

ATMAN - A SELF - EVIDENT ENTITY (ACCORDING TO SHANKRACHARYA)

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ABSTRACT

It is not that vedas or Sastras that reveal the self but that in fact Atman is self- evident. The self of man is 'knower' of all, even of knowledge and ignorance. Themselves are objects of knowledge to this "knower" only with this knower as the basis can any search for knowledge begin. Self is different from the mind. It understands the state of mind, that it is sad, it is glad. But Atman is the light and the witness, for different from the consciousness of the mind. So, it is not with the aid of the Sastras that man comes to know his self. It is never an unknown factor first which was made known later by Sastra. But there is a mist round the Atman. Sastra aid to clear the mist. One cannot obtain his self for the self is obtainer. One can not give up his self. It is ever existent and self evident first principle. This is the gist of the section. And that other entity which reveals consciousness is the self. The intelligence different from the consciousness.¹ The self is not a thing unknown to anybody at any time, not a thing to be reached or got rid of or aquired. Just as there is not need for any external evidence to know one's own body, so also there is no need for any external evidence to know one's self which is nearer than the body. So for the wise practice Jnana (knowledge of divine reality) is also equally well known automatically.²

Keywords: Vedas, Sastras, Atman, State of Mind, Self Evident, Consciousness.

Introduction

Meditation on Shri Ram, Shri Krishna of one's own Guru is quite possible. An image of these with their qualities come to our mind. Meditation here is continuous retention of the image in our mind. How can Atma Jnana be practiced as one cannot form an image of the Atman. The answer is that it is quite possible. No extraneous agent like a light or man etc. is necessary to make one know that he is a body. Atman is much nearer and inner to man than his body. In fact it is the prime knower in us. He is the witness of all mind, Prana and body.

He is self-evident; nothing extraneous like Sunlight or Sastra is required to know it. But this primary, self-evident knower is mixed up with other things. These other things have to be rejected by the mind that Atma is not the body, that Atma is not the mind. This experience has to be confirmed and stabilised. Atma is the simple witness of all. This idea can be practiced by the mind continuously. So Atma jnana is quite possible.

The process of valid knowledge is apprehended through cognition; So cognition is automatically known as pleasure and the like. Atma has to be posited before the process of knowledge commences. An object of knowledge is apprehended through learning; So cognition is automatically known as pleasure and the like. Therefore cognition is self revealed and so accordingly also is the cognisor self-revealed.³ Knowledge and ignorance are objects of immediate perception but as matters within the mind.⁴

Atman to be known, being beyond the reach of the senses, can be known solely through the instrument of knowledge called the Sabda, namely Vedas. Not otherwise being beyond the senses.⁵ Our knowledge is a thing outside ourselves. There are known by our five sense organs which can function

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only on outside things. Atma, the inner core of man, is beyond man's five senses projecting outside. But there have been Rishies who have divided deep within themselves and have gained correct experience of the soul. The record of these super sensuous experiences are the Vedas and the Upnishadas. These being a record of experiences and not supposition of the mind, must be correct. So the conflict of opinions is given a completely hard experiences of the Rishis recorded in Sastra. Thus the function of the Shastra or the Vedas is to reduce this conflict of opinions regarding the soul, on the basis of experiences. 'Aproksha anubhuti' that is called experience beyond the eyes or the senses settles all conflicts. This record of supersensuous experience of Rishis is called "Sabda" No inference can have authority against perception. It is not Atma that was unknown before the Vedas made it known to us. From the very first Atma was known. But there were some tangles over that Atman. Shastra removed these tangles alone. Atma then shines, and then is correctly known.

One of the entanglement over the Atman that was removed by Shastra was the idea of working ideologically. Man is born with the idea that he has no bliss and has to work for it and obtain it and enjoy it. Upnishads tell him that Atman is the spray of the bliss and that he has to know his reality.

'Atman' the self is Brahman.⁸ Moksha being eternal can not be the production of any action or ritual.⁹ Freedom is natural to the soul. Soul does not acquire it by Brahman Vidya. Indeed the eternal reality is produced neither by realisation nor by word.¹⁰ The knowledge of Brahman does not create nor put a stop to real entity.¹¹ Having no form etc. this thing is not an object of direct perception by any sense and not possessing any indicative mark it does not become a subject of inference. This gives reason why Atman is known only by Sabda. Self or Brahman has no form, no smell, no sound, no body etc. So senses can't grasp it. So it is beyond senses. Nor has it any indicating mark. With the help of smoke we assume there is fire. But there is no such indicating mark to self, it is beyond reason also. It is not proper to state that the 'Jiva' is different from Isvara.¹² In moksha there is no body or organs. This is the difference in the idea of Moksha between mimamsakas and dvaitins and Advaitins on the other. Both of them do not conceive of bodylessness to the soul in heaven or in the Vaikuntha.

The form taken by the realization of the Grand truth is "all this is one, the Brahman, the Absolute and Non-doer"¹³ one without any concern to gain anything from outside and because of his acquisition of the immortal nectar, the realization of the supreme is averse to everything else.

Such a one has reliable Jnana. Imaginary idea or knowledge has no power to affect the real thing. Avidya can do nothing to Kshetrajna.¹⁴ Ignorance contaminates our mind but it has no power to soil the Atman. Atman remains ever pure in spite of impurity of mind. True realization removes ignorance.¹⁵ Light alone can dispel darkness. That knowledge is the final point of the abstention of desires. Real knowledge or wisdom is not deep. It is rising up completely from the passionate mind of man. There can be no alternatives in reality as in Karma.¹⁶

The stages of Atmajnana in order are Karmayoga, purity of mind, then attainment of knowledge then renunciation of actions and lastly meditation ending in the peace of self realization.¹⁷ Action with the detachment is an intermediate means to the end, namely devotion to knowledge and not independently. But Jnana Nishta, which is attained with the help of unattached action (Karma Nishta) leads to the goal directly without extraneous aid.¹⁸ Jnana Nishta leads directly to the highest goal. Only performance of action becomes the means for attaining freedom from activity.

The experience of self realization is utter unity with all, as infinite consciousness and bliss. Then the 'Sadhna' stops. The Sadhaka has no further Karma or duty to do. This does not mean that there will be no flow of beneficial activities from them but they will flow just like fragrance from the flower. Moksha is (Atman) becoming identical with Brahman.¹⁹ Moksha is the Atman bursting its present bonds of Identification with the body and mind then Atman comprises all.

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