

The Unattached Self

A talk by Swami Sarvapriyananda

Introduction: The Essence of Asango'ham

In his illuminating talk, Swami Sarvapriyananda delves into the concept of *Asango'ham*, a Sanskrit term translating to "I am unattached." This exploration of detachment transcends mere renunciation of worldly possessions or relationships. Instead, it invites us to recognize the inherent freedom of the Self, untouched by the fluctuations of the world, body, and mind. Through vivid analogies and Vedantic principles, Sarvapriyananda reveals how we, as awareness, remain unaffected by the experiences, emotions, and relationships that seemingly bind us.

The Roots of Non-Attachment in Vedanta

The Upanishads and texts like *Brahma Jnanavali Mala* articulate non-attachment as a central tenet. In Advaita Vedanta, the understanding of "I am unattached" (*Asango'ham*) points to the core of self-realization. Swami Vivekananda once summarized this wisdom in four principles: fearlessness (*Abhaya*), non-violence (*Ahimsa*), non-attachment (*Asanga*), and bliss (*Ananda*). This non-attachment is not merely for renunciates; it is for everyone, revealing our essential nature as boundless consciousness.

The Nature of the "I Am"

Sarpapriyananda guides us to the foundational experience of "I am"—a state of pure awareness underlying all perception. This *I am*, or Self, is the light by which all experiences are known. According to the Upanishads, "That shining, everything else shines after it," emphasizing that awareness illuminates all phenomena without being altered by them.

Understanding Non-Attachment Through Key Analogies - Swami Sarvapriyananda employs several key analogies to clarify how our awareness remains unattached to the body, mind, and world:

- **The Crystal and the Red Flower (Upadhi):** When a colorless crystal is placed near a red flower, it appears red. However, this is only an appearance; the crystal itself remains clear. Similarly, awareness remains unchanged even as it appears affected by the body and mind. This phenomenon is known as *Upadhi*, where qualities seem transferred from one entity to another without actual change.
- **The Screen and the Movie (Vivarta):** The cinema screen allows various scenes—joyous, tragic, or chaotic—to play without being affected. The screen remains as it is, regardless of the movie's content. This analogy illustrates *Vivarta*, or appearance, where the phenomenal world is seen as an illusion projected onto the unchanging ground of consciousness.
- **Sunlight and Objects:** Sunlight illuminates objects without becoming attached or affected by them. In the same way, awareness illuminates experiences without being modified by them. Just as sunlight doesn't become clean or dirty depending on what it shines upon, awareness remains untouched by the qualities of what it perceives.
- **The Mirage and Desert:** A mirage of water in a desert cannot wet a single grain of sand. This demonstrates that while the world appears real to the senses, it does not impact the underlying reality of awareness.

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The Layers of Attachment and the Nature of the Self

Sarpapriyananda addresses the misconception of self-identification with the body and mind. The body, subject to physical needs, cannot embody non-attachment. Likewise, the mind is deeply influenced by emotions, memories, and external stimuli. The true Self, however, remains the witness of these fluctuations without attachment or identification.

Awareness as the Witness (*Sakshi*): The Self is the observer of the body, mind, and world. As *Sakshi*, it is like light, illuminating experiences without merging with them. This witnessing consciousness, or *Chit*, is distinct from the objects it perceives and thus remains unaffected.

The Ground of Reality (*Adhishtana*): Awareness is not only the witness but also the substratum on which all phenomena appear. Like the screen that supports a movie, consciousness underlies all experiences, lending them existence without being impacted.

Detachment Through Recognition of the Self

Detachment, according to Sarvapriyananda, is not a forced separation from worldly life but a natural outcome of realizing one's true nature. Through deep understanding and discernment, we recognize ourselves as pure awareness, untouched by life's ever-changing dramas. The following principles can help deepen this understanding:

1. Persist in the "I am":

- Begin by noticing the underlying sense of "I am"—the awareness that is always present, irrespective of thoughts, emotions, or sensory inputs.

2. Reflect on Upadhi:

- Understand how body and mind act as upadhis, projecting their qualities onto consciousness without altering it. Just as a crystal appears red due to a nearby flower but remains clear, awareness remains unaffected by the qualities of the body and mind.

3. Acknowledge Vivarta (Appearance):

- Recognize that the world is an appearance in consciousness, much like a dream or a mirage. As a dreamer wakes up to find that the dream's events have left no trace, awareness perceives the world without being impacted.

4. Embrace Impermanence:

- Reflect on how relationships, possessions, and circumstances continuously change. Understanding the fleeting nature of attachments helps dissolve the illusion of permanence and deepens non-attachment.

5. Engage Without Clinging:

- Sarvapriyananda describes living with openness, welcoming all experiences without grasping or resisting. As poet William Blake said, "He who kisses the joy as it flies lives in eternity's sunrise."

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The Bliss of Non-Attachment

The state of being “unattached” ultimately reveals itself as bliss, or *Ananda*. According to Vedanta, true happiness arises not from fleeting experiences but from the infinite nature of consciousness itself. Sarvapriyananda likens this to the vast, unobstructed blue sky, always present behind the clouds of our experiences. Temporary joys are like glimpses of the blue sky between clouds, but true bliss is the limitless awareness that underlies all.

Conclusion: Realizing the Unattached Self

Sarpapriyananda’s teaching on *Asango'ham* reminds us of the profound serenity found in knowing our true nature as the unattached Self. By embodying this understanding, we can navigate life’s ups and downs with equanimity, free from the bonds of identification. Ultimately, *Asango'ham* is not merely a spiritual ideal but a fact of our existence—a realization that offers lasting peace and joy. In the words of Swami Sarvapriyananda, we are invited to recognize and live by the statement, “Asango'ham, asango'ham, asango'ham punah punah”—I am unattached, unattached am I, unattached forever. Through this, we discover our true heritage of eternal bliss and freedom.

Invitation to the Temple of Silence A Non-duality Zoom Group

Dear Friend: You are warmly invited to join the **Temple of Silence**, an online Zoom group dedicated to exploring the essence of non-duality. In this gathering, we focus not on personal stories but on gently turning our attention to the boundless awareness that holds all stories and experiences within it—our true nature.

The Temple of Silence Mission Statement: *“The Temple of Silence Zoom group offers a decentralized space where friends gather, some seeking to realize their true nature, others resting in its recognition. Discussions focus less on fleeting personal stories and more on the reliable, wholeness of our True nature. Questions are welcomed, and when attention drifts into mental narratives, it is gently redirected to what never comes and goes. In this open space, all are invited to knowingly experience the oneness that underlies all appearances.”*

When: Open meeting on Wednesdays at 10:00 AM Eastern Time on ZOOM
Meeting ID: 935 829 6350 **Passcode:** tos

The Temple of Silence Zoom Group is not a therapy group, and there is no charge to attend the meetings. This document is part of “The Temple of Silence - From Knowledge to Experience” article series and was created as a public service. For those new to nonduality, this series of articles offers clear guidance into this profound understanding. We hope the content resonates with the deeper truth within you. We look forward to your presence in our next gathering.

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Please visit www.beingwalter.com for more nondual articles, poetry and information regarding Walter’s books *“Take Heart, Seeker”* and *“The Temple of Silence”*.