

Ātmā

Svāmī Sadānanda Dāsa

Comments in footnotes by the publishers
© Samuelsson Kid /Stamm Katrin 2011
last modified 8.11.11

The word *ātmā* is used for:

1. *Brahma* (the formless mode of God's being).
2. *Īśvara* (Lord, Master, Ruler) = Bhagavān.
3. *Jīva* = the one who animates, who gives life and consciousness to the coverings, i.e. the individual *ātmā*, first in the state of bondage, then in the state when he is no longer bound but still in his covering. The former is called *baddha-jīva*, the latter *mukta-jīva*.
4. *The individual ātmā without covering but without cit-form*. This is the individual *ātmā* who has seemingly lost his individuality after abandoning his coverings by entering the attributeless mode of God's being.
5. *The deha, the gross and subtle covering*.
6. *Manas*.
7. *Buddhi*.
8. *Dhṛti* = *dhairyam* (strength of character and ideology, philosophy of life).
9. *Yatna* = the inner effort or endeavour to reach a certain goal.
10. *Simple reflexive pronoun*.

Note: It follows from the definitions 1–9 that the word *ātmā* is used for that which either has life and consciousness in itself or gives consciousness and life to others, so that these others seem to be alive and of conscious nature.

The word *ātmā* is derived from the verbal root *at* (= to move, to go, extend to) and the suffix *man*, forming nouns. The word stem is *ātman*, but the nominative is *ātmā* (*ātma-* in compounds, for instance *ātma-like*). Where the word *ātmā* is used without reference to coverings (for something that is given consciousness or life) as it is used in (1) or (2) for instance, *ātmā* means the one

who or that which is unbounded, conscious, full of life, and without limitations of time and space extends everywhere.

Used in the sense of the individual *ātmā* in the covering, the word *ātmā* means that the *aṇu* or infinitesimal cit-nature of the *ātmā*, in spite of being at the innermost centre of the coverings, pervades them to their limit (candana-bindu-vat = like a small drop of sandalwood oil).

(1) and (2) are often called *parama-ātmā* or “the supreme *ātmā*”, to distinguish them from the concepts of the *ātmā* in (3) and (4).

Regarding the concept *ātmā* = *Īśvara* (Lord, Bhagavān), one shall note that the individual *ātmā* often is called *īśvara* or lord as well, because he actually ought to be the lord, namely over the coverings, and above all over the buddhi.

Parokṣa-vāda is a cryptic, indirect way of expression that compels the listener to follow the train of thought with full attention. This attentive following of the train of thought to see what is meant is the most essential form of *sevā* on the whole. *Parokṣa-vāda* prevents the reader or listener from exploiting a statement in an enjoying mood. Without elimination of his *vāsanā-s*¹ and liberation from the influence of his *saṁskāra-s*² it is impossible for him to understand what the text says. *Sva-daya* = study implies inner discipline.

“*Bṛṁhati-bṛṁhayati-va*”, “*Brahma* is that which is great and causes greatness”.

¹ Seeds of lust and hatred, originating from positive or negative experiences during this or former lives. They rest in the *cittam* till they suddenly sprout and manifest as strong outbreaks of emotion, sympathy or antipathy. They form the deep, essential character of an individual.

² Habitual ways of thinking, feeling and perceiving, imprinted in the *antaḥkaraṇam* by experiences in this and former lives.