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... Tattva Bodha ...

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Summary

Jīva-Īśvara Aikyam

Acharya Tadany explained that the current chapter (the fourth part of Tattvabodha) addresses the most important topic of the entire text: the relationship between Jīva (the individual soul or being) and Īśvara (God or the cosmic being). He noted that according to śāstra (scripture), any sentence that reveals the oneness (aikya) between Jīva and Īśvara can be called a Mahāvākya (great statement). Therefore, this topic could also be called "Jīva-Īśvara Mahāvākya"—the oneness between the individual and God.

To establish this profound oneness, the author of Tattvabodha first defines what Jīva is, then defines what Īśvara is, and finally reveals their relationship. Acharya Tadany emphasized that this is "a very profound, transformative and revealing topic." He noted that while they had already discussed the definitions of Jīva and Īśvara previously, this class would review and deepen that understanding.

What is Jīva? The Three Components

Acharya Tadany explained that Jīva refers to any living being—whether human, animal, plant, or even celestial beings like angels, gods, and goddesses. Every Jīva consists of three distinct portions or components, and understanding this threefold structure is fundamental to Vedānta philosophy.

The three components of Jīva are:

1. **The Reflecting Medium (Upādhi):** This consists of the three bodies—the gross body (sthūla śarīra), the subtle body (sūkṣma śarīra), and the causal body (kāraṇa śarīra). These three bodies together form the medium through which consciousness is reflected.
2. **The Reflected Consciousness (Pratibimba Caitanya or RC):** This is the borrowed consciousness that appears to belong to the bodies but is actually reflected from the original consciousness.



3. The Original Consciousness (Ātmā/Brahman or OC): This is the eternal, infinite, all-pervading consciousness that is the true nature of every being.

Acharya Tadanu emphasized that this framework is crucial to understand and remember, as it forms the foundation for understanding not only Jīva but also Īśvara and ultimately their oneness.

The Three Bodies as Reflecting Medium

Acharya Tadanu elaborated on the first component—the reflecting medium (upādhi)—which consists of three bodies. He explained that all three bodies are by nature inert (jaḍa), meaning they are insentient and lack consciousness on their own. This is a crucial point: the physical body, the subtle body (consisting of mind, intellect, and sense organs), and even the causal body (the seed form of all karmic impressions) are all fundamentally material and unconscious.

aware of our physical body, we experience thoughts and emotions through our subtle body, and we have a sense of individual existence. This apparent consciousness is not the body's own—it is borrowed. The three bodies function as a reflecting medium, like a mirror that reflects light. Just as a mirror has no light of its own but can reflect light from a source, the three bodies have no consciousness of their own but reflect consciousness from Ātmā.

Acharya Tadanu used the term "reflecting medium" (RM) to describe these three bodies collectively. They are the instrument or medium through which consciousness flows and manifests, but they are not the source of that consciousness.

Reflected Consciousness: Borrowed Awareness

The second component of Jīva is reflected consciousness (RC), which Acharya Tadanu also called "borrowed consciousness." This is the consciousness that appears to belong to the individual but is actually a reflection of the original consciousness in the medium of the three bodies.

To illustrate this concept, Acharya Tadanu used two powerful analogies:

The Moon and Sunlight: The moon appears bright, especially during full moon, and we speak of "moonlight." However, the moon has no light of its own—all its light is borrowed from the sun. The light that shines from the moon is reflected sunlight. If you remove the sun, the moon would have no light at all. Similarly, the consciousness that appears to belong to our body-mind complex is borrowed from Ātmā, the original consciousness. If you remove Ātmā, there would be no consciousness in the body at all.

Hot Water and Fire: When you want to make tea, you need hot water. But water is not hot by nature—water is cool. The heat in hot water is borrowed from fire, which has heat as its intrinsic



nature. Similarly, consciousness in the body-mind complex is borrowed from Ātmā, which has consciousness as its intrinsic nature.

Acharya Tadanu emphasized that this reflected or borrowed consciousness (RC) exists only as long as the reflecting medium exists. Just as the reflected image of the sun disappears when you remove the mirror, the reflected consciousness disappears when the body dies. The reflected consciousness is therefore temporary, finite, and dependent on the reflecting medium.

