

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Vedantic Concepts

Question

What is the difference between *ātman* and Brahman?

Answer

Ātman is the individual self and Brahman is the universal Self. Essentially, both are identical.

Question

How are *ātman* and *paramātman* related?

Answer

Ātman, 'I' is the self of the individual being. The prefix '*param*' indicates that which is free from limitations, and *paramātman* means the Self that is free from limitations, the limitless Self. Usually we say that *paramātman* is the Self of the universe. So *ātman* is the individual self and *paramātman* is the universal Self. It looks like these are two different entities, but Vedanta teaches us that they are one and the same. *Ātman*, the individual self, is the Self of all and *paramātman*, the universal Self, is my own self. This, in fact, is the principal teaching of Vedanta.

Question

Where does *jñāna*, knowledge, happen?

Answer

Self-knowledge happens in the intellect. The ignorance is in our intellect and therefore the knowledge also takes place in the intellect.

Question

How do we know the Self, since knowing takes place in the mind and it is because of the Self that the mind knows?

Answer

The knowledge of the Self does take place in the mind because knowledge takes place where ignorance is. Ignorance manifests itself as various notions or misperceptions about the self and knowledge takes place by the removal of these

wrong notions and the establishment of the right understanding. Vedanta discusses the five *kośas*¹, notions, and each notion is to be replaced with the knowledge that I am *saccidānanda*; I am the Self; I am Brahman. Since ignorance is in the mind, the knowledge has to take place there.

Question

Is our mind conscious?

Answer

The mind is not a conscious entity. However, the mind becomes conscious when it receives the reflection of Consciousness. The bulb by itself does not glow, but it starts glowing when it receives electricity. Similarly, the mind by itself is not conscious, but when it is united with Consciousness, it glows with consciousness. Everything becomes 'as though' conscious in association with Consciousness.

Question

When discriminating between the person and the personality, memories of the past seem to provide a definition of who we think we are. How do we address this aspect of the personality?

Answer

Vedanta looks upon memory as part of the personality because memory is different from the person. To create a distance between the person and the personality, we need to understand that we are not talking of a physical distance in terms of space, but dissociation in terms of our understanding. That is, we need to recognize that the body is a dwelling place and that I, the person, am not the body. We may lapse into the habit of identifying with the body because of our past memory, but we need to be alert and not make that error².

¹ Examples of the five notions are: 'I am mortal/I am fat' (*annamaya-kośa*), 'I am hungry/thirsty' (*prāṇamaya-kośa*), 'I am restless/sad' (*manomaya-kośa*), 'I am a doer/doctor' (*vijñānamaya-kośa*), and 'I am an enjoyer' (*ānandamaya-kośa*).

² Transcribed and edited by Malini, KK Davey, and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.