

Jīva-tattva

The definition of the term “ātmā”

by Svāmī Sadānanda dāsa

Translation into English and annotations as footnotes: Katrin Stamm

© Kid Samuelsson 2006

- 1) The *ātmā* is *nitya*, i.e. eternal, considering the past and the future.
- 2) The *ātmā* is “*sat*”, existing, in a secondary sense, as his existence depends on the *sat*-Being¹ of *Bhagavān*².
- 3) The *ātmā* (was) eternally free or in bondage, but also the eternally enslaved *ātmā* is only eternally in bondage from the perspective of the past, i.e. *anādi-baddha*³. He can become *mukta* or liberated when he turns to *Bhagavān*.
- 4) According to the school of *Śaṅkara*⁴ the coverings of the *ātmā* in bondage are *mithyā*, i.e. neither real nor unreal, consequently an illusion.
- 5) Following the *śāstram*-s⁵ the coverings of the *ātmā* in bondage are *a-sat*, i.e. not eternal, but real. Only the identification of the *ātmā* with his coverings consists of *avidyā*, i.e. nescience.
The conviction of the *ātmā*, who has identified with his coverings, is the result of a defect of the *buddhi*⁶.
- 6) If the *ātmā* were essentially and eternally free, also when residing within his coverings, i.e. if his coverings were not really existing but only a projection (*adhyāsa*) on the *ātmā* due to *avidyā*⁷, then the emanation, sustenance and dissolution of the worlds would be unreal, too. Consequently the *avatāra-līlā*-s⁸ would be illusory as well. Because, if the substance of *Prakṛti*⁹ factually didn't exist, then *Bhagavān* couldn't become *avatirṇa*¹⁰ in a world as an *avatāra*, nor as

¹ Existence.

² God in His highest form as eternal, supreme transcendental Personality, invested with the fullness of all His spiritual Potencies.

³ Bound since time without beginning.

⁴ Māyāvāda-doctrine.

⁵ “That, which instructs and keeps one on the right path by dint of regulations”, i.e. the Veda or the Revelation of God's Word.

⁶ Intellect.

⁷ Nescience.

⁸ Avatāra: “Coming down to the world of Māyā (five elements), from the realm of non-Māyā.” Avatāra-līlā: The transcendental Play of God on Earth, performed by a full or a partial manifestation of Himself.

⁹ The substance of the worlds.

¹⁰ Become manifest.

*Paramātmā*¹¹ dwell in a universe or be indirectly present nearby the individual *ātmā* in bondage.

Why does the *ātmā* identify with his coverings?

He does so, because he is on the one hand robbed of his true self-consciousness by *Māyā*, acting as *avidyā*¹², and on the other hand supplied with coverings by *Māyā*, acting as provider of matter, which he can identify with instead. As the *ātmā* is just as *svatantra*¹³ as *Bhagavān* – only with the difference, that *Bhagavān* can perform what He wants to, whereas the *jīva-ātmā*¹⁴ by his *own* power can only nourish the will to perform, but is in need of *Bhagavān's śakti*¹⁵ to fulfill his desire – he is in *this* respect, but *only* in this respect, *nitya mukta*, eternally free.

Freedom and bondage are ontologically speaking just expressions, which belong to the field of ignorance (*ajñānam*).

1) In Caitanya-Caritāmṛta¹⁶ it says:

Jīver svarūp hay Kṛṣṇer nitya dās
Kṛṣṇer taṭastha-śakti bhedābhed prakāś

The *jīvātmā's svarūpa* is: *Kṛṣṇa's*¹⁷ eternal *dāsa*¹⁸, i.e. the true nature (*svarūpa*) of the *jīvātmā* is, to be *Kṛṣṇa's* eternal servant. This implies: Although the *jīvātmā* is *baddha*, i.e. has no idea of his true identity, but considers himself to be something else than himself, he still remains – regardless of *not* knowing it – an eternal *dāsa* of *Kṛṣṇa*.

