

Paramatman

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Paramatman means the Supreme Self. It is the universal Self in and beyond all beings, the indestructible, invisible, formless spiritual Reality mirrored in the embodied Self, *Jivatman*. Its universality excludes the idea of a private spiritual superior possessed by an individual. It is the supreme spiritual ground of identity, known ultimately as *Parabrahman* and approached inwardly as the omnipresent *Aum*, *Ishvara*, and the secret Heart of universal consciousness.

The word “Self” can easily be misunderstood. In ordinary life, self often means memory, desire, opinion, role, wound, ambition, and preference. Even in spiritual language, “my higher self” can become a subtler possession, as though the individual owned a private spiritual superior. *Paramatman* cuts through this. It does not belong to the individual. The individual belongs to it, mirrors it, and may awaken to it.

Professor Iyer’s treatment of *Paramatman* begins with self-enquiry. True enquiry must begin in self-enquiry and persist until veil after veil is lifted. The pupil must discover the distinction between the Self and the non-self, willing to see that seeming life may be death and what seems like non-being may lead to true Being. The search for the one Self hidden in each and all beings eventually brings a striking recognition: the seeker is both the subject and the object of the search. Divine Wisdom is within oneself, but also in every noetic soul on its pilgrimage of necessity.

Professor Iyer states that within oneself is the entrance to the sanctuary of the cosmic Heart, the Supreme Self, the omnipresent *Aum* who is *Ishvara*, the *Paramatman*, known ultimately as *Parabrahman*. This gathers several currents. *Paramatman* is the Supreme Self, not merely an individual principle. It is connected with the cosmic Heart. It is approached through *Aum* and *Ishvara*. It is known ultimately as *Parabrahman*, showing that the Supreme Self is not separate from the attributeless Absolute.

The relation between *Jivatman* and *Paramatman* is central. *Jivatman* is the embodied or individual Self, the ray or center through which spiritual consciousness may awaken. *Paramatman* is the Supreme Self mirrored in that embodied Self. The mirror is not the source of the light, yet without the mirror the light is not recognized in that locus. The purpose is not to inflate the individual Self, but to make it transparent to the Supreme Self.

Professor Iyer’s image from the *Mundaka Upanishad* is especially helpful. *Aum* is the sacred bow, spiritual resolve is the arrow, and the fixed target is the indestructible, invisible, formless

Supreme Self, *Paramatman*, mirrored in *Jivatman*. This is not vague mysticism. The archer must be steady. The eye must be clear. The hand must be disciplined. The intention must be purified. The seeker does not conquer the Supreme Self; the seeker becomes transparent enough to cease resisting it.

H.P. Blavatsky's doctrine of the Monad supports this. The spiritual Monad is One, Universal, Boundless and Impartite, although its rays form what are called individual monads. The human monad is *Atma-Buddhi*, the spiritual duad. Individuality is real as a ray, a focus, a field of evolution, but not separate in ultimate essence. The many rays do not divide the spiritual Sun. *Paramatman* is the Supreme Self in relation to which all true individuality must be understood.

This protects the doctrine from two errors. One is egoic separateness, the belief that the individual self is self-existing and independent. The other is vague dissolution, the belief that individuality is meaningless. The Wisdom Tradition holds a subtler view. The individual is not ultimate, but it is a real field of responsibility. Spiritual individuality must be purified, universalized, and made transparent to the Supreme Self.

Paramatman is therefore inseparable from universal self-consciousness. The seeker who longs for universal self-consciousness must reduce everything to its homogeneous essence, see through the relative reality and unreality of the world, and recognize that within time there is that which is consubstantial with the Absolute. Human principles are specializations of a supreme principle, lenses through which one central light is focused in different degrees of differentiation.

The term must also be understood through the heart. Professor Iyer says that the monadic heart of every human being mirrors the heart of the cosmos. Within every human heart burns a fire of light-wisdom and love-compassion, *Prajna* and *Mahakaruna*. This spark of the One Fire may be stoked into a steady flame. *Paramatman* is not cold universality. It is the source of the deepest love, becoming fearless, selfless, and universal.

This gives *Paramatman* immediate ethical meaning. If the same Supreme Self is hidden behind every finite center, no being is spiritually negligible. No person can be reduced to personality, status, wound, error, usefulness, or difference. This is the metaphysical ground of Human Solidarity and Universal Brotherhood. Brotherhood is not merely an ethical sentiment added to metaphysics; it is the practical recognition that the Self in oneself is not finally separate from the Self in all.

In ordinary life, this changes conduct. Speech becomes more careful because the person addressed is not merely a role or obstacle. Relationship becomes less possessive because the other is not owned by one's need. Suffering becomes more spacious because the wounded self

is not the Supreme Self. Work becomes more consecrated because duty may be performed as service to the One Life. Even failure becomes educative when it returns consciousness from false identity to the deeper center.

Paramatman also requires the negation of self-sufficiency. The root teaching of voidness concerns the emptiness of the notion of independence and the falsity of believing anything disconnected from the entire chain. The Supreme Self cannot be realized by a self that clings to isolation. The separative self must be seen through and emptied of false absoluteness.

Consider someone helping an elderly neighbour with a task. A generous intention can still become possessive if the helper decides what the neighbour must want. Remembering a shared spiritual ground calls for greater respect for the other's judgment. One can ask what would help, listen to the answer and offer only what one can responsibly provide. The neighbour's dignity is present before the assistance is given; it is not conferred by the helper. Service becomes more exact as the desire to be indispensable recedes.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception means including this freedom of the other within one's wish to serve. The same recognition can be turned inward. A person who needs help has not lost the spiritual ground of dignity through dependence upon another's skill or strength. The teaching of the Supreme Self can sustain reciprocal care without pretending that all capacities are presently equal. Different instruments call for different kinds of assistance, while the inward source of worth remains beyond such comparison.

Meditation on *Paramatman* is not merely private inwardness. Professor Iyer says that the serene self-awareness intrinsic to *Alaya*, the universal *Paramatman*, must be brought down into higher mind in a way compatible with active duty. The realization must descend into *Manas*, speech, motive, rhythm, work, and relationship. It must produce self-tranquilization and self-regeneration while one remains vigorously incarnated in the sphere of duty.

To understand *Paramatman* is to re-educate identity. One begins with personality and discovers its instability. One turns toward *Jivatman* and senses the embodied spiritual Self. One follows the ray inward to the Supreme Self. Then the circle widens: the Self sought within is also hidden in all beings. Self-enquiry becomes universal compassion. The arrow returns as service. *Paramatman* is the invisible target, the universal center, and the secret Heart in which seeker, path, and all beings are held in one light.

Glossary

Absolute — The unconditioned Reality, beyond the limitations and distinctions of manifested existence.

Alaya — The universal soul or ground of consciousness; in the cited passage, related to the serene self-awareness of the universal *Paramatman*.

Anu — The atom; in the quoted passage, a divine title within a metaphysical account of life and consciousness.

Atma-Buddhi — Universal Spirit considered in relation to *Buddhi*, its spiritual vehicle; commonly called the human Monad.

Atman — The universal spiritual Self; *Atma* is another form, and Atmic means pertaining to this principle.

Bhutatman — One with the created or emanated materials of the world; a title discussed by Blavatsky in her account of cosmic life and consciousness.

Consubstantial — Of one underlying substance or essential nature; used in the quoted metaphysical account.

Differentiation — The emergence of distinct forms, functions or levels from a less divided condition.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception — Widening understanding to include more relationships, consequences and the needs of others.

Duad — An ordered pair or twofold unity.

Gelukpa — A Tibetan Buddhist tradition associated with Tsong-Kha-Pa; invoked in the passage on spiritual self-enquiry.

Gupta Vidya — Sacred or esoteric wisdom; also the title of Professor Iyer's collected Theosophical writings.

Homogeneous / heterogeneous — Homogeneous means of a uniform nature; heterogeneous means differentiated or diverse. The quotations also use homogenous and heterogenous.

Human Solidarity — The shared dignity and interdependence of human beings, expressed through responsibility for one another's welfare.

Immanence — Presence within the manifested world or its beings; distinguished from transcendence, which exceeds particular manifestations.

Impartite — Undivided; used by Blavatsky to describe the universal spiritual Monad.

Incarnation — The embodiment of an enduring principle or individuality in a particular life.

Individuality — The enduring spiritual Ego in Theosophical usage, distinguished from the temporary personality of a particular life.

Ishvara — The Lord or manifested divine principle; also written *Ishwara*, *Iswara* or *Eswara* in the sources.

Jivatman — The embodied spiritual Self or individual centre, described here as mirroring the Supreme Self, *Paramatman*.

Jnana Yoga — The path of spiritual knowledge or Divine Wisdom; *Jnanayoga* is the joined form in the quotation.

Mahakaruna — Great compassion, directed toward the welfare and liberation of beings.

Mahayana — The Great Vehicle of Buddhism, associated with the bodhisattva ideal and the universal scope of wisdom and compassion.

Manas — The self-conscious thinking principle; in its higher sense, the reincarnating individuality. Manasic means pertaining to this principle.

Metaphysics — Inquiry into the fundamental nature and principles of reality, including consciousness, causation and the relation of unity to multiplicity.

