

3. Thath Twam Asi —That Thou Art

Invisible in the visible world,
He shines as the consciousness, the *Atma*.
Like a thread through a necklace of gems,
The Creator permeates the whole universe.

Embodiments of Love!

Everything is Braman¹ (*Sarvam Khlavidam Brahma*). This is the essence of all *Upanishads*. The entire universe, living and non-living, is encompassed in this small statement. There is nothing that is not Brahman. Like fire latent in wood, like oil in seeds, God is present wherever we turn.

Creation, sustenance, and destruction are God's Will. The wheel of Time rotates as per God's command, whether one believes it or not. People forget that it is their duty to sanctify time by using it meaningfully.

Brotherhood of mankind

The sun shines, the moon lends its coolness to the world, rains pour, rivers flow, crops are harvested. Nature showers bounties for all humanity, not for any individual. Every person has an equal birthright over Nature.

People do not strive to understand the principle of equality. It is only among children that we find the spirit of brotherhood. Nourished by their mother's milk, enjoying the cool breeze, forgetting themselves in mothers' sweet lullabies, babies alone are able to plunge into the spirit of love. As the years pass, feelings of "mine", "yours", and "theirs" develop.

Selfishness is on the rise, sacrifice is disappearing, and human values are being destroyed. Why? The absence of faith in the *Atma* and faith in oneself, forgetting that the *Atma* is all-pervasive. Narayana is present in you, outside you, around you, everywhere (*Anthar-bahischa Thath sarvam vyaapya Narayana sthitah*).

The world teems with rich, strong, virtuous, and educated people, but not with self-realised individuals. Who is said to be self-realised? That person's body looks the same, and it even looks like they have a mind. But in truth, that person has gone beyond the mind and become the *Atma*. That person is engrossed in the *Atma* without interruption. In ancient India, many sages

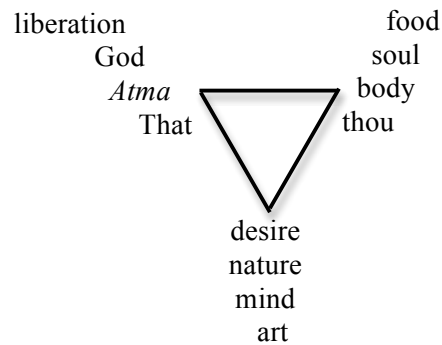
(*rishis*) experienced the divine sweetness of the *Atma* and have propagated it to the world.

Body, mind, and Atma

For the benefit of laymen, sages (*rishis*) classified the essence of the *Upanishads* on the basis of a triangle: body, mind, and *Atma*. The body is gross (*sthula*), the *Atma* is subtle (*sukshma*). The mind connects the body and *Atma*, making it possible for them to come together. The harmony and integration of these three elements was called Nature (*Thathwam*).

People do not understand the term *Thathwam*. *Thath* is "That". *Thwam* is "this". What is "That"? When something is distant or unknown, we refer to it as "that". What is near is called "this". Our senses determine what is near and what is far. The physical body, in close proximity to the senses, was called "this" by the *rishis*. The principles beyond the reach of the senses is "that", the *Atma*. The characteristic of the mind is to merge the distant *Atma* with the proximate body. This merger is represented by the term *asi*. Thus we have the *Vedic* injunction *Thath thwam asi* (That thou art).

A human being is a blend of body, mind, and *Atma*. "That thou art" has no abstract, complex meaning. The joining of "that" and "this" is "That thou art": the unity of the indivisible *Atma* and the visible body, leading to Divinity.



Another triad used by the sages was individual soul, universal soul or God, and nature or world or creation (*jiva, Deva, and prakriti*). Also, food, liberation, and desire (*bhukthi, mukthi, and rakthi*). The world itself is made possible only by desire. Food is essential for the upkeep of the body, and liberation is the attainment of

¹ The One Formless, Eternal, Infinite Divinity.

the *Atma*. Therefore, “That thou art” teaches that food, desire, and liberation are all necessary for human life.

Through the teaching of “That thou art”, the *rishis* harmonised people’s higher aspirations with everyday life. They taught that “That thou art” flows as a continuous stream through the past, present, and future.

The *rishis* imparted beautiful teachings to humanity using “That thou art.” A river flows and ultimately merges into the ocean. Water from the ocean evaporates into vapour, which takes form as clouds. Clouds descend to the earth as rain. Rain collects into streams, which collect together as rivers. Where does the river come from, and what is the source of its water? The river itself has no idea! But once it reaches the ocean, it says, “That thou art” — I am no different from the ocean.

A seed sown in the soil sprouts and becomes a plant. The plant grows into a tree with branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits. From where did the branches, leaves, and fruits emerge? Although a fruit, leaf, and branch look and feel different, they are essentially one, from the same source. Ancient Indians knew this truth. The seed proclaims, “That thou art (*Thath thwam asi*) — the branches, leaves, and fruits emerged from me alone.

The *rishis* propagated, “The entire universe abides in God (*Isaavaasyam idam sarvam*). When you dissolve sugar in water, it is no longer visible or tangible. But it is definitely present, a fact easily proved by taste. What does the indivisible sugar assert? “That thou art” — the sweetness is mine, not of the water! The great sages used such simple examples to emphasize the fundamental truth that God pervades the entire universe, that the universe dwells in God.

Om — the seed of Creation

There is only One, but it appears in various names and forms. The *Upanishads* declare that unity in diversity is the cornerstone of Indian culture. We waste our lives trusting in external differences, overlooking the underlying unity.

We have the three syllables *a*, *u*, and *m*. The unity of these sounds is *Aum* or *Om*. This sound, also called *pranava*, is a reflection of the world, and the world is a form of *Om*. These two principles, *Om* and Creation, intermingle and coexist. To recognise the *Atma* in their unity is the purpose of life, the *Upanishads* say. Why? Because *Om* is present within every individual as silence.

We might doubt, “I do not see or hear *Om* anywhere in my body.” What are inhalation and exhalation? What is the circulation of blood? They are nothing but the flows of *pranava* (*Om*). When the wind blows through trees, you can hear *Om*. Go to an electric pole and put

your ear to it — you will hear *Om*! However, we allow other thoughts and forms to distract us from its awareness.

For instance, we inhale *soooo* and exhale *hummm*. This cycle of *so* and *hum* becomes *sohum* — this is *Om*. *Sohum* (I am that) is not different from *Thath thwam asi* (That thou art). The *Vedas* say, “Brahman is the one-syllable *Om* (*Om iti ekaaksharam Brahma*).” Now, you may ask, how are *so sohum*, *Thath thwam asi*, and *Om* all the same?

Sohum = *so* + *hum*. Consider the first syllable, *so*. The *s* sound represents the four stages of *saalokya*, *sarupya*, *sameepya*, and *saayuja*². When you fall into deep sleep, forgetting the good and bad of the waking state, then you effectively subtract the *s* sound from *so* and are left with *o*. In the second syllable, *hum*, sound similarly falls away in deep sleep, leaving just *m*. The original sound of sound of *sohum* is, therefore, *Om*. The *s* and *hu* sounds prepend to *Om* only in the waking state, for inhalation and exhalation.

$$\begin{aligned} So &= s + o \\ hum &= hu + m \end{aligned}$$

Remove *s* from *so* and *hu* from *hum*. What remains is:

$$o + m = om$$

What does this mean? In the waking state, absorbed in the world of duality, we forget the single-syllable, non-dual Brahman, *Om*. We see duality, indicated by *sohum*. When we turn our vision to the world, we automatically become victims of pleasure and pain. In deep sleep, the waking world and its duality recede into imagination. For this reason, the *Vedas* say, “Deep sleep is the state of equanimity (*Nidre sthithih samaadhihi*).”

Cultivate faith

The *Upanishads* condense complex concepts into simple statements that ordinary people can understand and apply. *Upanishad* = *upa* (near) + *ni* (down) + *shad* (sit). The inner meaning of *Upanishad* is to approach the *guru* in humility and act as per the *guru*’s instructions.

God is as close or distant as you imagine (*Dhura adhure antike sah*), say the *Vedas*. Your feelings alone take God you closer or farther from Divinity, because God is everywhere, at all times. God is present in the smallest of atoms, and He encompasses the entire creation. He is smaller than the smallest (*Anoraneeyan mahato maheeyaan*), vaster than the cosmos. When one

² *Saalokya*: vision of God. *Saarupya*: acquiring a form similar to God. *Saameepya*: nearness to God. *Saayujya*: merger with God.

resolves to reach that glorious Divinity, when one perseveres in spiritual enquiry with faith and devotion, one will definitely achieve the goal.

But people do not strive to understand these concepts. They dedicate their life to mundane activities, not allotting even a few moments to the eternal journey. This lack of faith and dedication (*sraddha*) is a disease. One with faith acquires wisdom (*Sraddhaavaan labhate jnaanam*).

Peace of mind

People have no peace of mind and do not know why. Narada, son of Lord Brahma, an expert in the scriptures and a master of all sciences and arts, also lost his peace of mind once. He went to Sanatkumara³ and prayed, “Kindly explain to me the reason for my disturbance, eliminate it, and bless me with spiritual wisdom (*jnana*).

