

Sarvatman

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Sarvatman means the Supreme Self, the Supreme Soul, or the All-Self. It is not the personal ego made vast, nor the psychological self expanded into a universal fantasy. It points to the indivisible unity of the Self in all beings, the hidden spiritual ground by which every center of consciousness is rooted in one inexhaustible source.

In the *Gupta Vidya* current, *Sarvatman* is portrayed through luminous images. *Vishnu* rests upon *Adishesha* in the ocean of space. The Spiritual Sun rides a chariot drawn by seven steeds. The seven Lords of Being lie concealed in *Sarvatman* like thoughts in one brain. This last image is especially important. It teaches unity without erasing multiplicity. The seven are not outside the One, just as thoughts do not break the brain into fragments. The many rays do not destroy the sun.

Sarvatman holds together transcendence and immanence. *Krishna's* statement that he established the whole universe with a single portion of himself and remains separate gives the key. The Supreme Self dwells in every heart, yet is not confined by any heart. It sustains the universe, yet is never exhausted by manifestation. There is concern and compassion in the world, and also supreme detachment.

If one stresses only immanence, the Supreme Self may be flattened into visible nature or collective feeling. If one stresses only transcendence, it may become a cold abstraction beyond suffering and service. *Sarvatman* avoids both errors. It is the Self of all beings, but not the sum of beings. It is hidden in every heart, but cannot be claimed as private property.

This is why *Sarvatman* is linked with *Krishna* as *Narayana*, *Ishwara*, *Logos*, Avatar, and indwelling Master. *Krishna* is not merely an outward figure in this context. He is the Supreme Self dwelling secretly in every human heart. To recognize him inwardly is to discover the Master in the heart of every creature.

This recognition transforms identity. The personal self lives through comparison, fear, resentment, ambition, and self-protection. It sees the world as a field of others. *Sarvatman* reverses this perception. It does not abolish difference, but shows that difference is held within deeper unity. The neighbor, stranger, and even enemy are veiled centers of the one Self.

This makes ethics more exacting. If there is one Self in all, cruelty toward another is also ignorance of oneself. Indifference to suffering is a refusal of truth. Harsh speech, contempt, exploitation, and spiritual pride are not merely moral faults; they are metaphysical mistakes.

Human Solidarity and Universal Brotherhood are implied in *Sarvatman*. The Self is one; the lives are many; the responsibility is shared.

The teaching *Tat Tvam Asi*, “That Thou Art,” belongs naturally here. One may repeat “I am the universal Self” or “I am the Self of all creatures,” but such repetition is fruitless unless one can think and act in terms of it. *Sarvatman* must pass from phrase into perception, from perception into motive, from motive into speech, and from speech into conduct.

In ordinary life, this is quietly practical. Before judging another person, one may ask: what would it mean to remember the Self hidden here? Before speaking sharply, one may ask whether the word honors the inner dignity of the other. Before serving, one may seek not to be important, but to be transparent to the Self that serves all.

Sarvatman also clarifies spectator and participant. Human beings must participate in incarnated life, meeting duties, relationships, griefs, bodies, limitations, and karmic consequences. Yet they are also called to become monadic spectators rooted in the One. The problem is how to participate without losing awareness of the Self, and how to witness without withdrawing from compassionate action.

The lower mind fragments experience. It is pulled into “mine” and “thine,” praise and blame, attraction and aversion. To reaffirm the One in the many is therefore a discipline. Meditation upon the Soundless Sound, *Om*, and the hidden unity behind number, sound, and form gives the mind a way of returning to the center.

Sarvatman is also linked with the *Adhyatman*, the supreme inward mystery. In the forest of knowledge, the *Kshetragna*, the knower of the field, shines as the sun. The world may appear as a tangled forest of illusions and fears, but another forest can shine forth: intelligence as the tree, emancipation as the fruit, tranquillity as shade, contentment as water, and the Supreme Self as the sun.

This gives the term a healing current. The Supreme Self is the Self of Wisdom and Compassion, the secure refuge of truth, the deathless core of fearlessness in prisoners, children, and all who hope for peace and goodwill. *Sarvatman* is not known by ignoring suffering. The more universal the realization, the wider and more exact the compassion.