Monad — The spiritual unit or pilgrim, commonly related to *Atma-Buddhi*; its essential unity is distinguished from the changing vehicles through which evolution proceeds.

Mundaka Upanishad — A Hindu sacred text that supplies the image of *Pranava* as bow, the self as arrow and *Brahman* as the mark.

Noetic — Pertaining to the higher mind and spiritual cognition, distinguished from merely personal or reactive mental activity.

Om / Aum — The sacred syllable of invocation and consecration; *Om* emphasizes its unity and *Aum* its trilateral expression in the cited interpretations.

One Life — The universal unity of life underlying and expressed through the many lives and forms of Nature.

Parabrahmam / Parabrahman — The unconditioned Absolute beyond subject and object; *Parabrahm* is another form of the name.

Paramatman — The Supreme or universal Self, contemplated beyond personal identity and mirrored in the embodied Self, *Jivatman*.

Personality — The temporary identity, habits and instruments associated with a particular life, distinguished from enduring spiritual individuality.

Pradhanatman — One with the senses, in Blavatsky's quoted explanation of the divine titles associated with cosmic life.

Prajna — Spiritual wisdom or insight; joined with great compassion in Professor Iyer's account of the spiritual heart.

Self-consciousness — The capacity to reflect upon one's own experience, intention and action; the sources distinguish personal and more universal degrees.

Sine qua non — Latin for an indispensable condition, without which something cannot be.

Spiritual Sun — The inward source of spiritual illumination contemplated beyond the visible solar orb in Theosophical symbolism.

Svasamvedana — Spiritual self-awareness; in Professor Iyer's passage, a serene awareness to be brought into active duty.

Triad — A group of three related principles or powers.

Trimurti — A threefold divine expression; the cited contexts use *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*, or the triad of *Agni*, *Vayu* and *Surya*.

Universal Brotherhood — The spiritual kinship of beings, expressed ethically through care extending beyond personal or sectarian boundaries.

Universal Mind — The spiritual source or field of cosmic ideation; its relation to *Mahat* varies with the standpoint being discussed.

Upanishads — Hindu sacred philosophical texts concerned with the Self, spiritual reality and liberation; *Upanishad* is the singular.

Vishnu — The divine preserver in Hindu tradition; *Mahavishnu* or *Maha Vishnu* emphasizes the cosmic scope of that principle.

Wisdom-Compassion — Professor Iyer's expression for the fusion of love and wisdom, associated with the conjunction of *Buddhi* and *Manas*.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. R.N. Iyer — “Deity in Action”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 33.

“*Jnanayoga*, the path of Divine Wisdom, involves ever-deepening levels of vision attained by the Seer, but Divine Wisdom cannot be a subject for study in any ordinary intellectual sense. It may be an object for search, however, once one awakens in oneself the desire to begin the search and learns how to sustain the light of enquiry. True enquiry must begin in self-enquiry and must persist until, as veil upon veil lifts, there is an acceptance that there will be veils upon veils behind.”

Meditation thought: Let enquiry become sustained attention to the enquirer. Which familiar answer to the question of identity needs to be examined again?

2. R.N. Iyer — “Deity in Action”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 33.

“The pupil must persist in the progressive discovery of the distinction between the Self and non-self, willing to see that seeming life is really death, and that what seems to be non-being leads to true Being. This painful and persistent search for the one Self hidden in each and all beings, worlds and conditions will eventually lead to the recognition, at some stage of one's quest, that one is both the subject and the object of the search, because transcendent Divine Wisdom is within oneself and it is also in each and every noetic soul on its great 'pilgrimage of necessity'.”

Meditation thought: Consider how the seeker enters the field being sought. What changes when self-enquiry includes every other noetic soul?

3. R.N. Iyer — “Deity in Action”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, pp. 33–34.

“Within oneself is the entrance to the sanctuary of the cosmic Heart, the Supreme Self, the omnipresent *AUM* who is *Ishvara*, the *paramatman*, known ultimately as *parabrahman*, the sole source and *sine qua non* of Deity in action in the manifested cosmos.”

Meditation thought: The cosmic Heart is approached inwardly without becoming private property. What responsibility follows from that distinction?

4. R.N. Iyer — “Deity in Action”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 34.

“This Sacred Teaching is the Secret Heart of *Gupta Vidya*, and is central to the purest and highest *Mahayana* teaching of the *Gelukpa* tradition in Tibet. It was reaffirmed in this century through silence and speech by Shri Ramana Maharshi, who urged one and all who came to him to keep searching for the origin of the 'I-thought' in asking the age-old question ‘Who am I?’ until it dissolves in the attributeless Supreme Self in the Silence, which is Wisdom-Compassion.”