Sanatkumara asked him, “Narada what qualifications and skills do you possess? What have you studied? Narada was an adept at the 64 sciences described in the scriptures —not just one or two ordinary subjects but 64! He was also an authority on the four *Vedas*, the six *Vedagas*⁴, and the four *Upangas*⁵. But what good did these studies do him?

What is the use of any number of studies?
Who can escape destiny written on one’s forehead?
As soon as wrong ideals enter your mind,
Your virtues dry up like a pond in the summer.

Why did Narada lose his peace? “I am educated; I am a master of all scriptures.” Ego cut his peace at the root. Sanatkumara heard Narada patiently and said, “You think you are very learned. This is just talk. Degrees are just words, just denominations. There are many things beyond the shallow education you possess, Narada.”

Prana —the life principle

Narada was surprised that Sanatkumara casually dismissed his vast learning. Sanatkumara elaborated. “Greater than the name is speech. Mind is greater than speech. Will rules over the mind. Memory is predominant over will. And meditation is better than memory. Spiritual wisdom (*jnana*) is better than meditation, water

is better than wisdom, brilliance (*tejas*) is better than water, and life force (*prana*) is greater than brilliance. When you understand the life force, you will understand ‘That thou art (*Thath thwam asi*)’².” The life-force principle is essential to understand.

One small example. If we starve for a fortnight, 15 attributes (*kalaas*) in our body are depleted. With food, these attributes are restored. The body is composed of food (is *annamayam*). When food is denied, the body loses the life force.

The body is subject to decay, but the indwelling *Atma* is indestructible. The body, composed of the five elements, is bound to collapse, but the Indweller is immune to birth, death, attachments, and duality. The eternal *Atma* shines ceaselessly in this ephemeral body.

Sanatkumara advised Narada to enquire into this eternal Indweller. This concept was reiterated in Sage Uddalaka’s teachings to his son, Svetaketu.⁶ “Fix your vision on That by knowing which you will know everything,” Svetaketu was instructed.

True spiritual discipline: focus on Atma

Therefore, one needs to comprehend only one truth to understand everything. What is this truth? The *Atma*. Today, we have no faith in the *Atma*. We are interested in everything except the *Atma*. What spiritual discipline is expected of us today? Is it meditation, yoga, repetition of the Name, penance, sacrifice, or vows? None of these. We need only reject whatever does not pertain to the *Atma*. Then we come face to face with our reality.

No spiritual discipline is necessary. All spiritual discipline is done by the mind, for the mind’s satisfaction. How can an effort of the mind turn around and control the mind itself? Can a thief arrest himself? Similarly, the mind cannot control and destroy itself. We must reach the state of mindlessness (*amanaskam*). Absence of all thought is mindlessness. When we restrain thoughts, the influence of the mind will subside and, without doubt, gradually leads to cessation of thought.

Therefore, if self-realisation is our goal, we must align the body, senses, and mind as per the prompting of the *Atma*. Every thought that emerges must be directed toward the *Atma*. This is called merger with God (*saayujya*). The rivers Godavari, Krishna, Yamuna, and Kaveri look and taste different, but they lose their individual names and forms and become one with the ocean. The knower of Brahman becomes Brahman (*Brahmavid Brahmaiva Bhavati*). Therefore, when one merges all thoughts into the *Atma*, one becomes the *Atma*.

⁶ The subject of the *Chhandogya Upanishad*.

³ Another son of Brahma, perpetually absorbed in the *Atma*, abiding with Narayana.

⁴ A group of auxiliary texts designed to aid in the proper pronunciation and interpretation of the *Vedas* as well as correct use of *mantras* in various ceremonies.

⁵ A class of writings supplementary to the *Vedangas*, composed of *Puranas*, *Nyaya*, *Mimamsa*, and *Dharma Sastras*.

There is nothing besides *Atma*. All that exists is the *Atma*. We fail to see the omnipresent God because our vision is worldly, not divine. One small example. When you see this tumbler as a tumbler, you notice nothing more. If you enquire into its material, you see the silver and forget its tumbler form.

Another example. People go for pilgrimage to Tirupati or some other temple. At each place, they take *darshan* of the particular form of God. As long as we look at the idol, we do not think about its material. When we ignore the effect and go to the cause, we notice the rock instead of the form.

Likewise, we pay attention only to the names and forms. We see rivers, mountains, mansions, roads, trees, and so on. If we could grasp the basis for these physical entities, we would see their unity. Trees are composed of wood, mountains are made of rock, earth is mud, and the body is flesh and blood. These are nothing but combinations of the five elements, which, in turn, are merely facets of the *Atma*.

