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Does it convey identity or difference? Part II

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Dvaita interpretation

This illustration answers the question of why God is not perceived even when present in the body. The tree refers to the universe, the seeds to souls. Although the seeds are visible, Lord Viṣṇu, who permeates them, is invisible, because he is subtler than they are.³⁵

Advaita interpretation

The indivisible Brahman is the cause of the universe. This chapter of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad begins as follows: "O good-looking one, in the beginning, this was Existence alone, one only, without a second and it thought 'may I become many' and created the objects of the world." Objects of the world are known therefore, because they have come from Brahman, which is the essence of knowledge. In other words, Brahman is the material cause of the world.³⁶

It might be argued that transformation can occur only in the case of an entity that consists of parts. The Upaniṣads hail Brahman as indivisible.³⁷ Therefore, Brahman cannot

undergo transformation. If it could, that would make Brahman as transient as any transforming entity. But Advaitins hold that Brahman is eternal.³⁸

This is replied as follows. When the scriptures hail Brahman as the cause of the world, they refer to transfigurative causality (vivarta upādānatva) and not transformative causality. On the strength of this Chāndogya passage and from passages from other Upaniṣad (such as "Know māyā to be the material cause of the world and Maheśvara as one possessed as māyā"),³⁹ Advaitins admit that māyā undergoes transformation in the form of the world and thus is the transformative material cause of the world (pariṇāmyupādāna). Because Brahman is the locus of ajñāna, however, it is the transfigurative material cause of the world (vivartopādāna).⁴⁰

This illustration indicates that Brahman is the cause of the universe and is subtle. The word "subtle" does not mean that Brahman is as subtle as an atom; it means that Brahman is imperceptible. Though intrinsically subtle, Brahman, through avidyā, is the cause of the

33 atrāpi yadyapi jīvavr̥kṣayorbhedah̥ pratīyate, tathāpyatra vr̥kṣaśabdena dehasyopādhereva vivakṣanāt kṣetrakṣetrañāvibhāgapratipādanadvārā ... turīyāvastheiva jīvasya mukhyam svarūpam ... brahmeiva mukhyam tattvamityanena vivakṣyate ... anena ca kāraṇaśarīrājñānanivṛtyā'hambhāvavigamo'pi muktāviti nirūpanadvāropādhyabhivāyena tattadyupādhyabhimanibandhanaduhkhanivṛtiriti jñāpyate.ata eva ' asya yadekam śākhām jīvo jahātyatha sa suṣyatīti dr̥ṣṭāntah̥. I Anena hi dehābhimananivṛttereṅvāśarīratvam na tu karmanimittamiti jñāpyate I (ATS, 12).

34 Chānd. Up., 6.12.1-2.

35 atra vr̥kṣah̥ prapañcaḥ phalam śarīram dhānāḥ jīvāḥ, tatra yathā sūkṣme vaṭabīje dr̥śyamānepi hariḥ paramasūkṣmatvāt na dr̥śyate tathā jīvādapi sūkṣmatvāt tadantargataḥ na dr̥śyate ityuktam I (J.T.). VTN 100.

36 ...sadeva soumyedamagra āśidekamevādvitīyamiti sadvidyāyāḥ prathamavākya sarvasya prapañcasya sadātmanā pratīyamānatvam sacchidānandarūpabrahmanaḥ sadātmanā jñāyamānatvasyeivopādānatvanibandhanam I (ATS, 13).

37 niṣkalam niṣkriyam śāntam̐niravadyam, nirañjanam, Śvetāśvataropaniṣad in Upaniṣads for All, Chitrita Devi (New Delhi: S.Chand & Co, 1973), 6/19.

manifest world (consisting of name and form). This view is supported by a passage in the Bhagavadgītā : “The entire Universe is pervaded by me—the unmanifest.”⁴¹

Sixth illustration

'Put this salt into water and then come to me in the morning.' He did so. The father said to him, 'Bring the salt, my child, which you put into water at night.' Having searched for it, he did not find it, as it had completely dissolved. 'My child, take a sip from the top of this water. How is it?' 'It is salt.' 'Take a sip from the middle. How is it?' 'It is salt.' 'Take a sip from the bottom. How is it?' 'It is salt.' 'Throw this water away and then come to me.' He did so (and returned saying), 'It is there always.' The father said to him, 'Dear boy, as you do not see what is present in this water though indeed it exists in it, similarly, (Being exists) indeed in this body.'⁴²