Gradations in Reflected Consciousness

A crucial teaching that Acharya Tadanu emphasized is that reflected consciousness is not uniform—it exists in various gradations. The level and quality of reflected consciousness depends entirely on the nature of the reflecting medium. This gradation operates at multiple levels:

1. Different Species: In human beings, the level of awareness is very high. Humans can read poetry, appreciate aesthetic values, engage in philosophical thinking, and study Vedānta. In animals, however, the awareness is relatively lesser—animals are not as sensitive as human beings and cannot engage in abstract thinking. In plants, the consciousness is even grosser or more limited. This difference exists because the reflecting medium (the body-mind complex) differs in its subtlety and refinement across species.

2. Among Human Beings: Even within the human species, there are differences in the level of awareness from person to person. Some people have a higher level of awareness, discernment, and sensitivity, while others have a more grossified level of awareness. This variation exists because each person's reflecting medium (particularly the subtle body—mind and intellect) differs in its refinement and purity.

3. Within the Same Individual: Even within a single person, the level of awareness changes from time to time. Acharya Tadanu gave a vivid example: if you go to an all-you-can-eat thali restaurant for lunch and eat heavily, then try to attend a Tattvabodha class afterward, it would be very challenging to remain awake and pay attention. This is because after a heavy meal, the body draws blood from the brain to the digestive system, making the mind dull. He also mentioned his experience in Germany with large schnitzels—enormous portions that leave one in a lethargic state.

Acharya Tadanu explained that these fluctuations in awareness within the same person depend on the condition of the mind at any given time. In Vedānta, we speak of three qualities (guṇas) of the mind: sāttvika (pure, clear, balanced), rājasika (active, passionate, restless), and tāmasika (dull, inert, lethargic). When the mind is predominantly sāttvika, awareness is bright and clear. When it becomes rājasika or tāmasika, awareness becomes disturbed or dull.



This understanding of gradations in reflected consciousness is important because it explains the vast diversity in the levels of consciousness we observe in the world, while maintaining that the original consciousness (Ātmā) is the same in all beings.

Original Consciousness: Ātmā/Brahman

The third and most crucial component of Jīva is the original consciousness (OC). Acharya Tadany explained that if consciousness is borrowed, there must be someone or something that lends that consciousness. That source is called the original consciousness, which has two names depending on perspective: **Ātmā** (when viewed from the individual perspective) and **Brahman** (when viewed from the cosmic or universal perspective).

The key characteristics of original consciousness are:

All-Pervading (Sarva-Vyāpaka): While reflected consciousness is localized—existing separately in each individual body—original consciousness pervades everything. Acharya Tadany explained that this original consciousness must pervade not only your own body-mind-sense complex but all body-mind-sense complexes everywhere. It is like space that pervades all objects, or like the sun's light that illuminates everything.

Eternal and Imperishable (Nitya): Unlike the reflecting medium and reflected consciousness, which are temporary and perishable, original consciousness is eternal. It exists before birth, during life, and after death. It is not subject to time, change, or destruction.

Infinite (Ananta): Original consciousness is not limited by space, time, or form. It is infinite and unlimited, whereas the reflecting medium and reflected consciousness are both finite and limited. Acharya Tadany emphasized a crucial point: wherever there is a body (reflecting medium), there is reflected consciousness, and original consciousness is also there. However, the difference is critical—the reflected consciousness is localized and temporary, existing only as long as the body exists. When the reflecting medium (the body) is destroyed, the reflected consciousness also disappears. But the original consciousness continues to exist unchanged, just as the sun continues to shine even after the mirror reflecting its light is removed.

He used the analogy again: if you use a mirror to reflect the sun's light onto a wall, you see a reflected image of the sun. If you remove or break the mirror, the reflected image disappears. But does the sun itself disappear? No, the sun continues to exist and shine. Similarly, when the body dies, the reflected consciousness disappears, but Ātmā, the original consciousness, continues to exist eternally.

