

ShrIgurubhyo namaH

The Flawless Advaitic teaching of 'Tat tvam asi'

(A Study in Reply to a Dvaita Objection)

In the Chandogya Upanishad VI Chapter occurs the dialogue between UddAlaka, the father and Shvetaketu, the son. This dialogue, called SadvidyA , is a teaching of Brahman, Sat, as the Satyam. The teaching, through the famous 'Tat tvam asi' occurring nine times, culminates in Shvetaketu gaining the Knowledge of the Truth. In the following remarks, sourced from the site :

http://www.madhva.org/vms_mi/htm/Dashaprakarana.htm

the propriety of the Advaitic interpretation of 'Tat tvam asi' has been questioned/objected to, upholding the interpretation of the Dvaita school.

In this article the above objection is analyzed in detail and the appropriateness and the flawlessness of the Advaitic interpretation is established. Here is the objection:

(http://www.madhva.org/vms_mi/htm/Dashaprakarana.htm)

(Upanishad & DashaprakaraNa)

// INTERPRETATION OF ATAT TVAMASI

.... The context of the teaching of Atat tvam asi is that svetaketu had developed the pride that he knew everything. He was to be told that he did not know the highest entity, i.e. Supreme God as distinct and superior to him. He also did not know that he was under the control of this Supreme God. In this context, no useful purpose would be served if he is told that he is identical with the God. This would increase his pride. Therefore, he is told Atat tvam asi, you are not the God. You are completely under his control. Therefore, it is jivesvarabheda that is intended to be conveyed here.

Ekavijnanena sarvijanana stated in this context does not indicate upadanopadeyabhava here but it is based on pradhanya and sadrsya, therefore, this does not convey jaganmithyatva. //

The Advaitin's Response to the above observation:

At the very outset it is to be noted that the above observation is fraught with many misconceptions. These are classified under the following heads:

1. Misconception about the Upanishadic protocol in giving out the Tattva Upadesha.
2. Misconception about the facts of the Chandogya Upanishad VI Chapter regarding the above.
3. Misconception about the Chandogya Upanishad VI Chapter contents of the teaching of the Tattva.
4. Misconception about the Advaitic method of interpreting the Mahavakya 'Tat tvam asi.'

The above points are considered hereunder:

1. Misconception about the Upanishadic protocol in giving out the Tattva Upadesha:

In the Vedantic scripture, we note one outstanding feature: The disciple approaches the Acharya with reverence and devotion and offering prostrations, uses pleasing words of request and respect while seeking the teaching to be bestowed to him. For example, in the Mundaka Upanishad (1.i.3) it is said:

शौनको ह वै महाशालोऽङ्गिरसं विधिवदुपसन्नः पप्रच्छ । कस्मिन्नु भगवो विज्ञाते सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवतीति ।

[Shaunaka, well known as a great householder, having approached Angiras duly, asked, 'O adorable Sir, (which is that thing) which having been known, all this becomes known?']

About the type of aspirant too there is a norm set by the Upanishads:

For example, in the Mundaka Upanishad (1.ii.13) it is said:

तस्मै स विद्वान् उपसन्नाय सम्यक् प्रशान्तचित्ताय शमान्विताय ।

येनाक्षरं पुरुषं वेद सत्यं प्रोवाच तां तत्त्वतो ब्रह्मविद्याम् ॥

[To him who has approached duly, whose heart is calm and whose outer organs are under control, that man of enlightenment should adequately impart that knowledge of Brahman by which one realizes the true and imperishable Purusha.]

In the Taittiriya Upanishad, Bhrguvalli, we find BhRgu, the aspirant, approaching his father VaruNa, seeking the Tattva Ulpadesha:

अधीहि भगवो ब्रह्मेति ।

['O, revered Sir, teach me Brahman'] This manner of addressing the teacher (father) and seeking Brahavidya occurs several times in this section itself.

In the Bhagavadgita (4.34), the Lord says:

तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया ।

उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥

[Know this (Truth) by long prostration, by enquiry, by service. Those men of wisdom who have realized the Truth will teach you this wisdom.]

The precaution too is specified by the Lord (18.67):

इदं ते नातपस्काय नाभक्ताय कदाचन ।

न चाशुश्रूषवे वाच्यं न च मां योऽभ्यसूयति ॥

[This (which has been taught to thee) is never to be taught to one who is devoid of austerities, nor to one who is not devoted, nor to one who does not do service, nor to one who speaks ill of Me.]

The set of qualifications that a spiritual seeker ought to be endowed with, is also specified by the Lord. Here is an example (13.7):

अमानित्वं अदम्भित्वं अहिंसा क्षान्तिरार्जवम् ।

अचार्योपासनं शौचं स्थैर्यमात्मविनिग्रहः ॥

[Humility, modesty, innocence, patience, uprightness, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control..]

