

Essay

Accessing Atman via the Mesostratum Mind Loop

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Abstract

The Bhagavad Gita recommends realization of Atman - one's true self - through meditation using the raja yoga path of meditation. We examine a path which involves the mesostratum and the transcendent mind loop which connects the physiostratum physical self (Body) with the superstratum supernal self (Atman). We suggest that the mind loop keeps the Body in touch with the Atman to attain enlightenment and understanding and to achieve a satisfying, enriched, productive, purposeful extant self.

Keywords: Vedanta, Bhagavad Gita, Brahman, Atman, soul, inner self meditation, Mesostratum.

Introduction

Atman is a Sanskrit word meaning inner self or soul. In Hindu philosophy, especially in the Vedanta school of Hinduism, Atman is the true self of an individual - transcending the material being - it is the essence of the individual being. In order to attain liberation from the material-oriented self, a human being must acquire self-knowledge, which is to realize that one's true self (Atman) is identical with the transcendent self or Brahman - the impersonal supreme being, the primal source and origin of all beings. The six orthodox schools of Hinduism believe that there is Atman (Soul, Self) in every being - this is a major difference with Buddhism, which does not believe that there is either soul or self [1, 2].

Raja yoga is the 'royal path' of meditation through which one may acquire and maintain ascendancy over a virtual 'kingdom' - the vast domain of one's transcendent mind. In raja yoga one uses innate mental powers to realize the Atman - through application of intellect and disciplined psychical control. The basic premise of raja yoga is that perception of the divine self is obscured by the clamor of sensory inputs, distractions, and disturbances which occupy the mind. If the mind can be made to banish and ignore these, the divine self will immediately appear - according to the Bhagavad Gita:

*When, through the practice of yoga,
the mind ceases its restless movements,
and becomes still,
the aspirant realizes the Atman.*

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Mastering the Mind

An intermediate step to realization of Atman is to gain control of and master the mind. We have grown accustomed to living with an uncontrolled mind, tossed about by sensations and circumstances, but should never assume that to be acceptable. Vedanta says that we can master the mind and, through repeated practice, we can make the mind our servant. According to the Bhagavad Gita:

Patiently, little by little, spiritual aspirants must free themselves from all mental distractions, with the aid of the intelligent will. They must fix their minds upon the Atman, and never think of anything else. No matter where the restless and unquiet mind wanders, it must be drawn back and made to submit to the Atman alone.

This implies that we should fully integrate all aspects of life and direct our energies towards the one great goal. This doesn't mean that in order to realize Atman one must totally renounce the world and live alone, secluded as a hermit, or apart from society. Albert Schweitzer in *Reverence For Life* vehemently rejected the notion that:

. . . the only sensible line of conduct for a man is to withdraw entirely into himself and to concern himself solely with the deepening of his inner life . . . [and have] nothing to do with what may become of human society and of mankind. The deepening of one's inner life, as Indian thought interprets it, means that a man surrenders himself to the thought of 'no more will to live,' and by abstention from action and by every sort of life denial reduces his earthly existence to a condition of being which has no content, beyond a waiting for the cessation of being.

Clearly, Schweitzer abhors being without content even with the achievement of inner peace and eternal bliss. Perhaps endeavoring to attain Atman should be understood as seeking spiritual peace - which in turn ultimately assures social harmony and a peaceful world - to be accomplished by mastering one's mind by intellectual discipline, self-enlightenment, and self-management. The main teaching of the Vedanta appears to be that all aspects of one's life should be spiritualized and directed towards realizing oneness in Brahman, participating in advancing earthly Atman goals which are implied in the fact of our mortal existence.

Atman~Spirit~Body Triad

The significance of spirit is in communication between the Body and the Atman. As depicted in Figure 1, the mind spans three strata: (1) the superstratum (the transcendent domain of Brahman), (2) the mesostratum (the mediating domain of information, signals, and energetic fields), and (3) the physiostratum (the domain of material-temporal objective reality, the world). In this sense, Spirit is a communication modality which extends from the superstratum to the physiostratum via signals through the mesostratum [3, 4].

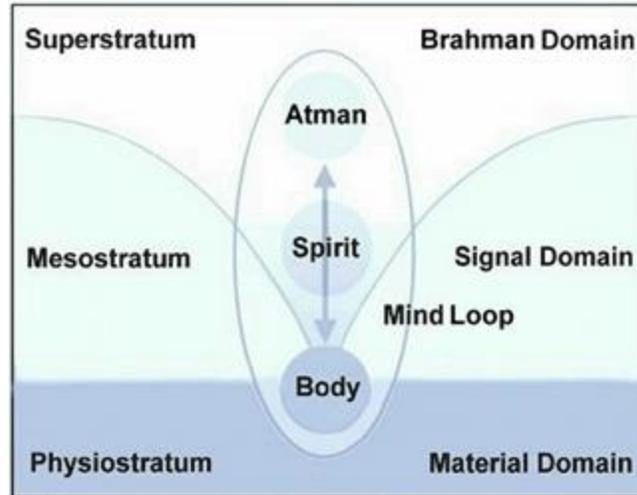


Figure 1 - Atman~Spirit~Body Triad of the Mind Loop.

The Atman and Spirit have Vedanta connotations and are reachable by meditative practices prescribed in the Bhagavad Gita. We adopt the concept that the Atman is the superstratum focus of a conscious meditating mind while Spirit is a mesostratum signal transmission modality that informs the embodied conscious entity. The Body is the physiostratum focus of the mind. The mind is defined as a loop that unites the Atman and Body foci via a spiritual download/upload cycle of meditation. In this concept, the mind is an upload-download loop that facilitates meditative communication within the Atman~Spirit~Body triad.