The term also protects the student from self-negation and self-inflation. The personal ego is not the Supreme Self, and cannot claim universal identity as an achievement. Yet the human being is not spiritually abandoned. Within oneself is the entrance to the sanctuary of the cosmic Heart. The search for the one Self hidden in all beings leads to the recognition that the seeker is both subject and object of the search.

There is also a discipline of speech. One cannot affirm the Self of all creatures and speak in ways that humiliate, exploit, or harden separation. Each sentence may deepen separateness or serve remembrance. Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception asks the speaker to include the dignity and circumstances of everyone affected by a sentence.

A community garden gives this discipline a concrete setting. Water, shade and space must be shared among different plants and among neighbours with different needs. To care for the whole requires noticing these differences closely. Giving every plot the same treatment may serve some and damage others. The analogy helps explain how a universal concern can require particular judgments. One attends to the actual conditions through which a common life is expressed, rather than allowing the language of oneness to replace observation.

The same care applies to a human dispute over that garden. One person's confidence in speaking may conceal another's difficulty in being heard. Remembering the All-Self gives no automatic answer about the distribution of space or work. It supplies a reason to hear each account, examine the consequences and seek an arrangement that others can understand. Fairness remains a task requiring thought. Spiritual universality becomes an inward discipline sustaining that task, rather than an authority claimed by the loudest participant.

Nor does the symbol require every form of life to possess human self-consciousness. Theosophy distinguishes the faculties and stages through which life is expressed. Its assertion of a common ground enlarges responsibility without erasing those distinctions. Reverence for a tree and respect for a neighbour may require different actions, each guided by attention to the being actually encountered.

It also grounds reverent stewardship. If the universal Self is the source of empathy for all life, for all kingdoms of Nature, for what is in stone, plant, tree, animal, and human being, the world becomes a field of care, not a warehouse of objects. Distinctions remain, but exploitation loses its metaphysical excuse.

Sarvatman finally leads toward silence and service. The word points; it does not contain. It asks the student to enter the heart, see the Self in all, serve without self-importance, and remain rooted in that which no multiplicity can divide. The living image remains: the Spiritual Sun, the seven Lords hidden like thoughts in one brain, and *Krishna* dwelling secretly in every heart.

Glossary

Adhyatman — The supreme inward spiritual mystery; in the cited discussion, the recognition of the Self and its relation to all beings.

Adishesha — The primordial serpent upon whom *Vishnu* rests in a cosmic image of manifestation.

Agni — Fire; the Vedic divine figure associated with sacred fire and creative spiritual energy.

Ah-hi — Spiritual intelligences that contain and reflect universal ideation in the cited cosmology.

Anugita — A philosophical dialogue within the *Mahabharata*, drawn upon in the cited image of the forest of knowledge.

Arjuna — The disciple instructed by *Krishna* in the *Bhagavad Gita*; a figure of the aspiring human soul.

Army of the Voice — A symbolic name for the hosts through which divine thought is expressed in differentiated manifestation.

Avatar — A divine descent or incarnation; in the definition used here, an exalted being's voluntary embodiment beyond the necessity of ordinary rebirth. *Avatâra* is the Sanskrit form.

Bhagavad Gita — The Hindu sacred dialogue between *Krishna* and Arjuna, concerned with spiritual knowledge, devotion and action.

Bhagavan — A title of reverence for a divine or spiritual teacher; applied to *Krishna* in the cited passage.

Brahma — The creative deity or *Logos* when masculine; in the quoted designation *Brahma* (neuter), the term refers to *Brahman*, the unconditioned spiritual ground.

Brahman — The supreme spiritual reality; distinguish the neuter *Brahman* from *Brahma*, the creative deity or *Logos*.

Buddhi-Manas — Self-conscious mind illumined by *Buddhi*; the conjunction of spiritual discernment and higher thought.

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.

Ego — In the cited higher usage, the enduring spiritual individuality; distinguish it from the changing personality and ordinary vanity.

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

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.

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

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

Karma — The continuity of action, cause and consequence; karmic law gives moral responsibility a wider field of relations.

Krishna — The divine teacher in the *Bhagavad Gita*, representing a source of spiritual wisdom and guidance.

Kshetrajna / Kshetragna — The knower of the field; the two spellings occur in Theosophical discussions of the witnessing or Supreme Self.