Dvaita interpretation

God is invisible. Salt dissolved in water cannot be seen but is nonetheless experienced by tasting the water. The essence of God cannot be perceived but is nonetheless understood.^{43,44}

Advaita Interpretation

The fifth illustration indicated that Brahman, together with māyā or avidyā, is the cause of the world. It is well known that qualities in the cause are transferred to the effects. Existence, consciousness, and bliss are qualities of Brahman, whereas name and form are qualities of avidyā. The objects of the world are therefore

characterised not only by existence, consciousness, and bliss but also by name and form. This sixth illustration supports that view.⁴⁵ Both salt and water retain their individuality as salt and water before mixing. When mixed, however, they form a new entity, salt water, which contains the qualities of both salt and water. Before creation, similarly, both Brahman and māyā are separate entities. During creation, due to the mutual superimposition of Brahman and māyā, the world that we know through cognition consists of the qualities of both i.e., not only of existence, consciousness, and bliss but also of name and form.⁴⁶

Seventh illustration

'Just as, dear boy, (some robber) having brought a man from the Gandhāra region with his eyes bound up, might leave him in a very desolate place, and just as that man would shout towards the east, or towards the north, or towards the south, or towards the west, (saying) “I have been brought here with my eyes bound up, I have been left here with my eyes bound up.”' And as some one might remove his bandage and tell him, “The Gandhāra region is in this direction, proceed in this direction” and as he, enquiring his way from village to village, and being instructed and capable of judging by himself, would reach the Gandhāra region itself, even so, in this world, that person knows who has a preceptor. And for him, only so long is the delay as he is not liberated (from the body) and then immediately he is merged in Being.⁴⁷

Dvaita interpretation

Instruction by a guru is indispensable for

38 niravayavyasyātisūkṣmasya ca kathamupādānatvami śāṅkāviśeṣaḥ | (ATS, 13). See also yadi niravayavam brahmasyāneiva pariṇameta, (Brahmasūtram with Śāṅkara's commentary (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), 213.

39 Śvetāśvataropaniṣad 4/10.

40 tacca sata ātmasvarūpatvat cidātmanā ānandātmana'jñānaneiva vivartopādānatvameveti tadaikṣata bahu syām prajāyeya iti vākyāntatātparyam vivakṣyate | (ATS, 13)

See also upādānatvam ca ... jagadākāreṇa

pariṇamamāna māyādhiṣṭānatvam. etadṛśamevopādānatvamabhipretyedamsarvam yadayamātmā sacca tyaccābhavat bahu syām prajāyeyetyādī śrutiṣu brahmaprapaṅcayostādātmyavyapadesaḥ | (VP, 235).

41 ayam hi dṛṣṭāntaḥ sa eso'nimeti sarvaprapaṅcakāraṇasya satonutvam nanuparimāṇatvena kintu durvijñeyatvena ... tathā cāvvyaktasya paramātmāno'pi vyaktaprapaṅcopādānatvamajñānopadhānena tadāśrītājñānapariṇāmavidhayā nāmarūpātmanā vyaktena rūpeṇa bhānam sadātmanā tvavyaktena rūpeṇa brahmaṇo bhānamiti na virudhyate. tatha ca gītā-

mayā tatamidam sarvam jagadavyaktamūrtinā | (ATS, 13).

