

Who am I?

Letter from Svami Sadananda Dasa from his sickbed
in Howrah, Calcutta 2.8.58, to his friends in Sweden

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Dear Vamandas, Hella, friends, and members of Vamandas' course,
With affectionate concerns I am with you all in the midst of the course. Now, maybe all of you will realize *one* fundamental difference between Vedic and non-Vedic ways of thinking. It is obvious to *everyone* that all misery, all suffering, everything that threatens our earthly existence is about “mine” and “yours” – it may be one's beloved, the petrol in Central Asia or one's own peace of mind – , but what is *not* obvious is that it *has* to be so, as long as one has not realized the difference between *the biological I¹*, *the I of the true atma²* and *the altogether illusory I³*, which often underlies the megalomania of the doctrine of personal immortality.

It is easy to realize the folly of expecting happiness or even love from anything or anyone in this world. The love of the world is like the love of a lover who strangles his beloved, because she expects or receives happiness from someone else – the love *he* wants to give her as *his sole right*.

It is much more difficult to realize that *it* – i.e. the person, ourselves, that we experience as a physical-mental unity, which we unconditionally and undoubtedly take for granted, which we cannot doubt at all –, that this “I” is nothing but an illusion, called forth by avidya-Maya⁴, and that the infinitesimal atma – in order to enjoy the world – is in need of this I of Maya, and that the atma – in order to experience himself and God – needs an I of cit-shakti, which is as real as God and the atma themselves.

¹ The “biological I” is the subtle material organ (ahamkara) of the psychic covering (antahkarana), the material basis for the I-concept (ahambhava). It makes us relate the functions of the senses and the first three layers of the antahkaranam (cittam, manah, buddhi) to an experiencing I. This relating to an I is the prerequisite of all acting.

² The atma has his own eternal I-principle, “I am atma”, which is called *tvam-pada-artha* or “that to which the word (*pada*) ‘tvam’ (you = the atma) refers or what it means (*artha*)”.

³ Asmita stands for the delusion that buddhi considers itself to be the atma. In contrast to the subtle material, psychic (guna-maya)-ahamkara, this asmita is *not real*, but consists of avidya (ignorance). As thinking subject (cf. Descartes’: “I think, therefore I am” or “I am a thinking object.”) buddhi considers itself as the unit of atma (jiva), subtle and gross covering.

⁴ “Ignorance-maya”, i.e. the aspect of maya that makes the atma forget that he has his own eternal I, consists of joy and knowledge, and that his constitutional nature is to be a dasa (servant) of Bhagavan.

Between the two – the false I and all that comes out of it and the true I and all that comes out of it – stands the futile effort for sheer renunciation, escapism, which leads to mundane and spiritual frustration.

My heart and soul is with you all there –
and my special love and gratitude to you both,
as you do, alone, what we should have done together,
the three of us.

May He, Who holds Govardhana for seven days,
strengthen and protect you all there,
during the two weeks the course will run.

Always Your Sadananda