Logos — The Word or principle of divine expression; *Logoi* is the plural and *Logoic* means pertaining to it. Classifications distinguish several stages of manifestation.

Mahatma — Great Soul; in the specific Theosophical usage, an Adept of high spiritual and moral attainment. *Mahatmas* is the plural.

Manifestation — The expression of differentiated existence from a subtler or unmanifest condition.

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

Nada — Spiritual sound or resonance; in the cited passage, *the Voice of the Silence*.

Nada Brahman — The Divine as Soundless Sound; contemplated by Professor Iyer in unmanifest essence and differentiated expression.

Narayana — A divine name associated with the spiritual source brooding over the primordial waters; related to *Ishwara* in the quoted interpretation.

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.

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*.

Sarvatman — The All-Self or Supreme Soul; the indivisible spiritual unity contemplated within and beyond all beings.

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.

Surya — The Sun; in the cited triad, spiritual sun or solar illumination.

Tat — That; a designation directing attention beyond limiting descriptions and personal claims.

Tat Tvam Asi — That Thou Art; an affirmation of spiritual identity whose meaning is to become effective in thought and conduct.

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.

Vayu — The wind deity; in the cited cosmic triad, spiritual air.

Vesture — A sheath, vehicle or instrument through which consciousness is expressed; vestures is the plural.

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

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. R.N. Iyer — “Spectator and Participant”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 316.

“This indivisible unity of *Sarvatman*, the Supreme Soul, has been portrayed in many mystic images – such as that of *Vishnu* seated upon *Adishesha* amidst the great ocean of space with *Brahmā* springing forth from his navel. The symbol of the Spiritual Sun riding a chariot drawn by seven steeds has the same meaning. Hence it is said: ‘The seven Lords of Being lie concealed in *Sarvatman* like thoughts in one brain.’ This is the basis of the highest meditation and the highest magic, giving strength to the continuous maintenance of one's consciousness as a monadic spectator.”

Meditation thought: Contemplate the seven Lords within an indivisible unity. How does the image preserve distinct functions without dividing the spiritual ground?

2. R.N. Iyer — “Spectator and Participant”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 316.

“Constant adoration of the *Ah-Hi*, the Seven-in-One, the *Trimurti* of *Agni*, *Vayu* and *Surya*, is the inherent and essential activity of the Monad. Owing to its constant adoration of the primordial One, the primordial Three, the primordial Seven, the Monad is able to maintain ceaseless awareness in eternal Duration. Hence, it can understand *Krishna* speaking in his highest aspect when he states: ‘I established this whole universe with a single portion of myself and remain separate.’ This is *Krishna* as *Narayana*, the first *Logos*. He is also *Ishwara*, the second *Logos* and the Avatar. He is all these simultaneously, and, as he reveals to Arjuna, he is the Supreme Self – *Sarvatman* – dwelling in secret within every human heart.”

Meditation thought: *Krishna* sustains the universe without being exhausted by it. Hold immanence and transcendence together before seeking a familiar personal image.

3. R.N. Iyer — “Spectator and Participant”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, pp. 316–317.

“The fundamental question facing human beings as obligatory participants in incarnated life is how to sustain this mystical awareness. Owing to the very nature of the vestures of incarnation, one will have to cope with multiples, with matter and with sense-experience. Differentiated, fragmented patterns of thought will arise in the lower mind as the sense-organs prompt comparisons and contrasts. To reaffirm the One in the many and to benefit, as a participant, from the standpoint of the spectator, one may, therefore, meditate upon the Soundless Sound of *Nada Brahman* in its unmanifest essence and in its multiple differentiations as the Army of the Voice.”

Meditation thought: Reflect on remaining a participant while remembering the whole. Which duty most clearly tests that capacity today?

4. R.N. Iyer — “The Healing of Souls”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 86.

“Finally, there are those who already know *Krishna* because they are already a part of *Krishna*. These beings are the dearest unto *Krishna*; eternally united to him, they are never apart from him. They are the *Mahatmas* difficult to find. They became *Mahatmas* in the only way that any human being ever can, out of many lives of struggle and search, of honest striving and pure devotion. They are the custodians of the Seventh Mystery, that most secret Wisdom, which ever lives in the heart of every being and from which ultimately none is excluded.”