42 Chānd. Up., 6.13.1-2.

acquiring the knowledge of God. And there is a delay in attaining liberation till the prārabdhakarma is experienced.⁴⁸

Advaita interpretation

Liberation is possible for a qualified aspirant only with the aid of a guru. A competent aspirant who cultivates qualities such as detachment, control of sense organs, and so on, approaches a guru. The latter teaches him that he is not different from Brahman.⁴⁹

Although the Gāndhāra region is not a person, this metaphor supports the teaching of Advaita. In the preliminary stages of self-realization, when the influence of avidyā exists, the soul is admitted to be different from God. Only at the final stage, after self-realization does an aspirant realize that his soul is God. The illustration tells therefore, that aspirants need gurus in order to realize.⁵⁰

Eighth illustration

'Dear boy, the relatives of a man who is ill assemble round him and ask, "Do you know me? Do you know me?" As long as his speech is not merged in the mind, the mind in Prāṇa, Prāṇa in fire, and fire in the supreme deity, so long does he know them. Then when his speech is merged in the mind, the mind in Prāṇa, Prāṇa in fire, and fire in the supreme deity, then he does not know them.⁵¹

Dvaita interpretation

The fourth and fifth illustrations were used an analogy to show that the soul of a tree depends on God, and this illustration shows that the soul

of a person depends on God.⁵² Thus when God takes away the prāṇa the jīva will not be able to know anything and function through them and the jīva will be able to do so only when God allows them to function. In other words, only when the God endows the jīva with prāṇa etc., he is able to function and when God takes away the prāṇa he is not able to function. Thus this illustration shows the dependence of jīva on God and his difference from him.⁵³

Advaita Interpretation

In this illustration although there is difference between the individual soul (jīva) and his vital breath (prāṇa) that distinction exists only as long as the body exists. Once that falls away, there is no distinction as the knower and the known and what remains is nothing but the self-illuminating pure consciousness.⁵⁴

Ninth Illustration

'Dear boy, (the officers of the king) bring a man, holding him by the hand (while saying), "He has taken something, he has committed a theft, heat the axe for him." If he is the doer of that, then he makes himself false. And being addicted to falsehood, he covers himself with falsehood and grasps the heated axe; he is burnt, and then he is punished. If, however, he is not the doer of that, then he makes himself true. And being attached to truth, he covers himself with truth and grasps the heated axe; he is not burnt and then he is released.⁵⁵

Dvaita interpretation

This final illustration is about the consequence of truth and ignorance. The

43 lavaṇaguṇe rase drśyamānepi lavaṇam na drśyate tathā hareḥ sāmārthye drśyamānepi bhagavān na drśyate | (VTN,101).

44 "In the previous illustration it was pointed that God's presence can be observed from the effects of his presence. This is one more illustration to show his presence though he is not observed." Ibid.

45 tena ca sṛṣṭeḥ pūrvam sadātmano'pi cetanācetanātmakasya sarvasya prapañcasya sṛṣṭyanantaram na sadātmanaiva pratītiḥ kintu nāmarūpātmanā vyaktenayathā'lavaṇāvasthāyāmudakātmateiva salavaṇā(v)asthā tu rūpāntareṇa iti ṣaṣṭhenodāharaṇena viśadīkriyate || ATS., 14.

46 tathā ca yathā lavaṇodakayoḥ parasparāvyatikarāvasthāyām tattadrūpamātreṇa bhānam, parasparavyatikare tu lavaṇodakatvena evameva parasparatādātmyadyāsād māyikanāmarūpātmaprapañcātmanā vyaktam bhānam sadātmanā tvavyaktamiti... (ATS, 14).

47 Chānd. Up., 6.14.1-2.

48 gurūpadeśaḥ taddarśanaprāptyoḥ heturiti drśtāntamāha pitā | yavat na vimokṣye -prārabdhakarmanāḥ na vimokṣyate tāvadeva ciram vilambaḥ brahmaprāptou atha bhogena prārabdhakṣayānantaram sampatsyate brahma prāpnoti | (VTN, 103).

difference between God and the soul is truth; those who know that are not affected by bondage. The unity of God and the soul is illusory, however; those who think that there is unity between God and soul are affected by bondage and experience misery.⁵⁶

Advaita interpretation

The notion of being a doer is superimposed on the self. In the case of a liberated soul, it does not exist. An aspirant contemplates the fact that he is not the agent of what he does. Slowly, due to his spiritual practises, he becomes free from the bondage that arises from the notion of being a doer and he enters the state of pure consciousness.⁵⁷ This is liberation. In short, seekers can become free from bondage by understanding that they are not agents. Thus, the difference between the robber and the stolen article is not important here. What is emphasized here is that between the notions of being an agent and a non-agent, the notion of being a non-agent is real and one can become free from bondage only by contemplating on the fact that one is not an agent.⁵⁸

