

Who am I?

Possessive language

So, I ask you, who are you? And you say, I am so and so. Really, think about it. Your name is given to you. Your parents could have named you something else and you would say, I am something else to my question of you are you. Please understand that your name is just a label for you in this world.

In the every language there is an equivalent word for the possessive pronoun 'my'. 'My' implies something that belongs to me. It is separate from me but is mine. For instance I say, "This is my cell phone, this is my home." But in this identification I am separate from the objects. Similarly I say, "My body, my mind, my intellect, and my ego." Here we have to have the subtle understand that I am separate from my body, my mind, my intellect and my ego. I am not the sum total of all these things.

Another way to look at is, the 'my' is transitory, only present for a while. For instance what is mine is only for a short time. For example, my phone is with me until the next model comes out or the technology changes and then my phone is replaced. Same thing applies to my father, my mother, my sister, my brother, my friend, my wife, my husband, my son, my daughter, my home, my car, etc. Even my life has an end. The 'my' always has additions and losses, and we can observe that, that 'my' is separate from me.

Mathematical view

Let us look another way, in a mathematical way. The question is, "Is there a difference between a living person and a dead person?" The obvious answer is that there is a difference, the living person moves, talks, laughs, eats, etc. While the dead person does not perform any function. The term difference is represented as a 'minus' sign in mathematics. Thus one can write the equation:

Living Person – Dead person = Something

Adding Dead person to both sides of the equation gives:

Living person = Dead person + Something

What is the one word that describes a dead person? For instance, in police reports when a dead person is found and its identity is not known, it is described as a 'Body'. Therefore the above equation can be written as:

Living person = Body + Something

Now let us look at the whole world and see how many human beings are on it. Today, September of 2011, we can say there are over six point five billion people on this earth. We are all included in this six point five billion people. All of these six point five billion people have identities. The question is what gives us our identity. From the above equation the living person's identity can be from the body or the something.

Let us understand the definition of identical twins. Identical twins are formed when a fertilized cell splits and creates two identical cells with the same chromosome structure.

These two individuals have the same physical bodies. When you ask them about their identity, they will tell you that we are individuals, and then the answer to individuality comes from the something in the above equation. Our identity is from the something and not the body.

But one can say, the something contains a lot of things, like the mind, intellect and the ego, thus these quantities give me my identity. Let us re-write the something as:

Mind + Intellect + Ego + Something else = Something

We have refined the something into further parts.

Most of us have education and we have been taught the principles of science. One of the key pillars of science is observation. You have to observe to study anything; most of our discoveries have been through observations. When changes are being measured, observation can be used. It is easy to measure changes when one is separate from the change. For instance take an analog clock, if the dial is rotating and the hands are also rotating, then the overall change, change in time, cannot be measured. The dial has to be stationary, separate from the hands to tell time.

We have all observed changes within us one time or another, usually as we get older, we say things like, I could not live without something, but now I realize that I can do without it; this is change in the mind. I used to think like this, but now I know better; this is change in the intellect. If someone would do this to me, I would retaliate, but now I do not react like that; this is change in the ego.

We all observe these three changes in our lives as we pass through life. Implication of this is that the observer, I, is separate from the mind, intellect and the ego. The true I is the Atman. This has to be understood intellectually before we can continue. When one understands rationally, with logic and reason and makes use of the intellectual facilities then it stays with us throughout our lives. Just in the same way, if our faith is anchored in the intellect, then it will never waiver no matter what thoughts.

Hence reverence

Since I am the Atman, there is the concept of “Reverence for Self”. Since humanity is also Atman, there is “Reverence for Others”.

I can use similar logic to understand the difference between ‘a living dog and a dead dog’, ‘a living fish and a dead fish’, ‘a living bug and a dead bug’. From this understanding comes “Reverence for Animals”.

Furthermore, I can talk about ‘a living plant and a dead plant’ or ‘a living tree and a dead tree’. From this we have “Reverence for Nature”.

God’s teaching about Atman

Now we are going to turn to the Bhagavad-Geeta to get better understanding of what Bhagavan says in the matter of the Atman.

Verse 2:12

**na tvevāham jātu nāsam na tvam neme janādhipāḥ
na caiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ sarve vayamataḥ param**

Bhagavan says, “*There was never a time when I was not, nor you were not, nor these kings were not. Nor is the fact that here after we all will cease to exist.*”

This tells us that we, the Atman, are eternal; we exist for ever. So my question to you is, how old is the Atman? Atman is eternal, ageless, thus we should be able to relate to everyone even if they are babies or elders.