Summary of Jīva's Three Components

Acharya Tadany summarized that every individual (Jīva) is a composite of three parts:



1. **Reflecting Medium (RM):** The three bodies (gross, subtle, causal) — finite, perishable, inert
2. **Reflected Consciousness (RC):** Borrowed consciousness — finite, perishable, graded
3. **Original Consciousness (OC):** Ātmā/Brahman — infinite, imperishable, eternal

Of these three components, two are finite and perishable (the reflecting medium and the reflected consciousness), while one is infinite and imperishable (the original consciousness). This understanding is revolutionary because it means that whenever we use the word "I," we should remember that "I" consists of these three parts. The original consciousness is there (otherwise we wouldn't have awareness to even say "I"), the reflecting medium is there (we undoubtedly have a physical body), and the reflected consciousness is there (we experience consciousness in our body-mind complex).

Acharya Tadany noted that this realization itself "expands substantially the way we look at the word I, me, myself." It represents "a tremendous progress in understanding, spiritual understanding, or understanding of reality."

What is Īśvara? Parallel Structure

Having explained the three components of Jīva, Acharya Tadany then explained that Īśvara (God) also has exactly the same threefold structure. He said, "We just apply the same framework. We just apply the same playbook." The difference is not in the structure but in the scale or level—Jīva operates at the micro or individual level, while Īśvara operates at the macro or universal level.

Just as Jīva has three bodies, Īśvara also has three "bodies":

1. **The Gross Universe (Sthūla Jagat):** The physical, tangible, perceptible universe that we can see, touch, and measure
2. **The Subtle Universe (Sūkṣma Jagat):** The subtle dimensions of the universe, including subtle energies, forces, and principles
3. **The Causal Universe (Kāraṇa Jagat):** The universe in its potential, unmanifest, seed form

Acharya Tadany emphasized that just as the three bodies of the individual are material and inert (jaḍa) by nature, the universe—in its gross, subtle, and causal forms—is also material and inert by nature. The universe, in and of itself, has no consciousness. This is the reflecting medium of Īśvara.

Reflected Consciousness in Īśvara: Universal Laws



Just as the individual's bodies are illumined and animated by reflected consciousness, the universe is also illumined and animated by reflected consciousness at the cosmic level. Acharya Tadanu explained that this reflected consciousness in the universe is what manifests as the organized, harmonious functioning of the cosmos.

He made a powerful point: **The universe is not a chaotic manifestation.** While some speak of a "theory of chaos," Acharya Tadanu noted that "the theory of chaos only functions in the mind of the guy who coined it." In reality, there is a law of harmony that guides the universe. This is why physicists and scientists can discover and derive universal laws—the law of gravity, the laws of thermodynamics, the laws of energy and matter, electromagnetism, and so on.

These scientific laws exist and function in the universe perpetually. They were not created by scientists—they were discovered by "extremely brilliant minds" who were able to observe the organization and harmonization in nature and "write down certain principles that we could replicate and use." The fact that we can create airplanes that fly reliably, that we can predict planetary motions, that we can harness electricity—all of this is possible only because the universe functions in "a harmonious way, in an organized manner, in a, let's say, predictable manner."

Acharya Tadanu acknowledged that we don't know everything—"we know very little"—but what we have discovered allows us to achieve remarkable things, including building airplanes "so that you can come and visit India."

The Law of Karma: Moral Order

Beyond physical laws, Acharya Tadanu explained that the universe also operates according to moral laws. In śāstra, this is called the **Law of Karma**, otherwise known as the laws of puṇya (merit) and pāpa (demerit). The principle is simple but profound: **every action generates a result** in the form of puṇya and pāpa.

Acharya Tadanu made a striking statement: "The body you have right now, it's because you deserve that." This applies universally—"every single human being, every being, has a body that he, she, or it deserves." This includes not just the type of body (human, animal, etc.) but also how long the body is meant to last. Some people die right after birth, while others live into their 90s, with "the whole family praying, please, lead her to the light" (said in a very poetic way). Even the manner of death varies—some people have a very peaceful and comfortable death, while others "go through very painful and torturous experiences before dying." According to the law of karma, **none of these are accidental.** They are all governed by the law of karma, and "it's all out of our own making."

Acharya Tadanu explained that all these universal, unbiased, impersonal laws—both physical and moral—"are maintained by the consciousness principle which pervades the entire universe."



This is what we call the reflected consciousness at the level of Īśvara. Just as in Jīva, this reflected consciousness will exist as long as the universe exists. When the universe is resolved (goes into avyakta, the unmanifest state), the reflected consciousness at the universal level will also be resolved. But the original consciousness will continue to exist.

Original Consciousness in Īśvara

Just as Jīva has original consciousness (Ātmā), Īśvara also has the same original consciousness (Brahman). In fact, Acharya Tadany emphasized that it is the very same consciousness—there are not two separate original consciousnesses, one for individuals and another for the universe. The original consciousness is one, infinite, and all-pervading, whether viewed from the individual perspective (as Ātmā) or from the cosmic perspective (as Brahman).

This original consciousness pervades and illumines the entire universe, sustaining all cosmic laws and universal order. Even when "the whole universe disappears and goes into avyakta, unmanifest form," the original consciousness will still be there, unchanged and eternal.

Summary of Īśvara's Three Components

Acharya Tadany summarized that Īśvara consists of three portions or parts:

1. **Reflecting Medium (RM):** The macro universe—gross, subtle, and causal — finite, perishable, inert
2. **Reflected Consciousness (RC):** The consciousness that pervades and governs the entire universe, manifesting as universal laws — finite, perishable
3. **Original Consciousness (OC):** Brahman/Ātmā — infinite, imperishable, eternal

He emphasized: "The framework, notice, is the same. For the Jīva, you have the original consciousness, reflecting medium, and reflected consciousness. What about Īśvara? Īśvara you also have reflecting medium, reflected consciousness, and original consciousness."

The only difference is the scale: "In the Jīva, the reflecting medium and the reflected consciousness, they are at micro level, small level, individual level. Whereas in Īśvara, the reflecting medium and the reflected consciousness, they are at the macro level, universal level, total level."

The Superiority of Original Consciousness

Acharya Tadany then addressed an important question: of the three components (in both Jīva and Īśvara), which is superior? He stated clearly that "the original consciousness alone is superior." Why is this so? Because original consciousness is always there (nitya)—it is not subject to time. It exists eternally, before, during, and after the manifestation of the reflecting medium. The reflecting medium (whether the physical body or the physical universe) and the reflected



consciousness are both subject to arrival and departure. They come into being and eventually cease to be.

The physical body may last for a century at most. The physical universe, according to current scientific estimates, has existed for about 13 billion years (though Acharya Tadany humorously noted that this number keeps increasing: "So far, we've been there for 13 billion light years. Probably next thing you will be 20 billion or 30 billion. The more precise our instruments become, the older the universe... seems to be. That's the trend.").

But the point remains: the universe had a beginning—"there was a time it came into manifestation"—and according to śāstra, "there is a time this entire universe will go into unmanifest form." Acharya Tadany reassured his students: "Not in the upcoming decade, so don't you worry. You have time to learn about that."

Therefore, the reflecting medium and reflected consciousness are both temporary and subject to destruction, while the original consciousness is eternal and imperishable. This is why original consciousness is considered superior—it is the unchanging reality that underlies and supports all temporary manifestations.



Questions after class

The First Stage: Mixture of Ātmā and Anātmā

Acharya Tadanu explained that understanding that both individuals and the universe are mixtures of Ātmā (original consciousness) and anātmā (the reflecting medium and reflected consciousness) represents **the first stage of spiritual understanding**.

He said explicitly: "Every Jīva is a mixture of Ātmā and anātmā. And every macro universe, every Īśvara, so to speak, is a mixture of original consciousness and reflected consciousness." He reiterated this crucial point: "The universe is a mixture of the original consciousness and the reflected consciousness. The individual is a mixture of original consciousness and reflected consciousness."

Acharya Tadanu emphasized: "This is a very, very important discernment to assimilate and to educate ourselves. That's actually the first stage of spiritual seeking." He stressed that this understanding should not be taken for granted—"it requires a lot of cognitive reorientation and reprogramming."

Why is this so challenging? Because "traditionally, one is educated that there is me here, and there is God somewhere else, and we are forever different." Most religious and cultural traditions teach a fundamental duality between the individual soul and God, presenting them as eternally separate entities. The Vedānta vision, by contrast, begins by showing that both the individual and God share the same structure—both are mixtures of consciousness and matter, both have reflecting media and reflected consciousness, and most importantly, both share the same original consciousness.