In these examples, taken just as a sample, we find that the aspirant seeking the Highest Knowledge has to be a qualified one, possessed of humility, devotion to the Acharya, etc. Also he must approach the Acharya in the prescribed manner, with prostrations, etc. The protocol in this matter is taught by the Upanishads and the Gita. Unless an aspirant, duly qualified, approaches in the said manner, the Acharya would not give out the teaching.

दैवीसंपद् विमोक्षाय निबन्धाय आसुरी मता । Says Bhagavan in the Gita (16.5). The Sattvic, Daivi, qualities are conducive for the arising of the Jnanam that leads to Moksha.

The Lord has also stated दम्भो दर्पोऽभिमानश्च...आसुरीम् (16.5) [Ostentation, arrogance and self-conceitdemoniac lot.]

'mAnitvam', 'Atma-sambhAvitatvam', pride, egotism, etc. are listed as Asurl, demoniac, qualities not conducive for the Moksha sadhana.

2. Misconception about the facts of the Chandogya Upanishad VI Chapter regarding the above.

In the Chandogya Upanishad VI chapter too, as stated in the foregoing, the Upanishadic method is followed. Shvetaketu approaches Uddalaka and addresses him:

कथं नु भगवः स आदेशो भवति (६.१.३)

['O Venerable Sir, in what way is that instruction imparted?'] (6.1.3)

न वै नूनं भगवन्तस्त एतदवेदिषुः....भगवान्स्त्वेव मे तद्ब्रवीतु .. (६.१.७)

['May yourself, venerable Sir, tell me that'.] (6.1.7)

भूय एव मा भगवान् विज्ञापयतु..(६.५.४)

['May the venerable Sir explain to me over again.'](6.5.4)

This last mode of request is made by Shvetaketu innumerable times throughout the entire discourse.

Uddalaka too, bestowing affection, addresses the boy 'Somya' throughout the discourse several times.

This mode of surrender, praNipatanam, and devotional addressing as 'BhagavaH' by Shvetaketu shows that he no longer was possessed of the pride of learning; he had transformed into a sincere, qualified seeker of Truth. This transformation came about when his ego took a severe beating upon being questioned by Uddalaka, the father, about the crucial knowledge that when

comprehended results in liberation from samsaric existence. It can reasonably be assumed that some time lapsed between the father questioning him about this esoteric knowledge and the real transformation in Shvetaketu taking place. It could have been days or weeks or even months. (The first mantra VI.i.1 opens with Uddalaka exhorting Shvetaketu to get initiated and go to a Gurukulam. The very second mantra informs us that Shvetaketu has returned after staying for twelve years in the Gurukulam.) That such a transformation must have taken place could be inferred from what we saw in the earlier section about the Upanishadic/Gita protocol regarding the requirement of qualification (vinaya, etc.) and manner of approach that is shown as a sine qua non for seeking and bestowing of Tattva Upadesha.

If this is not granted, there will be the grave misdemeanor of implicating the Shruti of flouting the well-laid out norms regarding the Tattva Upadesha. Thus, Shvetaketu, even though did entertain pride when he returned from Gurukula, yet, over a period of time shed that pride and developed genuine jijnAsA for the tattva. Uddalaka's initial questioning did the magic.

That Tattva upadesha will not become fruitful in an unqualified aspirant is well known. Our inference regarding Shvetaketu's transformation is proved by yet another fact from this Upanishad itself. In the end of the discourse, the Upanishad reports that Shvetaketu succeeded in realizing the Truth of his Sat-identity. Says the Upanishad: तद्वास्य विज्ञौ, तद्वास्य विज्ञौ इति (6.16.3) [He, Shvetaketu understood that from him, Uddalaka.]

3. Misconception about the Chandogya Upanishad VI Chapter contents of the teaching of the Tattva.

The Upanishadic teaching commences with the boy asking to know what is the nature of that Important Teaching. Uddalaka gives out three examples to show how the knowledge of the material cause of effects results in gaining the knowledge of all the effects of that class. The ultimate, pAramArthik, unreality of the effects and the ultimate reality of the cause is brought out through the three examples. This is applied in the Tattva teaching by declaring that all this was Sat alone before manifesting as the world. The Cause Sat and the universe, the three elements, tejas, ap and annam (fire, water and earth) as effects are presented. The elements are shown to be the cause of the individual body-mind apparatus. On the analogy of the 'VAchArambhana Shruti' (.....mRttiketyeva satyam), at every stage Uddalaka teaches:

- the non-difference of the effect, the elements, from their cause, the Sat,
- the non-difference of the body-mind apparatus from their cause, the elements, and ultimately
- the non-difference of the body-mind apparatus from their ultimate cause, the Sat.