Conclusion

According to the Dvaita point of view, all nine illustrations convey the soul's dependence on and distinction from God. All the nine illustrations have as their import the difference between jīva and Īśvara. Madhva summarizes the Dvaita view as follows: just as the bird and string are different jīva and Īśvara are different. Just as the juices of different trees are different and just as the rivers and oceans are different, jīva and Īśvara are always different. Although God pervades the seeds and is different from the seeds, still he is

not perceived as he is subtle. Although salt and water are different still the salt dissolved in water is not perceived; in the same way God the inner controller is not perceived. Just as the blind folded person and the Gandhāra region are different, in the same way jīva and Īśvara are different.⁵⁹

Anantakṛṣṇāśāstri summarizes the Advaita point of view as follows: the first illustration states that the concept of difference leads to bondage and liberation is nothing but realisation of one's own bliss, the second illustration justifies that the identity between jīva and brahman is realised by the jīvanmukta, the third illustration supports the view of identity between jīva and Brahman taking the above experience of the non-dual Brahman into consideration, and the fourth illustration mentions that the pure consciousness devoid of all upādhis, such as ajñāna together with its latent impressions, is the true principle.⁶⁰ In other words, the first illustration says that liberation is nothing but the realization of one's own bliss, which is experienced by prājñā while deep sleeping; The second, third and fourth illustrations say that pure consciousness is the true nature of the soul. Therefore, the latter appears to be different from Brahman only as long as the limiting adjuncts—such as body and mind—exist. Once the latter vanish, the soul experiences its oneness with Brahman; The fifth illustration discusses the subtle nature of Brahman; The sixth justifies the role of Brahman and māyā in creation; The seventh stresses the importance of a guru for liberation; The eighth argues that the two distinct notions of body and self exist only as long as the vital breath exists and the ninth says that the self is free from the notions of both agency and the results of agency.

49 A competent aspirant is one who has learned the four methods: discriminating between eternal and non-eternal things (nityānityavastuviveka); withdrawing from objects of enjoyment in both this world and the world hereafter (ihāmutrārthaphalabhogavirāga); having the six qualities such as control of mind, control of sense organs, renunciation, withstanding opposites such as heat and cold; concentrating the mind; having faith in the instruction of guru and scripture (śamādisādhanaśampat); and feeling intense desire for liberation (mumukṣutva). Having learned those things, an aspirant begins to read the scriptures (śravaṇa), contemplate their meaning (manana), and meditate on his self (nididhyāsana). His mind pure, he attains self-realization after hearing his guru say the following words: "You are that." See VP 311-313.

50 *atrāpi yadyapi gāndhārapuruṣayorbhedo vartate pratīyate ca tathāpi sādhanavasthāyamadvaitasyadvaitavāde'nabhyupagamāt, upāyamātrapadarśanatātparyakatvāccoktadrṣṭāntasya nātra virodhaḥ ...* (ATS, 15).

51 Chānd. Up., 6.15.1-2.

52 *jīvasya asvātantryam vṛkṣadehe avagatam mānuṣadehe eva bodhaya ityarthitāḥ āha puruṣam somya upatāpinam jñātayāḥ paryupāsate* (VTN, 103).

Liberation is not for the hereafter, because the body's breath does not depart once the body dies; the seeker becomes one with the ubiquitous consciousness.

This entire section of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, the sadvidyāprakaraṇa, relies on one important question. Noticing that Śvetaketu is somewhat arrogant, Uddālaka asks whether he knows a teaching that encompasses everything. In my opinion, the remaining portion of the Upaniṣad and the supporting illustrations are meant to explain over and over again the key concept discussed in this passage. The correct interpretation of the illustrations, therefore, is one that makes sense of it.