Acharya Tadanu noted that this first stage of understanding sets the foundation for a deeper realization. He mentioned that "in a couple of weeks, you will know how you and God are one"—referring to the teaching of abheda (non-difference) or aikya (oneness) that would be covered in subsequent classes. But before arriving at that ultimate understanding, one must first grasp this foundational teaching: that Jīva and Īśvara are both mixtures of Ātmā and anātmā.

Preksha's Question: Why Categorize Īśvara Separately?

Toward the end of the class, Preksha asked a profound question: "Why is this categorization being made? And oftentimes, you know, you would say, like, you would refer to Īśvara, right? Like, I don't know, you would say that, oh, Īśvara is great, or something like that. Like, why do you refer to this... the universe as a special entity separate from Brahman, when that is like the main thing that we're trying to attach our identities to?"



This question reflects a common confusion that arises when students first encounter this teaching. If everything is ultimately Brahman, why do we speak of Īśvara as if it were something separate?

Acharya Tadany addressed this with a crucial clarification: **"The universe is not separate from Brahman."** Similarly, "the individual is not separate from Ātmā." He explained: "The individual is a mixture of anātmā and Ātmā. And the universe is a mixture of non-Brahman and Brahman." He emphasized: "This is the first distinction or discernment that the spiritual seeker wants to have. Every Jīva is a mixture of Ātmā and anātmā. And every macro universe, every Īśvara, so to speak, is a mixture of original consciousness and reflected consciousness."

Acharya Tadany explained that from the standpoint of the reflecting medium (upādhi), there is a difference between Jīva and Īśvara. "I, the Jīva, from the perspective of the reflecting medium, I'm different from [Īśvara]... The reflecting medium of the Jīva is the physical body, which is small, finite, perishable, subject to change, from the microcosmic perspective. What about Īśvara? Same thing, but from the macro perspective. It's just large."

He assured Preksha that at the end of this chapter, "we will have understood why and from which standpoint the abhedha, the non-difference, is there." In other words, the teaching proceeds systematically: first, we understand the structure of both Jīva and Īśvara; then we understand their apparent difference (from the perspective of the reflecting medium); and finally, we understand their ultimate non-difference (from the perspective of original consciousness).

Acharya Tadany also made an important pedagogical point: if one doesn't have a proper understanding of Īśvara, Ātmā, or Brahman, "then you can create all sorts of other ideas about God—a God which is located, which has a place, which has commandments, which is always looking at you and judging you." He stopped himself, saying, "Don't even go there because that's genuinely embarrassing," but his point was clear: proper Vedāntic understanding prevents us from falling into limited, anthropomorphic conceptions of God.

He concluded by acknowledging that this is a profound thought that requires contemplation: "It's actually a very profound thought. We all are a mixture of anātmā and Ātmā. That's the first stage of spiritual understanding. That understanding itself, it's not a... Don't take it for granted. It requires a lot of cognitive reorientation and reprogramming."

Sandra's Question: Vedānta's View on Suicide

As the class was concluding, Sandra asked, "And then, how does Vedānta see the decision of someone to cease his or her life? Like, is it possible here in Switzerland, you know? You can go there and declare you wanna cease your life, and then you're gone."



Acharya Tadanu addressed this sensitive topic with nuance and depth, acknowledging different contexts and situations.

Suicide as Abuse of Free Will

Acharya Tadanu began by categorizing suicide philosophically: **"It's free will. It's an abuse of free will."** He quoted Pūjya Swāmījī (his teacher), who used to say, "Free will is free only if you can abuse it." In other words, the very fact that we have free will means we have the capacity to make harmful choices, including the choice to end our own life.

He was clear about the gravity of such an action: "It's as simple as that. It's free will. Anyone can... However, then, once we study the law of karma, there will be consequences. Because it's an action." He characterized suicide as "probably one of the most damaging actions that one person can commit."

He placed both suicide and murder in the same category: "If we were to have different degrees of action, you know, it is to take your own life, or somebody else's life, for that matter. Assassination or suicide, they're both very horrendous crimes or actions to be committed."