Accessing the Atman via the Mind Loop is essential to the wholeness of one's being, but is difficult when the Body is awash in worldly tides, distractions, and self-indulgence. The separation of the Atman and Body may be overcome by quiet meditation which engages the Mind Loop, recombines the Atman and Body, and helps realize the full potential of one's being through enlightenment and inspiration. The recombination allows the Atman in its all-knowing timeless purity to be the captain and master of one's destiny and fate.

Meditation and Inspiration

How to meditate and what to meditate upon is an individual choice which depends on the individual's abilities and interests. Vedanta philosophy and Bhagavad Gita practices recommend that such issues be taken up directly with a qualified spiritual teacher. It is pointed out that meditation is an intensely personal matter; and often only a genuine spiritual teacher can accurately gauge the student's personal tendencies and direct the student's mind accordingly. It is interesting to consider self-guided meditation and inspiration:

Einstein, Pauli, Schrödinger, Heisenberg, Eddington, Jeans, espoused a form meditation that connotes communication with their spiritual consciousness. Einstein spoke of a cosmic feeling that inspired his reflections on the harmony of nature. Apparently mystical insights achieved by quiet meditative practices can be a useful guide in formulation of foundational scientific theories and paradigms. Kurt Gödel spoke of the "other relation to reality" by which he could directly perceive

mathematical objects, such as infinity. Gödel was able to achieve this by his unique meditative practices. Regarding mathematical insights he gained through meditation, Heinrich Hertz said, "One cannot escape the feeling that these mathematical formulas have an independent existence of their own, and they are wiser than even their discoverers, that we get more out of them than was originally put into them."

A basic guideline is that we can think of the Spirit as being present either outside of ourselves or inside. Ramakrishna recommended meditating upon the Spirit within, saying "the heart is a splendid place for meditation." Repetition of the holy syllable *Om* may be helpful. It is also helpful to have a regular time for meditation in order to create a habit in a regular place for meditation that is isolated and tranquil.

Meditation need not conform to the previous guidelines. The seemingly effortless wholesale delivery of spiritual inspiration is reflected in the famous case of Henri Poincaré. After he had spent considerable time fruitlessly tackling a problem concerning mathematical functions, Poincaré allowed himself to abandon the pursuit of the problem and take time to relax with friends. One day, Poincaré set out on a geological excursion with them and as he was boarding a bus the key to solving the problem entered his mind. He recalled, "At the moment when I put my foot on the step, the idea came to me, without anything in my former thoughts seeming to have paved the way for it." So certain was he that the problem was solved that he put it to the back of his mind and continued his journey. When he returned from the trip he was able to prove the result readily at his leisure (Jacques Hadamard, *The Psychology of Invention*).

Karma and Reincarnation

The Vedanta encourages individuals not to just sustain life but to evolve beyond the earthbound status. In both Hinduism and Buddhism this means attempting to reach a Brahman status, an ultimate goal of all beings. When reached, it is an exhilarate state of enlightenment, detached from the physiostratum and merged with the superstratum - a state of sublime consciousness, timeless and infinite. This implies abandoning the Mind Loop and download-upload cycle forever. Achieving a Brahman status is rather daunting because one literally floats away from one's physical integument before it has been worn out and is no longer useful. It is good that the exercise need not be suddenly completed in only one lifetime:

To approach the ultimate Brahman detachment, one endures, maybe enjoys, a series of reincarnations during which good Karma can, with luck and purpose, accumulate. Karma in general is fate, destiny generated by one's actions. Karma accrues to each individual being - providing rewards or punishments in one incarnation commensurate with that individual's deeds in the previous incarnation. In this sense, Atman, Spirit and Karma are interconnected aspects of an individual's download-upload Mind Loop feedback cycle. Taken together, the Atman, Spirit and Karma are core aspects of one's being that cannot be directly experienced in the physiostratum. These aspects transcend the palpable world, they are entangled with the Mind Loop. Reincarnations give one control and opportunities to deliberately - perhaps mischievously if necessary - avoid being inopportunistly and irrevocably thrust into the Brahman status - assuming the one prefers to continue savoring mortal pleasures - despite any accompanying pains.

Vedanta Interpretation

All adherents of the Vedanta agree on three points: (1) the Brahman, (2) the Vedas (Hindu scriptures), and (3) Cycles. The following interpretation of Vedanta is based on Figure 1: At the beginning of a Cycle, Akasha (Superstratum~Mesostratum~Physiostratum) begins to evolve. After an incalculable time, evolution ceases and involution begins - everything returns back to the original state and a new Cycle begins - and a new subset of the Universe appears and evolves [4]. For the individual Atman, this corresponds to the cycle of death and rebirth - liberation is deliverance from the individual cycle.

In our interpretation, the Mind Loop attaches to the organs of seeing and inputs of the senses which it carries to the Atman. The Atman reacts and concentrates on something in external objective reality to form a whole. All sensations, perceptions, and ideas of the world are gathered and projected onto the Atman via the Mind Loop. Hindu philosophy branches at this point, but all roads lead to fine distinctions between the actual world and perceptions of it - until the latter no longer deludes the Atman. When the Atman is liberated and realizes its own nature, the whole world vanishes. Vedanta philosophy holds that attainment of this is the goal. Beyond this is attainment of the Brahman - Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute - which according to Advaita school of Vedantic philosophy is the ultimate goal.

Conclusion

We conjecture that each Atman is created as a permanent individual construct of the Brahman will. We extrapolate this idea by positing that, although each Atman resides in the transcendental superstratum, it is fully aware of the cosmos and worldly events. In the supernal realm, each Atman shares with Brahman transcendence over space, time, and matter while retaining a coherent individuality. The individual Atman partakes of worldly experience by means of the mediating Spirit that motivates the Body it invests.

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