Verse 2:20

**Na jāyate mriyate vā kadāci-
nnāyam bhūtva bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato’yam purāṇo-**

na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre

Bhagavan says, “*The soul is never born nor dies; nor does it become only after being born. For it is unborn, eternal, everlasting and primeval; even though the body is slain, the soul is not.*” Here we get the message that we are eternal and so our outlook should also be eternal. We should not be lost in this life with all the day to day encounters. Life is a journey for the Atman and we should always keep that in mind.

Verse 2:22

**vāsāmsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya
navāni grhṇāti naro’parāṇi
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇā-
nyanyāni saṁyāti navāni dehī**

Bhagavan says, “*As a person removes worn-out clothes, and takes new ones, likewise the embodied Atman casts off worn-out bodies and enter into new ones.*” Here the message is of reincarnation of the Atman, the Atman goes from body to body.

Verse 2:23

**nainam chindanti śastrāṇi nainam dahati pāvakaḥ
na cainam kledayantyāpo na śoṣayati mārutaḥ**

Bhagavan says, “*Weapons cannot cut the Atman nor can fire burn it; water cannot wet it and wind cannot dry it.*”

Verse 2:24

**aachedyo’yamadāhyo’yamakledyo’śoṣya eva ca
nityaḥ sarvagataḥ sthāṇuracalo’yam sanātanaḥ**

Bhagavan says, “*This Atman is incapable of being cut; it is inflammable (against fire), impervious to water and un-dryable. The Atman is eternal, omnipresent, immovable, constant and everlasting.*”

Here God explicitly tells us that the Atman cannot be destroyed, it is ever lasting, no beginning or no end.

Verse 2:25

**avyakto’yamacintyo’yamavikāryo’yamucyate
tasmādevam viditvainaṁ nānuśocitumarhasi**

Bhagavan says, “*This Atman is unmanifest; it is incomprehensible and is immutable. Therefore knowing it such, you should not grieve.*”

Here the message is that the Atman is immutable and thus we should not grieve, the Atman transcends the physical or material world.

Incomprehensible means beyond the reach of human intellect; not capable of being contained within limits

Immutable means unchanging through time; unalterable; ageless

Verse 15:7

**mamaivāṁśo jīvaloke jīvabhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ
manaḥśaṣṭhānīndriyāṇi prakṛtisthāni karṣati**

Bhagavan says, “*The eternal Jivatma in this body is a fragment of My own being; and it is That alone which draws around itself the mind and the five senses, which abide in Prakruti.*”

Way deep in the Geeta is the knowledge that the Atman is part and parcel of God. Just like a cell in the body is an individual, so is the Atman an individual. Technology exists today to separate each and every cell in the body. But each and every cell in the body is part and parcel of the body. Just like that, each and every Atman is part and parcel of God. However, we should note that I am beyond the sum total of all the cells, just like that God is beyond the sum total of the Atman. God transcends above everyone and everything.

Our outlook

Now we have ask ourselves, how our outlook should be. Most people tell us to have a long range vision, we should have positive attitude, think of where we want to be, etc. We should also have an outlook that goes beyond this life. Where do I want to be in my next life? What progress can I make in my next life? What characteristics should I have in my next life?

With this kind of outlook, you can start working towards your next life goals in this life. Just know that birth and death go hand in hand, and our destiny is in our hands.

God’s love for us

Verse 7:4-5

**bhūmirāpo’nalo vāyuḥ khañ mano buddhireva ca
ahañkāra itīyañ me bhinnā prakṛtiṣaṣṭadhā
apareyamitastvanyāñ prakṛtiñ viddhi me parāñ
jīvabhūtāñ manābāho yayedāñ dhāryate jagat**

Bhagavan says, “*Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and also ego; these constitute My Prakruti divided into eight parts. This is My lower nature (prakruti). The other than this, by which this whole universe is sustained, know it to be My higher (or spiritual) nature in the form of Jiva (life principles), O Arjun.*”

Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and ego are all from God’s prakruti. This is the lower form of prakruti (apara-prakruti). The consciousness in us is from the higher form of prakruti (para-prakruti). Here earth represents solids, water represents liquids, fire represents all forms of energy, air represents gases, and ether represents space. All these five, gross elements, compose the body. On top of that is the mind, intellect, ego and consciousness, all part of God’s prakruti. Here God is telling us that mind, intellect and ego are not part of Atman, and they belong to Him. Here we have to pause and think about what has been said. The mind, intellect and ego do not belong to us. If I hurt someone physically or mentally or intellectually, who am I hurting in reality? I am hurting God not the Atman. That is why the “Ahinsa”, the concept of non-violence is so important.

In this sloka, we also understand God’s love for me, the Atman. Atman is forever contained in God. God surround the Atman so no harm comes to it.

Points:

- Possessive my
- Mathematical view
- Arjun’s dilemma
- Bhagavan’s start of teaching
- I am Atman

- I am eternal
- I am indestructible
- I am not born or killed
- Long range vision past this life
- Self development over life times