Meditation thought: The passage joins long preparation with an inward wisdom from which none is excluded. What kind of encouragement follows from holding both?

5. R.N. Iyer, quoting the *Anugita* — “The Healing of Souls”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 86.

“But as *Bhagavan* revealed in the *Anugita*, for those who have learnt to subdue their senses and for whom the light of *Buddhi-Manas* has begun to dawn, another forest shines forth, in which intelligence is the tree, and emancipation the fruit, and which possesses shade (in the form of) tranquillity, which depends on Knowledge, which has contentment for its water, and the *KSHETRAGNA* (the 'Supreme SELF,' says *Krishna*, in the *Bhagavad Gita*) within for the Sun.... Those people who understand the forest of Knowledge (*Brahman*, or SELF) praise tranquillity.”

Meditation thought: Let the forest become an image of understanding and tranquillity. What changes when knowledge nourishes freedom instead of multiplying fear?

6. R.N. Iyer — “The Healing of Souls”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 86.

“Those who seek for nothing in the world but only wish to serve humanity and *Krishna* in the heart of every being are 'fortune's favoured soldiers'. They alone come to *Krishna*, realizing that they are already in him though he is not contained in them, for he is everywhere and cannot be only in a few. This is the supreme mystery of the *Adhyatman*, the comprehension of which dispels all darkness. It is the mystery of immortality veiled by the appearances of the life and death of beings.”

Meditation thought: Consider service without the wish for possession. What would it mean to meet another's need while respecting their own inward life?

7. R.N. Iyer — “The Healing of Souls”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, pp. 86–87.

“It is the very Self of Wisdom and Compassion, and the secure refuge of truth sought by all beings in the vast vale of soul-making called the world. It is the deathless core of fearlessness in all the prisoners in all the dungeons of the world, in the hearts of all the children who hope against hope that there will be a tomorrow, hope that despite the errors of generals, the follies of politicians, the ignorance of pseudo-spiritual leaders, there will be peace and goodwill amongst men, and there will be some rare breeze over the Himalayas which comes to bless all beings.”

Meditation thought: Remember those whose circumstances make hope difficult. What concrete assistance would give compassion a form they can actually receive?

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

“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'. 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: Self-enquiry includes the seeker within a universal field. Which assumption of separateness is exposed by that inclusion?

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

“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. 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.”

Meditation thought: Let affection open toward a wider empathy. How can that movement remain attentive to the particular being before you?

10. R.N. Iyer — “Order in Chaos”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 187.

“The exemplifications of the sacred teaching *TAT TVAM ASI* are as varied as the modes in which diverse Monads can make it come alive. A person may hear all his life about this teaching, and even repeat every day, ‘THAT Thou Art’, ‘I am that universal SELF’, ‘I am the Self of all creatures.’ Nonetheless, the teaching avails him naught. He cannot make that teaching come alive if he cannot think and act in terms of that affirmation, if he cannot correct and control his trains of associative thought.”

Meditation thought: Choose one spiritual affirmation and examine the conduct it calls for. What would make it more than a sentence repeated?

11. R.N. Iyer — “Universality and Sectarianism”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 42.

“After giving Arjuna the universal vision of the ‘Divine Eye’, *Krishna* said to Arjuna: ‘But what, O Arjuna, hast thou to do with so much knowledge as this? I established this whole universe with a single portion of myself, and remain separate.’ This statement partakes of that deeply puzzling relation between the transcendent and the immanent in all subsequent theologies and concepts of the Godhead. It is dramatically put forward here in a manner that seems to be personified and yet has the curious obscurity of an impersonal cosmic enigma.”

Meditation thought: The image resists both confinement to the world and remoteness from it. What does this tension ask of one’s idea of the Supreme Self?

12. *Bhagavad Gita*, quoted by R.N. Iyer — “Buddhi Yoga and Svadharma”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 111.

“There dwelleth in the heart of every creature, O Arjuna, the Master — *Ishvara* — who by his magic power causeth all things and creatures to revolve mounted upon the universal wheel of time. Take sanctuary with him alone, O son of Bharata, with all thy soul; by his grace thou shalt obtain supreme happiness, the eternal place.”

Meditation thought: Contemplate the Master in the heart of every creature. How would remembering that inward dignity change the way a disagreement is addressed?