The 'VAchArambhana Shruti' is repeatedly demonstrated by both utterance and application. It is based on this logic that the teaching 'Tat tvam asi' occurs nine times in the Upanishad.

4. Misconception about the Advaitic method of interpreting the Mahavakya 'Tat tvam asi.'

Surely, Shvetaketu, as a jiva, cannot be identified, equated, with Sat, the Supreme. The jiva is alpashakta, alpajnaH, with finite power and limited knowledge. Sat, on the other hand is infinite. The two cannot be the same as

they now appear to be. But the Upanishad teaches that Shvetaketu is Sat in truth. That means, since the body-mind apparatus is in reality Sat, Shvetaketu, free of the body-mind apparatus, is Sat, Existence. Since the elements - that make up the body-mind apparatus of all living beings and the whole of the inert material world – is really Sat, their Cause, Sat Itself is not a cause really. The elements are only vikara-s, appearances, of Sat and therefore only mere names; essentially they are Sat alone, just as the clay-products are substantial only as their material cause, clay, but unreal as mere names. The unreality of the effects is understood only from the analytical point of view; the practical utility of effects like using a clay pot for cooking, storing water, etc., is not denied. Thus, in the Tat tvam asi equation, the essentially-Sat Shvetaketu is non-different from the essential-Sat.

Since pride, etc. are only an attribute of the mind, a vikAra, Shvetaketu is clearly different from the mind, etc. and is not endowed with any attributes, both of the body and the mind. It is on this basis that the *Tat tvam asi* teaching is given out.

A few similarities:

1. There is a similarity between the opening question, forming the core teaching, in the Mundaka and the Chandogya (VI) Upanishads:

For example, in the Mundaka Upanishad (1.i.3) it is said:

शौनको ह वै महाशालोऽङ्गिरसं विधिवदुपसन्नः पप्रच्छ । कस्मिन्नु भगवो विज्ञाते सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवतीति ।

[Shaunaka, well known as a great householder, having approached Angiras duly, asked, ‘O adorable Sir, (which is that thing) which having been known, all this becomes known?’]

Here, Shounaka, the aspirant, reverentially approaching the Acharya, Angiras, seeks to know of 'That by knowing which everything becomes known.' This same question is asked by Uddalaka, the teacher, addressing Shvetaketu, the aspirant:

येनाश्रुतं श्रुतं भवत्यमतं मतम्, अविज्ञातं विज्ञातं इति । (६.१.३)

[Are you aware of 'That by which the unheard of becomes heard, the unthought of becomes thought of, the unknown become known?'] (6.1.3)

The entire focus of the teaching, along with several examples, is to make known That crucial Truth, Brahman, called Sat in this Upanishad.

2. In the Mundakopanishad, the mantra 2.1.10 reads:

// पुरुष एवेदं विश्वं कर्म तपो ब्रह्म परामृतम् । एतद्यो वेद निहितं गुहायां सोऽविद्याग्रन्थि विकिरितीह
सोम्य ॥

The Bhashya:

// एवं पुरुषात् सर्वमिदं सम्प्रसूतम् । अतो वाचारम्भणं विकारो नामधेयमनृतं, पुरुष इत्येव सत्यम् ।
अतो पुरुष एवेदं विश्वं सर्वम् । न विश्वं नाम पुरुषादन्यत्किञ्चिदस्ति । अतो यदुक्तं तदेवेदं अभिहितं
'कस्मिन्नु भगवो विज्ञाते सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवतीति' । एवं अस्मिन्हि परस्मिन्नात्मनि सर्वकारणे पुरुषे
विज्ञाते पुरुष एवेद्ं विश्वं नान्यदस्तीति विज्ञातं भवतीति । //

[Translation of the above]

'Thus from the PuruSha emerged all this. Therefore, 'All modification is supported by speech and it is name only' (Chandogya Up. VI.i.4 – 6), and it is false; but only that which is the PuruSha is true. ...

The Mundaka mantra:

'The PuruSha alone is all this – (comprising) karma and knowledge. He who knows this supreme, immortal Brahman, existing in the heart, destroys here the knot of ignorance, O good-looking one!'

The Bhashya:

There is not such thing as the Universe apart from the PuruSha. Therefore the very thing that was asked in the question, 'O adorable Sir, (which is that thing) which having been known, all this becomes known?' (I.i.3), has been declared here thus: On knowing this PuruSha alone, the Supreme Self, the source of everything, there arises the realization, 'PuruSha alone is all this – there is nothing besides.' //

In the Chandogya Upanishad too, the above theme, of the Mundaka Upanishad, alone is what is discussed.

3. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad there is the AjAtashatru BrAhmaNam (II.i). AjAtashatru, a Kshatriya, a Jnani, is a King. He is approached by a Brahmana named BAIKi, a conceited one, priding himself with an assumed Brahman-Knowledge. He visits the King and offers to teach him Atma vidya and only ends up as the King AjAtashatru's disciple. This transformation came about as a result of the King questioning BaalAKi. Unable to answer the King's questions, BAIKi realized his shortcomings and submitted himself to the King and sought to know the Tattva. It is only when he thus submitted and became a fit recipient of Knowledge, did Ajaatashatru proceed to teach him. Thus, pride is decidedly not the begetter of teaching of the tattva.

Similar is the case in the Uddalaka-Shvetaketu dialogue. The conceited Shvetaketu could not comprehend Uddalaka's initial question regarding the Paratattva. He was floored by the very depth of the question. He realized his

limitation and surrendered to Uddalaka. The teaching was given to him only when the pride had given place to meekness and true desire to learn the Tattva.

The Upanishadic/Advaitic teaching of ‘Tat tvam asi’ cannot ‘increase the pride’ of Shvetaketu for the following reasons:

- First, we have seen earlier that even at the start of the teaching Shvetaketu had shed his pride and had surrendered to his Father/Acharya, Uddalaka, and beseeched him to teach that Vidya.
- The identity between Sat and Shvetaketu is only after Shvetaketu, by discrimination, viveka, just as in the pancha-kosha viveka of the Taittiriya Upanishad, separates the body-mind-senses apparatus from his being and knows himself as the pure Existence. This is called the ‘shodhita-tvam-padArtha’. In this condition, no pride can ever creep in. There could have been a possibility of pride sneaking in if the teaching of Tat tvam asi had meant equating the JagatkArana Sat with Shvetaketu, the jiva. This we have already seen is an impossibility as Sat, the Cause of the Universe can never be equated with Shvetaketu, the finite bound jiva. If this Upanishadic/Advaitic method of establishing identity is clearly understood, there would be no room for the objection that ‘the Advaitic teaching of Tat tvam asi will increase Shvetaketu’s pride.’

Some possible arguments: If it is argued by the Dvaitin that ‘Even at the start of the teaching Shvetaketu was conceited and only as the teaching progressed he shed his pride’, then this argument applies to the Advaitin too. If the Dvaitin further argues: ‘Shvetaketu was proud at the start of the teaching, but by repeatedly being pointed out that ‘he is not Sat’ but only ‘dependent on Sat,’ by holding out various examples he became humble, then the Advaitin would argue: Granting that

Shvetaketu had pride at the commencement of the teaching, by being exposed to the unreality of the effects from the cause Sat, with the support of various examples, he was able to appreciate that he was after all not the body-mind apparatus but the pure Existence, Sat, and shed his pride which had no meaning/purpose whatsoever in the light of the Upanishadic teaching that he, in truth, is the Infinite Sat. Pride could exist only in the wake of the possibility to compare oneself with other/s. The Sat divested of the jivatva upAdhi and the JagatkAraNatva upAdhi will be the adviteeya entity and hence there will be no 'other/s' to make any comparison against. Hence there will be no room for pride, etc. in such a realized person. 'Brahmavid Apnoti param' says the Taittiriya Upanishad.

A synopsis:

- The objection from the Dvaita school arises only because of not appreciating the general norms of the Upanishad/Gita in giving out the teaching of Brahmavidya.
- Even if Tat tvam asi is interpreted in the Dvaita way, to admit that Shvetaketu was proud even at the commencement of the teaching would implicate the Upanishad of flouting its own norms of bestowing Tattva Upadesha to an adhikAri, a fit candidate, alone and not to an *anadhikAri*, an unfit candidate.
- Also, even the teaching of adheenatva/paratantra (dependence) of the jiva will not sink in a mind that is filled with pride. A great degree of humility, anahankAra, is required for appreciating and accepting the teaching that 'I am dependent on the Lord'.

- It would be best to recognize, from the wordings of the Upanishad, that Shvetaketu had shed his pride prior to seeking the teaching and therefore was a fit adhikAri for Brahmavidya.
- The question of the Advaitic 'Tat tvam asi' increasing Shvetaketu's pride does not arise at all.
- The unreality of the effect, the material universe, and the Sole reality of the Cause, Sat, has been brought out by the teaching culminating in Shvetaketu appreciating that his real nature is non different from the Sat, the universal Cause. This knowledge would not have consummated in the presence of pride, etc. (Related reading: ['Tat tvam asi Nine Times'](#)).

श्रीसद्गुरुचरणारविन्दार्पणमस्तु

ShrisadgurucharaNaravindArpaNamastu

Om Tat Sat