Meditation thought: Follow the question toward the origin of the I-thought. What remains unexplored when the answer is only a description of personality?

5. R.N. Iyer — “Dateless and Deathless”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 110.

“At the same time, one will understand that the very ability one has gained to stand apart from these shadows is itself rooted in a recognition of that which is all-knowing, unforgetful, ever-awake, courageous, free, untrammelled and universally self-conscious. Even though one's deeper Self must be repeatedly invoked, one will still find a certain joy arising in oneself, a certain natural desire flowing out of deep love for that universal Self. This is the true source of all other loves and the only thing that can ultimately give meaning to all one's other altruistic urges.”

Meditation thought: Distinguish love for the universal Self from attachment to a preferred self-image. How could that distinction refine an existing affection?

6. R.N. Iyer — “Dateless and Deathless”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 110.

“It is the wellspring of one's empathy for all life, for all the kingdoms of Nature, for what is in every stone and plant and tree. It is that in oneself which can resonate to the rising sun, can respond to the setting sun, and can echo back to the invisible Midnight Sun. All these are but veiled expressions of a deeper universal current of energy which is compassionate, which is sacrificial, and which is consciously emanated by the Masters of Light and Love, Compassion and Wisdom.”

Meditation thought: Let empathy extend beyond the human circle. What kind of attention is appropriate to the particular life encountered?

7. R.N. Iyer — “Dateless and Deathless”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 110.

“When one begins to develop a natural joy, hunger, longing and love for this mystic meditation, one will find that it acts as an eliminator. Many of one's lesser longings will simply fall away, and one's vanity, delusion and ego-projection will be revealed and emptied out. Yet, what was good and true at the core of them will never be lost, for that is an outflow of the fount of universal love which belongs to the *Paramatman*, the universal Self.”

Meditation thought: Consider a lesser longing that has fallen away. What was valuable within it, and how might that value find a wider expression?

8. R.N. Iyer — “The Nachiketas Flame”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 374.

“That Self is veiled rather than revealed by compulsive speech and chaotic thought-vibrations. One must sustain in the daily round of duties a secret spiritual discipline which no one else can discern from peering at perfunctory externals. This 'divine discipline' has to do with fidelity to that sovereign standpoint which steadily sees the unmanifest Self behind the mental furniture of the world and manifest selves.”

Meditation thought: Review the relation of speech to inward discipline. Which unnecessary words make it harder to remember the purpose of a duty?

9. R.N. Iyer — “The Nachiketas Flame”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 374.

“It is certainly feasible to realize this fully within oneself, to abide constantly in those depths of spiritual self-awareness (*svasamvedana*), wherein there are no waves or ripples, but rather a sublime experience of serene limpidity, crystalline clarity and radiant translucence, which are all intrinsic to *Alaya*, the universal *Paramatman*. This state of self-awareness must be brought down into the realm of the higher mind in a manner that makes for steady self-tranquillization and self-regeneration, which is compatible with vigorous incarnation in the sphere of active duty.”

Meditation thought: Contemplate serenity that remains compatible with active responsibility. What would bring a moment of inward clarity into today's work?

10. R.N. Iyer — “The Nachiketas Flame”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 375.

“AUM is the sacred bow, the arrow is spiritual resolve, and the fixed target is the indestructible, invisible, formless, supreme Self (*Paramatman*), mirrored in the embodied Self (*Jivatman*), the divine Triad within and beyond one's manifest identity.”

Meditation thought: In the bow image, distinguish resolve, instrument and aim. How does the Supreme Self remain beyond the wish to acquire an object?

11. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, pp. 177–178.

“In short, as the spiritual Monad is One, Universal, Boundless and Impartite, whose rays, nevertheless, form what we, in our ignorance, call the ‘Individual Monads’ of men, so the Mineral Monad — being at the opposite point of the circle — is also One — and from it proceed the countless physical atoms, which Science is beginning to regard as individualized.”

Meditation thought: The many rays do not divide their source. What does the image suggest about individuality without establishing a separate spiritual ownership?

12. H.P. Blavatsky — “Kosmic Mind”, *Studies in Occultism*, PDF p. 104.

“The five fundamental titles of *Vishnu* — added to that of *Anu* (atom) common to all the trimurtic personages — which are, *Bhutatman*, one with the created or emanated materials of the world; *Pradhanatman*, ‘one with the senses;’ *Paramatman*, ‘Supreme Soul’; and *Atman*, Kosmic Soul, or the Universal Mind — show sufficiently what the ancient Hindus meant by endowing with mind and consciousness every atom and giving it a distinct name of a God or a Goddess.”

Meditation thought: Keep the historical metaphysical setting visible. How do these divine titles express relationships of life and consciousness within the cited account?