

In Vedanta the term Atma means the ParamAtman too. For example in the Taittiriya Upanishad mantra: आत्मन आकाशः सम्भूतः the word Atma refers to the Supreme Self from which the elements AkAsha, etc. manifested to form this world. Since Paramaatma is the essence of the world, He/It is the PratyagAtma of the world. Again, since this essence of the world is what constitutes the essence of the individual soul, it, the individual soul, is no different from the ParamAtma.

श्रीसद्गुरुचरणारविन्दार्पणमस्तु

Om Tat Sat

term. In the IshavAsyopanishat mantra 3 we find:

असुर्या नाम ते लोका अन्धेन तमसावृताः ।

ताँस्ते प्रेत्याभिगच्छन्ति ये के चात्महनो जनाः ॥

[Those worlds of devils are covered by blinding darkness. Those people that kill the Self go to them after giving up this body.]

Shankaracharya comments that those people who remain in ignorance of their true nature are the ones who kill the Self by continuing to be in samsara.

Then we have the usage 'Atmakathaa' to mean an 'autobiography.' Also, there is the term 'Atma-nivedanam' that occurs for example in the Srimad Bhagavatam. The famous 'nava vidha bhakti' mentioned by the Great Devotee Prahlada in the shloka:

श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पादसेवनम् ।

अर्चनं वन्दनं दास्यं सख्यमात्मनिवेदनम् ॥

//(7.5. 22) Hiranyakas'ipu said. 'Now tell me Prahlâda my son, now you're so well taught, something nice about all that you, o love of my life, have been learning all this time from your teachers.'

(7.5.23-24) S'rî Prahlâda said: 'Hearing, singing, remembering Vishnu, attending to the feet, offering worship and prayers, becoming a servant, being a friend and to surrender one's soul are the nine ways making up the bhakti that should be performed unto the Supreme Lord of Vishnu; this I consider the topmost of learning.' //

The culmination of the spiritual journey that takes the path of devotion to the Lord, is in the devotee erasing his ego totally and placing himself fully at the feet of the Lord. This is called Atmanivedanam.

There are other usages like 'Atma-prashamsaa' , 'Atma-shlAghanam', etc. which mean 'self-praise', boasting, etc. The term 'Atma-shraddhA' means self-confidence.

There are common usages like 'MahAtma', 'DharmAtmA', 'puNyAtma' (an exalted soul), 'pApAtma' (someone with an impure mind), 'shuddhAtma' (a pure-minded person), etc.

Again, to denote that an ear-stud is made of gold, the Sanskrit usage is: 'suvarNatmakam kunDalam', an ornament that has gold for its material. A clay pot could be referred to as: 'mRdaatmakaH ghaTaH'. In these usages the word Atma refers to the material cause of the object. This material constitutes the essence, the soul, the heart, of the object.

In all these usages invariably the term 'Atman' used as a prefix or suffix means/refers to the individual soul only and not the ParamAtman. Thus, Shankaracharya's assertion that the term 'Atman' refers to the PratyagAtman alone is amply proved by the various examples, both scriptural and worldly, that we saw above.

अतः स एव आत्मा जगतः प्रत्यक्स्वरूपं सतत्त्वं याथात्म्यम् । आत्मशब्दस्य निरूपदस्य प्रत्यगात्मनि गवादिशब्दवन्निरूढत्वात् ।

[Hence that indeed is Atma, the Self of the world, its inmost essence, its quintessence, its very reality, because the word Self when not preceded by any other word, conventionally denotes the inmost Self, like the conventional words cow etc. Hence 'thou art that Existence, O Shvetaketu.']

The 'convention' Shankara is referring to here has been shown above in the Lingapuranam quote that He has referred to in the Kathopanishad commentary. One can see the consistency in His use of the word 'rUDhi' (convention) in both the quotations above.

Atman as referring to the mind/intellect/ego:

Often the word Atman refers to the mind. For example, in the Bhagavadgita Chapter 13.24 it is said:

ध्यानेनात्मनि पश्यन्ति केचिदात्मानमात्मना ।

[By meditation some behold the Self in the self by the self....]

Here, the first underlined word 'Atmani' in the locative case refers to the intellect. The second underlined word 'Atmaanam' in the objective case refers to the Self, the essence. The last word 'atmanaa' in the instrumental case refers to the trained mind/sharpened intellect.

The Bhagavadgita verses 6. 5,6 and 7 also convey the above sense of the term Atma.

Atman as referring to the gross body:

Rarely the word 'Atman' is used to connote the gross body. For example, in the Kathopanishad mantra 1.3.4:

इन्द्रियाणि हयानाहुः.....

आत्मेन्द्रियमनोयुक्तं भोक्तेत्याहुर्मनीषिणः ॥

Here a definition of the jiva, bhokta, samsaari, the embodied soul, is mentioned. The word 'aatmaa' here refers to the gross body. The entity endowed with a gross body, senses and mind is called a bhokta, the experiencer of the fruits of his karma. Of course, he is the doer of actions, too.

Some common usages of the word Atma:

In common parlance we use the term Atma in conjunction with other words. For example, a popular usage is: 'Atmahatyaa' which means 'suicide'. In fact the Upanishad itself uses this

श्रीगुरुभ्यो नमः

Different meanings of the term 'Atma'

The word 'Atma' generally means the Self. But in Vedanta the word 'Atma' takes different meanings depending on the specific context. Here are some instances where different meanings of this term can be seen to be used.

Atman as the Self, the essence of the individual:

In the commentary to the Kathopanishad mantra 2.1.1:

पराञ्चि खानि व्यतृणत् स्वयम्भूः तस्मात् पराङ्पश्यति नान्तरात्मन् ।

कश्चित् धीरः प्रत्यगात्मानमैक्षत् आवृत्तचक्षुः अमृतत्वमिच्छन् ॥

[The self-existent Lord destroyed/damned the outgoing senses. Therefore one sees the outer things and not the inner Self. A rare discriminating man, desiring immortality, turns his eyes away and then sees the indwelling Self.]

Sri Shankara says while commenting on the word 'pratyagaatmaa' of the mantra:

प्रत्यगात्मानं प्रत्यक्च असौ आत्मा च इति प्रत्यगात्मा । प्रतीच्येव आत्मशब्दो रूढो लोके नान्यस्मिन् । व्युत्पत्तिपक्षेऽपि तत्रैव आत्मशब्दो वर्तते -

यच्चाप्नोति यदादत्ते यच्चात्ति विषयानिह ।

यच्चास्य सन्ततो भावः तस्मादात्मेति कीर्त्यते ॥' (लिङ्गपुराणम् १.७०.९६)

इत्यात्मशब्दव्युत्पत्तिस्मरणात् ।

// That which is pratyak, in the interior, and at the same time atma, the Self, is the pratyagaatmaa. In common usage the word atma **conventionally** means only the individual soul, and not anything else. From the point of etymology, too, the word atma has that very sense. For in the Smriti the derivation of the word is given thus: 'Since It pervades, absorbs, and enjoys (all) objects in the world, and since from It the world derives its continuous existence, therefore It is called the Atma.' (Linga PuraaNam 1.70.96) //

In His commentary to the famous mantra 'Tat tvam asi' occurring in the Chandogya Upanishad VI. 8.7 says Shankara: