

**Oneness of the Self and the Universe in Upanishads**Yam Prasad Sharma^{#*}[#]Lecturer of English at Lalitkala Campus, Tribhuvan University.^{*}Corresponding Author: yamprasadsharma@gmail.com**Citation:** Sharma, Y. P. (2025). Oneness of the self and the universe in Upanishads. *Journal of Fine Arts Campus*, 7(2). 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jfac.v7i2.98217>**Abstract**

Upanishads assert the oneness of the self and the cosmos (*Brahma*). *Tatwamasi* (*Tat tvam asi*), that is, 'that you are'. In other words, the seeker of essence is himself the essence. The subject itself is the object of the quest. The viewer himself becomes the object of viewing. This is the oneness of *Brahma* (the universe) including all living and nonliving things. *Aham Brahmasmi*, one of the principal statements in the text, means that I am the universe. Similarly, *Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma* is next statement in *Upanishads* which means that 'all this is *Brahma*'. There is oneness of beings and things in the universe. This is the state of *Satchitanand* (*Sat chit anand*). When we realize the truth, we gain absolute bliss. Being aware of *Brahma*, I achieve absolute bliss. Being aware of *Brahma* is being oneself *Brahma*. The focus is on the unity of the self and ultimate reality (*Brahma*). Different expressions reinforce the same sense that both the self and the universe are one. When we realize that we are infinite, fear dissolves. There is nothing to lose. There is no hierarchy, comparison and judgment since all are the expression of same entity *Brahma*. The universe is infinite. The micro particles within human being were once in the stars of distant galaxies. The matters and energy are transformed from one form to another, one state to other state. Nothing is destroyed. *Brahma* is beyond the beginning and the end. We are part of it. We are within it. I am you, and you are me. Realization of this brings harmony by reducing conflict and contradictions. This is supposed to improve the way of life.

Keywords: *Aham Brahmasmi, Ayam Atma Brahma, Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma, Satchitanand, Tattwamasi, Upanishad, Vedanta.*

Introduction

One of the important teachings of the *Vedānta* is '*Tatwamasi*' (Dash & Dash, 2020). '*Tat*' means 'that', '*tvam*' means 'you' '*asi*' means 'are'. You are that (*Brahma*). The essence that you are seeking is you yourself. You are the universe. *Tattwamasi* is a philosophical *Mahavakya* (great statement) from *Chandogya Upanishad*. The statement "That you are" ("You are that") signifies the unity of an individual person and universal consciousness or *Brahma*. The central teaching of *Vedanta* is that the individual being is not isolated or detached from the ultimate reality.

Tattwamasi or *tat tvam asi* (तत् त्वम् असि or तत्त्वमसि in Sanskrit) is a mantra from the *Advaita* (no duality) *Vedanta* or the *Upanishads*. The statement implies the unity of the individual self with *Brahma* or universal consciousness (Bhatt, 2003). This is the nature of *Brahma*. This suggests the one's association with a Higher Self. The argument is attributed to *Adi Shankaracharya*, an 8th-century Indian philosopher of *Advaita Vedanta* doctrine. *Tattwamasi* attempts to unite the macrocosmic idea of universal consciousness with the microcosmic individual existence of the



Self. All beings and things are intimately connected to the universe and they cannot be separated from the whole. You and I are one. This and that are the same. It conveys a sense of coexistence, coherence and harmony in the world. There is no ego and a sense of hierarchy and superiority of one over the other. This *Mahavakya* (statement) intends to lead the practitioners of yoga toward the recognition that all beings are within *Brahma*. Realization of this is supposed to be the essential form of compassion. The individuals identify one another as a part of the same whole.

Research Methodology

The area of this study includes some key statements of *Upanishads*. *Upanishads* are primary sources. Criticisms on *Upanishads* are secondary sources. The key statements are interpreted and analyzed to support the thesis statement. This research is qualitative, for the interpretations, to some extent, depend on the critics' perspectives and points of view.

Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion

The *mahavakyas* (principal statements) in *Upanishads* like *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am the universe) and *Prajnanam Brahma* (Consciousness is *Brahma*) are directed towards self-exploration in relation to the context and the universe. The methods of this realization and awareness are meditation, mantra chanting and contemplation upon *Mahavakyas*. The realization resolves the contradictions, conflicts and dualities of life and experiences (Thilly, 1999). The individual self mirrors the world, and the universe is realized and reflected upon the self. The statement *Tattvamasi* suggests that the object of the exploration and quest like absolute power or essence is not far from us (Sharma, 2026). It is very close. That is you yourself. The concept has been elaborated in *Sama Veda* and *Chandogya* Upanishad. There is no beginning and the end of the *Brahma* (universe). It is *ananta* (infinite), *nirakar* (without fixed form), *niranjan* (alone), *aparampara* (limitless). It was existing and it still exists. Scientific inventions also state that there are trillions of galaxies and stars. There is no border of the universe. The expansion is infinite. There is no beginning and the end of the universe like the features of *Brahma* as mentioned in Vedanta. If one follows this one sentence and goes for the search of the ultimate state of existence, he gains liberation from the anxiety, pain, suffering and enmity.

Aham Brahmasmi (अहं ब्रह्मास्मि) means 'I am *Brahma*'. The statement is found in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.4.10 of the *Yajur Veda*. The idea is coherent to the sense of *Tattvamasi*. 'Aham' means I, 'Brahma' means the universe, and 'Asmi' means 'am'. That is 'I am the *Brahma* (universe)'. *Tattvamasi* means 'you are that (*Brahma*, universe)'. *Aham Brahmasmi* means 'I am *Brahma*'. Despite the difference in literal sense of the words, the connotation is the same. I am *Brahma*. You are *Brahma*. You and I are the same. The next *Mahavakya* from *Mandukya Upanishad* 1.2 of the *Atharva Veda* is *Ayam Ātmā Brahma* (अयम् आत्मा ब्रह्म). This means 'This self (atman) is *Brahma*'. The connection of the *Mahvakyas* clarifies the concept.

Next statement from *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.14.1 is 'Sarvaṃ Khalvidam *Brahma*'. This means, 'all this is *Brahma*'. This statement further reinforces the sense of earlier *Mahavakyas*. This is one of the important statement of *Advaita Vedanta*. The character of such *Brahma* is *nirguna*, that is, it is beyond worldly pain and pleasure. This is the state of Satchitanand (*Sat chit anand*).



Sat means truth or essence, *chit* means knowing, and *anand* means absolute bliss. When we realize the truth, we gain absolute bliss. According to *Advaita Vedanta*, Sadhakas are initiated into *sannyasa*, and they are taught these principal statements to attain the highest state of mind where the individual self dissolves into *Brahma*. This indicates the real identity of the individual. The *Mahavakyas* in *Upanishad* express the universal message in the concise form.

In *Chhandogya Upanishad* 6.8.7, we find the dialogue between *Uddalaka* and his son *Śvetaketu* that reveals philosophical discourse on the self and the universe. There cannot be anything without a root. The universe is the root of all these matters and creatures. The world is their resting place. The universe is the source of all living and non-living things. The self emerges out of the universe. That is how you are within me and I am within you. You are the root, origin or essence of everything that exists. *Advaita Vedanta* argues for absolute equality of *Brahma* (the ultimate reality) and, the self. *Aham Brahmāsmi* (I am *Brahma*) is a key statement in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.4.10 of the *Shukla Yajurveda*. It implies, "I am the Absolute". My identity is cosmic and universal. *Brahma* is infinite and all-pervading entity. Knowledge of non-dual existence alone drives out ignorance. The universe is infinite.

Aitareya Upanishad 3.3 of the *Rigveda* states, '*Prajñānam Brahma*'. *Jnana* means "understanding" and "knowledge". This is related to "consciousness". *Pra* is a prefix that means higher or greater. *Prajñānam* as a whole means the knowledge and wisdom of higher level. *Brahma* means the infinite universe or the highest truth. *Prajñānam Brahma* means the knowledge, awareness of the existence is *Brahma*. In other words, we understand and realize *Brahma* through knowledge. The consciousness is *Brahma*. Without consciousness, we are not aware about *Brahma* or the universe. *Prajñanam* implies the intuitive truth that is verified by reason. The higher function of the intellect determines the *Sat* (truth). *Sat-Chit-Ananda* refers to *Brahma* (truth) - consciousness-bliss. The enlightened or truly wise person is known as *Prajna*. He is supposed to have attained *Brahmahood*. The knowledge of *Brahma* is itself *Brahma*.

Mandukya Upanishad from *Atharvaveda* (1-2) mentions, '*Ayam Atma Brahma*' (अयम् आत्मा ब्रह्म in Sanskrit). The statement means this self (soul) is *Brahma*. *Brahma is this self*. *Sarvam hyetad Brahma* (सर्वं ह्येतद् ब्रह्म) means this universe (*Brahma*) is the Whole. '*Brahma ayam atma* (ब्रह्मायमात्मा)' means *Brahma* is *ātman*. '*Brahma sah ayam atman* (ब्रह्म सोऽयमात्मा)' means *Brahma* is this self. I am *Brahma*. You are *Brahma*. This is *Brahma*. Thus, everything is *Brahma*. *Mundaka Upanishad* claims that living beings and things originate from *Brahma* just like a burning flame produces hundreds of sparks in different forms. *Brahma* is infinite. All the things like air, mind, senses, water, space, light and earth emerge from *Brahma* and dissolve within it. The things like fire, the sun, the moon, rain, herbs, seeds, *Vedas*, music, verses, gods, stars, men, cattle, birds, rice, corn, truth and law come from *Brahma* (*Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.1.4 - 2.1.7). *Mundaka Upanishad* verse 2.2.2 claims that *Brahma* is not affected by *Karma*. It is free from sorrow. It is in the state of *anand* (perpetual bliss). *Brahma* is indestructible. *Upanishad*, the great weapon like a bow, through which the self like an arrow sharpened by meditation directed toward *Brahma* penetrates the imperishable mark. The arrow becomes one with the mark. The self becomes one with *Brahma* (*Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.2.2 - 2.2.4).



Sarvaṃ khalvidaṃ Brahma (सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म) means that everything is *Brahma*. All the things come from *Brahma*, and they go back to *Brahma*. Everything is sustained by *Brahma*. Thus, one should meditate on *Brahma*. Everyone has his mind. What he wills in his life, he becomes that when he dies. Bearing this in mind, he should meditate accordingly. *Ekam evadvitīyam Brahma* (एकं एव अद्वितीयं ब्रह्म) is another great statement from *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* which means *Brahma* is one, without a second. The statement in *Isha Upaniṣad* says "So 'ham (सोऽहं)" which means I am that (*Brahma*). *Katha Upaniṣad* states *Etad vai tat* (एतद् वै तत्) which means this (self) is that (*Brahma*). Even when we are moving about, resting or working, we feel that we are all-pervading infinite *Brahma*. The entire universe is my body. Realization of this contributes to reduce jealousy, hatred, anger and egoism.

Aham Brahmasmi mantra is a profound affirmation of our true nature. It reminds that we are not separate from the universe. We and the ultimate reality are one. When we incorporate this mantra into our meditation practice, this becomes a profound tool that can guide us towards experiencing the reality of existence and self-realization. *Aham Brahma asmi* holds profound spiritual significance in the *Jnana Yoga* (Self-realization through knowledge and wisdom). It leads *sadhaka* to enlightenment and liberation (*Moksha*). This mantra guides him on his spiritual journey toward understanding the intricate dance of the self within the cosmic order.

The process of realization begins from the question, "Who am I?" The *Sadhaka* feels this. The first step of the practice is self-inquiry (Dutta, 1950). It is not only reasoning but also lived exploration. My body and thoughts are always changing but one is not separate from external existence. This is not only a mantra for chanting but also the philosophy to be followed. It brings a shift in being and the way of life. It means seeing life as a unified whole. It is not the faith and belief but the objective observation with clarity. I am *Brahma*. We see *Brahma* in everything. When we look a person, an animal, a tree, a stone or the sky, we remind ourselves that this too is *Brahma*.

Contemplation in higher level, we realize we do not need to "attain" *Brahma*, for we have never been separated from it. We are already always *Brahma*. Realization of *Aham Brahmasmi* is not to withdraw oneself from life but to engage with it fully without illusion and anxiety. This is an act without attachment, love and compassion without possessive attitude. This understanding guides us as a way of being, seeing and moving through life. We are existence itself. This experience is epiphany coming out of the union of object and subject, you and I, the self and the universe (Sharma, 2009). Pure knowledge of the Absolute provides the experience that I am alone with my singularity.

Every person is supposed to be a microcosm of the universe. I and everything I experience in the world around me are the same field of energy. We are intimately connected to this energy. We cannot be separated. We are connected to everything that exists in the universe. I am a thread in the fabric of the universe that is connected to all the other threads. According to *Isopanishad*, the self identifies itself with the reality or the world (Das, 2014).

In a way, *Aham Brahmasmi* is telling us the same thing. Just as science indicates that everything arises from a common source, *Upanishads* state that all beings and things are connected to *Brahma*. Both the perspectives of science and *Upanishads* have the same statement that we are all one. We are all interconnected (Sharma, 2003). Quantum physics states that particles influence



each other although they are far apart in the universe and space. This suggests the deep unity of all things in the world. Realization of the statement '*Aham Brahmasmi*' makes us see ourselves, the world and universe in a new light. This can change the way we live. The compassion comes forth, for I exist within you and you exist within me. The matter and energy change the form but never destructed. The essence of us was existing from the early time, it is still existing and will exist in the future as well. In a way, every being is immortal. This provides peace to our mind. Our true self has the infinite nature. This is the significance of *Aham Brahmasmi*. While looking at the star, we remember we were once in that star. The universe is expanding, similarly inner journey of our self-discovery is expanding (Das, 2014).

Rig Veda states, "*Ekam sat.*" This means that the truth is only one. Existence is only one. The existence is ultimate reality (Paramahansa, 2007). Both being and existence mean the same thing (Purushothaman & Kumaran 2014). Such statements of *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, and modern science are identical to some extent. Therefore, the ways of science and *Vedanta* are never on collusion. They have identical observations to some extent.

Thoughts in *Upanishads* strongly encourage tolerance for different beliefs (Swami, 1993). The higher concept is the unchanging formlessness, *Nirguua Brahma*. Whatever is taking place in my mind, whatever I may be thinking, believing, feeling or sensing, the one thing I cannot doubt is my consciousness. My consciousness is unquestionable truth. Formless *Nirguna Brahma* is beyond distinction and comprehension. *Nirguna Niraakara Brahman* is the supreme reality without form, quality, attribute and image. In the Vedantic philosophy, *Brahma* is signified as "Absolute Consciousness" which pervades the Universe and has no form, no quality, no characteristics and no image (Mahadeven & Saroja, 1981). It has a holistic nature of interconnectedness of all things and beings. Yoga is a physical, mental and spiritual discipline. Yoga elevates an awareness and intuition in the mind and raises the individual consciousness and merges it with the infinite. The Vedic *Mahavakyas* state and contemplate on '*Ayam Atma Brahma*' or '*This Atman is Brahma.*' The *sadhaka* is aware that *Brahman* is unlimited and exists in many different forms. Everything in the universe is that One, appearing in various forms. It is all one. The whole universe is one. There is only one Consciousness and only One Existence (Swami, 1963).

Consciousness is a singular. There is only one thing. What seems to be a plurality is a series of different aspects of this one thing. 'Reality is one', and the individual is identical with it. The identification of the self with the absolute is not any act of bringing together two different things. It is an affirmation that absoluteness or universality includes everything. There is nothing outside of it. (Swami, 1992). *Prajnanam Brahma* (Consciousness is *Brahma*) in *Aitareya Upanishad* 3.3 of the *Rig Veda* means that the ultimate reality is pure consciousness. No object exists independently from *Brahma*, the whole. It is said that the kernel of this universe is *Brahma*. Everything like life, seed and ego emerge from it.

Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma (all of this is *Brahma*). This statement is the last stage of man's realization towards absolute reality. *Brahma* is real. *Brahma* is one, without a second. *Brahma* is the supreme knowledge (Keerthi, 2017). That is what you are. The self and *Brahma* are the same. I am *Brahma*. These insights are the foundation of *Vedanta*. Where from do all these things come?



They come from space. All beings arise from space, and into space they return. Space is indeed their beginning, and space is their final end (*Chandogya Upanishad* chapter 1.9.1). *Isha Upanishad* says:

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते ।
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥

(*Aum Purnamadah Purnamidam Purnat purnamudachyate.
Purnasya Purnamadaya Purnamevavashisyate.*)

This means that *Brahma* is infinite, and this creation is infinite. The infinite proceeds from infinite. If you subtract the infinite from the infinite, the infinite remains. The modern scientific study acknowledges the principles of the *Vedanta* (Swami, 1992). Big bang theory argues that creation commenced through the explosion of condensed mass (*Brahmanda*, *Brahma* in the shape of an egg). All objects are formed in space and when the object disintegrates they assimilate into space only. Subjective and objective reality are interconnected (Purushothaman & Kumaran, 2014).

Everything is basically connected to each other in inseparable manner. Holistic concept of interconnectedness of all the things is expressed in the *Vedas* as, "*Sarvam Khalbidam Brahma.*" Consciousness is key to realize the unity of the self and the other. If there is no mind, we are unaware of the world. We do not know whether it exists or not. Consciousness is fundamental to make sense of the existence. Matter and energy, mind and matter, living and non-living, observer and observed are strictly not separate from each other (Swami, 1997). You are here in this world and everywhere (*Bagavat Gita* 10/42). All things are eternally born from him, and taken eternally back into his oneness (*Bagavat Gita*, 13/17).

Lack of tolerance and compassion have dragged the contemporary civilization down (Purushothaman & Kumaran, 2014). The statements related to the oneness of self and other, I and you, subject and object contribute to create humanity and harmony in the civilization. All matters are interconnected to consciousness, and therefore you and I are fundamentally interconnected. This holistic statement is backed by the modern science and quantum mechanics.

Conclusion

Mahavakyas in *Vedanta* are the statements that integrate philosophical truth, summarize and finalize the significance of philosophical discourses. The statements hold the authority. They unify all Vedic instructions into a guide for performing the cultural rituals.

The statement "*Aham Brahmasmi*" is connected to science and reasoning. Big Bang theory explains the beginning of the universe. Before the Big Bang everything like space, matter and energy was compressed into a single point. From this point, the universe expanded, giving way to galaxies, stars and planets and life on Earth. All the things in the universe, including human beings, are made up of atoms that were created in the distant planets and stars billions of years ago. While going deeper, everything is made of electrons, protons and neutrons. Basic building blocks are the same. The micro particles move in the space. When certain particles come together and combine, certain things and life appear. When they are decomposed and separated, they return back to earth,



space and stars. I am made of the particles in the earth, space or star. After death, I return there from where I came. There is oneness in I and the universe. Thus, I am *Brahma* (*Aham Brahmasmi*).

The great statements like *Ayam Ātmā Brahma* (This self is *Brahma*), *Aham Brahmāsmi* (I am *Brahma*) and *Tattvamasi* (That is you) are connected, and they convey that everything including me is *Brahma*. You are the absolute spirit. You are the universal consciousness. You are the energy and matter. You are the world. The universe is yours. Everything is within you. Then, why do you worry? We need to stay in absolute bliss.

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