According to the law of karma, such actions have severe consequences. The karmic results (pāpa) of such violence—whether directed at oneself or another—will have to be experienced by the person who commits the act.

Why Do People Commit Suicide?

Acharya Tadanu then explored the psychological dimension: why would someone choose to end their life, given that "the will to live is usually stronger" than our thoughts about life? "The survival instinct is programmed in our bodies. It's stronger than our own will."

He quoted Pūjya Swāmījī again: **"Whenever a person reaches a condition wherein he or she cannot find any possible solution to that situation or scenario that he or she is living under, then the person decides to commit suicide."**

The key factor is the person's inability to see a way out. Acharya Tadanu explained: "But if anyone presents one possible, you know, beam of light, that there is a way out of this situation, most people would choose not to commit suicide." This suggests that suicide is often an act of desperation when all options seem closed, rather than a carefully considered philosophical choice.

He noted that suicide is "quite often an impulsive action" and has devastating consequences beyond the individual: "It's because the person doesn't see any way out. It's very dramatic, very painful. Not only the person who goes through it, but the whole family. Sometimes the family is



left without answers. And why that happened, that creates all sorts of traumas within the family. It's a very, very delicate subject."

End-of-Life Decisions: A Different Context

Acharya Tadany then distinguished suicide from end-of-life decisions in cases of terminal illness or irreversible medical conditions. He introduced this with a question: "Now, the other aspect of this same one... What about the person who is old and in the vegetative state, induced coma?" In such cases, he explained, "we believe that the person or the family could choose to end the person's life. Or even the person could change. Because there is no way out of that circumstances and you are a burden both to yourself and to others."

To illustrate this, Acharya Tadany shared a deeply personal story about a friend who was diagnosed with terminal cancer about eight or nine years ago. She was hospitalized with tremendous pain in her stomach region. After examination, doctors discovered cancer in her intestine with metastasis—it had spread to other organs.

The oncologist proposed surgery, and when she asked how long she would live if she underwent the procedure, the doctor replied, "probably six more months or a year." Upon hearing this, she made a conscious decision: "She left the hospital. She went home and she decided, okay, I'm going to die myself and I'm not going to undergo any surgery."

Acharya Tadany explained the method she chose: "And it's very easy, actually. You just stop eating and drinking water. You don't last more than seven days. You know, the body doesn't survive. Probably, you know, two weeks, tops three weeks, the body dies."

However, the process was complicated by her husband's resistance: "She actually ended up living a little bit longer because her husband didn't accept. So she had to convince him to accept her death." She was taking painkillers to manage the pain, "because the pain was tremendous." Acharya Tadany visited her just days before she died: "One day I decided I'm going to go to her house, you know, just to say hi and see how is it going. Probably the mood is not the nicest or the strongest, you know. It's a very sad moment when I got to her house. She was as full of life as she had always been, you know, sharing stories about her life." He noted that both she and her husband "were very, very spiritually aware of existence."

However, physically, "she was just flesh and bones, skin and bones. And then three days later, she left the party. She just stopped eating and drinking water."

Acharya Tadany made an important cultural observation: "Which is—in India, it's actually—in śāstra, where I come from, it's—people do that. There is no solution, you know. The śāstra doesn't condemn that. And you're old, there's nothing you can do with it."



He emphasized the contextual nature of dharma: "So you see that every circumstance, we have to look at it. What is the context? Vedānta doesn't have one answer to all. Everything is based on the context."

Capital Punishment: Societal Protection

Acharya Tadany briefly touched on another related topic: capital punishment. He noted that "in the Indian judicial system, there is capital punishment, death." He explained the rationale: "Because actually, you remove from the society somebody who has committed horrendous crimes."

From a karmic perspective, "he or she will pay"—the karmic consequences (pāpa) accrue to the person who committed the crimes. Meanwhile, "society protects itself, right, from such a diabolical human being. So you can be hanged." He noted that capital punishment in India is typically applied to terrorists who have committed heinous acts.

This brief discussion illustrated how the consequences of actions (karma) work at both individual and societal levels, and how dharma sometimes requires difficult decisions to protect the welfare of the many.