For Dvaitins, when the Upaniṣad says that knowledge of one thing leads to the knowledge of everything, they cite three reasons: knowing that God is important; knowing the similarity between God and everything; and knowing that God is the cause of everything. For Dvaitins this Upaniṣadic passage does not convey the illusoriness of the world.⁵³ When the Upaniṣad maintains that the word “clay” is real, they mention that only the Sanskrit sounds in the word mṛttikā are eternal; non- Sanskrit sounds are not.⁵⁴ To explain, when it is said that the Sanskrit word mṛttikā is eternal whereas other words are not, it means that words other than Sanskrit words are produced by the sense of speech and hence are not eternal. Sanskrit words on the other hand are manifested and hence are eternal. Thus, this śruti passage does not convey the illusoriness of the world.

For Advaitins, however, both passages convey one thing; the eternal Brahman is the

cause of the world. This is the same Brahman that enters various beings. And just as the knowledge of cause (clay) will give rise to the knowledge of effects (pots and cups made out of clay), the knowledge of Brahman (cause of the world) will give rise to the knowledge of everything in it—including that of the self. In other words, Brahman alone is eternal; the objects of the world are not. Advaitins interpret this entire section of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad in this light. When the Upaniṣad describes prājña after describing the creation of various beings, it does so to emphasise that it is the same Brahman that appears as jīva when subjected to the limiting adjunct of mind. While deep sleeping, everyone experiences this innate bliss, but, due to ignorance (ajñāna), they do not realize it. Consider the memory of someone who has just woken up: “I slept happily, I did not know anything.” This, Advaitins say, proves the experience of the innate self and also the presence of ajñāna while deep sleeping.⁵⁵ In the waking state the soul cannot experience this innate bliss due to the superimposition of body-mind complex on it. Liberation means experiencing one's innate self as different from the body-mind complex at all times and such an experience is possible here and now.

The first four illustrations focus on this very topic. The fifth and sixth justify the assistance of māyā or ajñāna in creation, because objects of the world have the qualities of name and form in addition to existence, consciousness, and bliss. Having dealt with the process of creation, because knowledge of Brahman will lead to knowledge of everything else including the self,

53 tejaḥ parasyām devatāyām tāvanna jānāti ityatra ca yadā asya prānādīn paraḥ grasati tadā na jānāti yadādadāti tadā jānātīti tadvaśatvamevoktam |

yadā prāṇān dadātīśaḥ tadā cetanako'khilam |

jānāti grastakaraṇaḥ tena veti na kiñcana || iti ca | (VTN, 117).

54 atrāpi yadyapi jīvaḥ prānādīnām bhedaḥ pratīyate tathāpi sa yāvatprānādīlayam, sarvavilaye tu na jāñt- jñeyādibhedasattvam, kintu svaprakāśasamvitmātrāvasthānamityeva vivakṣyate | (ATS, 15).

55 Chānd. Up., 6.16.1-2.

56 evam sarvaprakāśam bhagavantamātmanaḥ bhedenā yaḥ jānāti yaśca so'hamityabhedenā jānāti tayoh kīdrśam phalamiti bhāvenāha-puruṣam somya hastagrhitam | (VTN, 104).

57 Someone becomes bound to his acts when he performs them with the notion that he is the actor. Therefore, he will experience the results. Consider someone who acts with the notion that he is not an actor, but his body with sense organs. He is not bound by those acts and is free from both agency and the results of agency. See BG 2/51, 4/20, 21.

58 navamo dr̥ṣṭāntastvātmano'kartṛtvameva svabhāvah kartṛtvam tvāropitam ityahamātmanā jīvasya muktou nānuvṛttirīti

the seventh illustration stresses the importance of a guru in knowing the self. Due to a guru's instruction, seekers understand that the self is different from the body, mind, and breath—a difference that exists until the body continues to function due to the *prārabdhakarma*. Once the body falls away, the seeker remains as pure consciousness.⁶⁴ The ninth illustration deals with the final stages leading to liberation, when an aspirant fully realizes that he is not an agent and he is pure consciousness—that is, liberated. The final illustration is very important, because it takes us back to the beginning of the *Upaniṣad*, which sets the stage for *Uddālaka* to instruct *Śvetaketu*. The latter is conceited due to the fact that he is “well read,” so *Uddālaka* asks him whether he knows something that encompasses everything else. Just as the notion of being an agent (*kartr̥tva*) is superimposed on the self, the notion of scholarliness (*vidvatva*) is superimposed on the self. For Advaitins, *Uddālaka* is by now indeed asking *Śvetaketu* why he feels conceited about something that does not belong to him. His true nature is Brahman. And Brahman is of the nature of existence, consciousness, and bliss. It is the cause of the universe. But it appears as the beings of the world and indeed as *Śvetaketu* himself. “Know Brahman and you will know everything, including you, as you are no different from Brahman. Only then are you a true knower of everything.”