Our sages taught unity in diversity since time immemorial. Ornaments (*sringaaram*) are many, gold (*bangaaram*) is one. Cattle are of many colors, but milk is one. Beings are many, the indwelling God is one. Castes and values may be different, but birth is one. Visions are varied, God is one. Flowers are different, worship is one. We attach too much importance to names and forms and nurture divisive feelings—all in the interests of this short-lived life.

Another example. In the waking state, we meet various people, go to places, and experience different situations. In dream, we create circumstances. We create joys and sorrows, we create the world, we create even ourselves and bind ourselves in it! In deep sleep, all is forgotten and we approach the state of perfect equanimity. The same entity is present in the waking, dream, and sleep states. The states are three but the individual is one. This is “That Thou Art (*Thath Twam Asi*).” In the three times and three states, the one who experiences is the same.

Human values

We understand the human body but not human values. Regardless of our education, wealth, and fame, we must live by human values. Human values can flourish only in a spiritual atmosphere. A seed germinates only in fertile soil, not in tin. True human character blossoms only on the foundation of spirituality, *dharma*, and morality. Every student must cultivate human qualities.

Affection for family and relations is limiting. Before birth, who is the mother and who is the child? Before

marriage, who is the husband and who is the wife? These relations are cultivated midway through our eternal journey. They are “passing clouds”. One must neither desire nor fear such temporary associations. Life is a vast ocean, with short-lived waves of union (*samyoga*) and separation (*viyoga*).

We are prodded into effort by hundreds of desires, without a moment’s rest. We spiral into endless worry by yielding to worldly allurements. Spirituality alone is the guiding light for humanity perplexed in search of peace. With the destruction of spirituality, India will be annihilated. We must nurture the treasure of spirituality with care.

Culture and spirituality

The banner here says, “Indian Culture and Spirituality”. In My view, culture and spirituality are not separate. Culture is an aspect of spirituality. With spirituality, all arts and sciences acquire a new light, a positive direction. Devoid of spirituality, if you simply say culture, culture, culture, ... What is this culture? It is “meaningless culture”.

Culture is heritage, traditions (*sanskriti*). The word *sanskriti* means that which has undergone the process of purification (*samskarana*). Purified by what? By spirituality alone. There can be no refinements without spirituality. Without refinements, there is no culture.

Therefore, spirituality must come first. But spirituality has become a matter of derogatory jokes today. Yes, spirituality is ridiculous—to whom? To fools who consider this temporary, worldly life as all-important! To one who knows that worldly life is a “passing cloud”, spirituality is not just a guiding light but an invaluable gem, their only ornament and wealth. That is the only ornament we must desire today.

Babar’s regard for Indian culture

Students, it is not possible to limit Indian culture. People of all nations, religions, and times have bestowed glorious accolades on our heritage. You all know the Mughal Emperor Babar of the Muslim religion⁷. He had absolute faith in Indian culture. Babar’s son, Humayun, succeeded him as Emperor of India.

On this happy occasion, Babar wrote a lengthy letter to his son, “Huma! You are fortunate, and I am doubly fortunate to have a fortunate son as yourself! You are now the emperor of the sacred land of Hindustan⁸—the

⁷ Mughal, invader from Central Asia, who conquered and settled in India in the 16th century.

⁸ Persian name for India, meaning, “Land of the Hindus”.

land that tolerates all religions, the culture that teaches unity in diversity, the Hindu religion, which is truly the essence of all religions. You are blessed to rule over such a nation!

“Never be an obstacle in the way of Indian culture and traditions. The Hindu culture is sacred and mighty. There is nothing it cannot accomplish. Do not oppose this ancient culture. In fact, include Hindus in every decision you make and earn their love.”

Babar was the great and courageous ruler who established the Mughal dynasty in Delhi. What high regard he had for Indian culture!

Understand your religion

Unfortunately, Indians themselves are shredding our culture to pieces. It is a matter of shame and humiliation for every Indian! I wish that as Indians, you students clearly grasp the message of our culture, put it into practice, protect it, and derive joy therefrom.

I never say that one religion is great and another is not. The underlying precepts of all religions are noble. But people only fight in the name of religion without following teachings. This is a major fault in human character today. Understand the significance of your respective religions. Everyone who makes a sincere attempt to recognise their Self has the right to enter the gates of immortality without preference to religion or country of birth.

Therefore, first recognise human values. Then progress to Divinity instead of slipping into demonic qualities. All the *Upanishads* propagate methods to achieve Divinity and immortality. Not by good deeds, children, or wealth but only by sacrifice is immortality attained (*Na karamana na prajaya na dhanena tyaagenaike Amritatvamaanasu*). We shall discuss the relation between sacrifice (*thyaga*) and worldly enjoyment (*bhoga*) tomorrow.

[Swami concluded with “*Prema Mudita Mana Se Kaho, Rama Rama Ram*”]

23 May 1991

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