To be a *dāsa* is an inalienable characteristic – i.e. to belong non-detachably to *Kṛṣṇa* and be ever subordinate to Him. Only in this sense one can say, that the *jīvātmā* is “*mukta*”¹⁹, although he doesn't realise it.

2) That the *jīvātmā* doesn't have to be really and truly *mukta*, but can be *baddha* as well, follows from the fact, that the *jīvātmā* is a *prakāśa* of *Kṛṣṇa's taṭasthā-*

¹¹ The aspect of the Lord, facing the world, the Oversoul (= *Paramātmā*) who a) enters each universe to sustain it (2. *Mahāviṣṇu*), and b) dwells in close proximity to every *ātmā* as his „Inner Guide” or *Antaryāmī*, to sustain his coverings and guarantee that the *ātmā* meets the reactions of his individual karma (3. *Mahāviṣṇu*).

¹² *Avaraṇātmikā-māyā*, i.e. the power of *māyā*, that veils the consciousness of the *ātmā*, that resides within his gross and subtle covering.

¹³ Endowed with free will.

¹⁴ The *ātmā* within the coverings or the embodied *ātmā*, who gives life (*jīvayati*) to the coverings.

¹⁵ Divine Potency.

¹⁶ C.C.II.20,101/108 (101 according to the edition of Rādhā Govinda Nāth and 108 according to the edition of Gauḍīya Maṭh). One of the biographies of Śrī Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya, a full manifestation of *Bhagavān*, who appeared on Earth in the years 1486-1533 in India.

¹⁷ *Bhagavān* in His Fullness.

¹⁸ Servant.

¹⁹ Free.

*śakti*²⁰, that, despite of belonging to *Kṛṣṇa*, is different and not different from Him at the same time (*bhedābheda*).

Prakāśa denotes something that is self-luminous and enlightening. Therefore the *ātmā* cannot become *prakāśya* by means of the *antaḥkaraṇam*²¹, i.e. the *antaḥkaraṇam* cannot make him be seen or known.

Only when the *saṁvit-śakti*²² enables the *jīvātmā* to know himself and he stops to identify himself with the *antaḥkaraṇam*, then the defect of the *buddhi* ceases, that had made the *antaḥkaraṇam* mistake itself for the *ātmā*, because the power of *Māyā*, working as *avidyā*, due to which the *ātmā* had identified with the coverings, has terminated.

“If you read or hear in any place, that *bhakti* or *premabhakti* is ‘awakened’, you always have to keep in mind that the *bhakti-śakti* is ‘*viṣṇu*’ in exactly the same way as *Viṣṇu* Himself. She *is* always and everywhere present, but becomes discernible only by virtue of the contact [...] [with] *bhaktas*.”

“ ‘To become revealed’ does not mean, that *bhakti* was inherent in the heart and that the *ātmā* possessed dormant *bhakti* out of himself. [...] *Bhakti* is God’s power, not the power of the *ātmā*. [...] *Bhakti* as a discipline causes *bhakti* to manifest as *sthāyi-bhāva* in the *ātmā*; please *not out* of the *ātmā*. The sun rises *in* the sky, but not *out of* the sky.”

(From the Corrections to “The Indian Love of God”)

²⁰ “The Power on the border-line”, oscillating between the centripetal Power, attracting the *ātmā* towards God (*ākarṣaṇa-śakti*), and the centrifugal Power (*vikarṣaṇa-śakti*), hurling the *ātmā* away from Him.

²¹ The “inner sense” or psychic organ, containing the purely receptive consciousness or the ability to perceive (*cetas*), the mind or willingness to perceive (*manas*), the intellect or ability to discern the perceived (*buddhi*) and the subtle material of *Māyā*, which provides the perceiving subject with a false and transient personality and is therefore called *Ahaṁkāra*, the “I-maker”.

²² *Bhakti* or the Power of God, through which He Himself knows Himself and makes Himself known to others.