For Advaitins, therefore, this entire section of the *Upaniṣad* conveys only one idea. And it does so consistently and cogently. The Dvaitins too offer a consistent dualistic interpretation of the nine passages. They interpret this section of the *Upaniṣad* to mean that every illustration teaches difference between God and the soul. However, in many places they offer a literal translation whereas the Advaitins go a step ahead and exhibit their hermeneutical skills. Above all the Advaitins focus on the practical Advaitic experience of the *jīvanmukta*, which is experienced in this world itself. By doing so they are able to connect the text with the experience and it is this point that offers strength to their argument. Moreover, the claim of the *Upaniṣads* that the knowledge of one thing leads to knowledge of everything will be applicable only if both the things mentioned are similar. The same thing should be applied to *TAT TVAM ASI* as well. The Dvaitic interpretation that the Sanskrit words alone are eternal in this context makes their ground shaky. It also makes them move away from the discussion. When two things are different how can knowledge of one thing lead to the knowledge of the other? It is interesting to note however, that the Dvaitins themselves mention that similarity (*sādr̥śya*) is the intention of this passage.⁶⁵

Therefore, I argue that we need to interpret the text as *sa ātmā TAT TVAM ASI* rather than *sa ātmā ATAT TVAM ASI*. ■

59 (ii) *yathā pakṣī ca sūtram tathā jīveśvarau bhinnau | yathā nānāvṛkṣarasāḥ yathā ca nadyaḥ samudraśca tathā sarvadeivavilakṣanau | (iii) yathā dhānāgataḥ tathā sūkṣmarūpatvāt bhinnō'pi bhedenā na dr̥śyate. yathā śuddhodavalavane bhinne tathāpyudakāntargatam lavaṇam dr̥ṣṭasāmarthyamapi svayam na dr̥śyate tathā prerako'pi san dr̥ṣṭasāmarthyo'pi na dr̥śyate | (iv) yathā puṃviṣayau badhākṣagandhārādeśau bhinnau tathā jīveśvarāvapi bhinnau | (J.T.) VTN., 122.*

60 *prathamena dr̥ṣṭāntena... bhedasya bandhaheturā, svasvabhāvavasthānasyeiva muktitvam ca jñāpyate, iti dvitīyo dr̥ṣṭānto jīvabrahmāikyam jīvanmuktāvanubhavadgamamupapādayati | tṛtīyo dr̥ṣṭānto'khaṇḍākārāvasthāmādāya jīvabrahmāikyam samarthayati | turīyo dr̥ṣṭāntastvakhaṇḍākāravṛtṭyā'jñānatatsaṃskārādisarvopādhivirahitam svayamjyotiḥsvabhāvamakhaṇḍa caitanyamātram tattvamavagamayati | | ATS., 12-13.*

61 *ekavijñānena sarvavijñānam ca prādhānyat kiñcit sādr̥śyāt kāraṇatvācca | na tu tadanyasya mithyātvāt | (VTN, 124).*

62 *vācārambhanam vikārah nāmadheyam mṛttiketyeva satymityatra ca vācā nāmnārambhanam vikārah avikṛtam nityam nāmadheyam mṛttiketyeva ityetadvacanam satyamiti śrutyarthaḥ | (VTN, 132). See also VTN, 133. In this context, eternal and real are synonyms.*

63 *Madhusūdana Sarasvatī 144-147.*

64 *VP 204.*

65 *tadeva sādr̥śyamatrāpi vivakṣitam yathā somyaikena mṛtṭiṇḍena sarvam mṛnmayam vijñātam syādityādinā | VTN., 127.*