I, one Atma who is fat, who is blind, who is hungry, who is restless, who is short or tall, who is male or female. If it is a single “I”, then all these things can be “I” or “I” could be something else. We do not know, and this therefore creates an occasion for doubt. If we can create an occasion for doubt then there can be a debate. If I am the same in all of them, I may be in all of them or in none of them – I may be distinct from all of them.

Perhaps I am all of them or perhaps I am none of them. When you say ‘perhaps’ we have the basis for an enquiry into understanding if something is atma or anatma. If two things are together yet one is not distinguished from the other then the enquiry that separates the two is called a discriminative enquiry. We are not eliminating anything. We are not eliminating the body, the senses, the mind or indeed the world. We are trying to understand what my Self is.

If the body is “I” (atma) and everything else is anatma, then to me my body is atma and your body is anatma and to you, your body is atma and my body is anatma. What is atma to me is anatma to you and what is atma to you is anatma to me. Evidently there is some confusion. I include your body in the physical world yet omit my body and you include my body in your physical world yet exclude your body. Does this not seem illogical?

Surely my body, your body, all bodies must be part of the physical world. My body must be inside the physical world so how can I say it is atma. In fact, you and I

know that my body exists because we can see it. This body is healthy because I know it. I am the one who places this body here, at this time. I handle this body and therefore this is a handled body. Therefore, the body is not “I”. I may have an “I sense” with the body but that is because I have a special relationship with the body and I therefore often refer to it by the term “my”. This is my body. It is an object that is owned by me with a special relationship to me. I cannot be both the owner and the owned. The body is thus an object, anatma, something that is known to exist by a means of knowledge. This body is known to me as healthy, fat, tall, white or black through a means of knowledge. The body is therefore anatma.

Then there is prana – I am hungry or I am thirsty. How do I know I am hungry? Does it reveal itself or is it known by a means of knowledge? It is known to me, atma, and thus an object of knowledge, anatma. If I fall asleep while hungry or thirsty, there is no more hunger or thirst while asleep. This hunger or thirst is known to me, so it is also anatma.

Then there are senses. When eyes cannot see I say I am blind. But blindness is also known to me through a means of knowledge as is hearing, taste etc. If it is known to me, atma, it must be an object of knowledge, anatma. Therefore, we can safely say atma is not my senses.

My mind is capable of changing its emotional state. It may be happy or sad, restless or scared. Does this mean that I am all these things? I know these things. I recognise a restless mind and seek peace. It is known to me and I can work to change it. Therefore, the restless or emotional mind is not me, atma, it is an object, anatma. Similarly, a thought can change from moment to moment yet I remain the same and these changes are known to me. So, the mind is also anatma. You are aware of your knowing mind. Thus, the knowing mind or recollecting mind is also anatma. You were there before the thoughts and recollections, they are anatma. Ignorance too is not self-proven. Do you know the Chinese language? How do you know that you don't know? It is known to you and so ignorance is also anatma.

We are very quick to point out our failures yet ignore our successes. Every breath in is a success, every meal that you digest is a success, yet we choose to only remember failed exams, failed businesses and failed relationships. Not only do we remember them, we equate them to me, to “I”. “I am a failure,” we say.

This atma is therefore self-evident and a ‘conscious being’. The ‘I being’ is in the form of consciousness. Why is it conscious? There is no ‘why’ because it is self-evident, it is not known through a sense of knowledge. It is not subject to doubt because it is self-evident. You can question everything you come to know through a means of knowledge. There is no certainty in anything you consider to be knowledgeable about the world

gained through a means of knowledge. The Self is NOT known through a means of knowledge, it is NOT subject to doubt.

Conscious is an adjective in ‘conscious being’. An adjective qualifies a noun. It is used because you wish to distinguish the object of the noun from all objects of the same species. Thus, we say ‘white cow’ to differentiate from black cows. Because there are cows of many colours, we are constrained to use the adjective ‘white’ to differentiate the cows we mean.

There are many instances where adjectives are not needed. For example, we do not say ‘cold ice’ – we say ice cold but that is another matter entirely. We do not need to say cold ice unless there is hot ice. In the same way, there is no need to say ‘good saint’ because a saint is by definition good. As we lose the meaning of words, we add adjectives to compensate. ***The necessity for an adjective is occasioned by the object of the noun enjoying other members in its own class.*** In other words, if all the chairs in the world are all the same, you need not qualify by saying a wooden chair or a steel chair or a wheelchair.

Atma is said to be a conscious being. Does that mean there is an atma that is an unconscious being? No, there is only one atma because everything else is anatma. If I am atma and you are atma, do we not have many atmas? Let us assume that there are two atmas, you and me. We know that atma is self-evident. So, I know my atma (self-evident) and I see in front of me another atma (you). You similarly, know your atma and see me in front of you as another atma. But what do you really see? You see my body, as I see yours but we have already determined that the body is anatma. In the same way, you see my mind through display of emotion or language, but my mind and your mind has already been determined as anatma. What you see is anatma, not only for you but also for me. My thought is anatma to you as it is anatma to me.

You are not seeing another atma, you are seeing another anatma. All that you objectify is anatma. Does a conscious being objectify another conscious being? No, because you can only objectify anatma. Atma is only you ... and me. The use of the adjective conscious in conscious being therefore is not to differentiate it from others in the same class but to define the nature of ‘being’ to reveal that “I” IS consciousness. The consciousness is “I”, therefore when I say, “I am”, I am saying I am consciousness. In other words, when you see me, consciousness IS. When you are awake, in dream, even in deep sleep when the body and mind is gone, consciousness IS.

Now where do we draw the line. I am the world in front of you now. Where do you end and where do I begin? You are the conscious being. Where do you end? Where does the consciousness stop and then I begin? Suppose consciousness stops somewhere outside me, and I am outside that. Will you see me? I will be outside you. I will never be

in your consciousness. If you see me, am I inside your consciousness or outside your consciousness? I am inside consciousness. I am self-evident, my body is within my consciousness and I am within your consciousness. That my physical body is standing here is dependent on your consciousness. Can you draw the line between you and any object? You cannot.

When you see the stars, they are within consciousness. You think of unknown things, but they are still in consciousness. You can never draw a line between consciousness and the world and therefore when the world IS consciousness IS. The world is within consciousness. The whole body is a sense organ – a sense of touch. Even your eyes or tongue have a sense of touch. The sense of touch is all over the body and through it we experience the world. Atma is consciousness. When I see the body, the body exists, consciousness is. When the thought is, consciousness is. When the world is, consciousness is. If the world is not, consciousness is. Consciousness always is. It does not occur as an event in time. It always is. It means that I am not bound by time. If I am not bound by time then I am not bound by space I eternally exist. I shine always. In the form of consciousness, I shine always.

Consciousness IS all the time. There is nowhere where Consciousness is not. Consciousness is all pervading. That consciousness I am. **I am infinite and all pervading**. In that infinity there can be no separation between you and me. You and I must be that same atma. **We are all one**.