

MITHYĀ UPĀDHI ADHYĀSA ADHYĀROPA

MITHYĀ

We can say that something is real, *satyam* or *sat*. However, *asat*, its opposite, has two aspects, *mithyā* and *tuccham*. Which meaning of *asat* is relevant depends on context.

Satyam – existent; true; non negate-able; independently real

Mithyā – as though existent; apparently real (not absolutely real)

Tuccham – non-existent; unreal; never can exist

A clay pot is *mithyā*. The pot is dependent on the clay from which it is formed: remove the clay and the pot ceases to be. The pot can be said to exist, but it exists only because of the clay and the way the clay has been formed. The pot therefore has a dependent, apparent reality: its reality depends on the clay. In contrast, the clay's reality or existence is independent. All that is really there is clay. The clay can therefore be said to be *satyam* in relation to the *mithyā* pot.

Similarly, a shirt is *mithyā*; the fabric from which it is made is *satyam*. Remove the fabric and the shirt disappears, but remove the shirt from the fabric and the fabric remains. However, in relation to the yarn (from which the fabric is woven and on which it is therefore dependent) the fabric is *mithyā* and its yarn *satyam*. But, in relation to the yarn's threads, the yarn is *mithyā* and its threads are *satyam*. Soon, we reach the atomic level, where the atoms are *mithyā* and the sub-atomic particles are *satyam*. Beyond that we have concepts, which are *mithyā*; their substance, consciousness, is *satyam*.

So, we cannot say the shirt or pot exists, but neither can we say they do not. This is *mithyā*.

Satyam and *mithyā* are terms that can be used relatively or absolutely. In absolute terms, all that is truly, independently real is consciousness. The entire universe (including your body, mind and the very subtlest experience or perception) is *mithyā*. Consciousness alone, being absolutely, independently real and being all that is here, is ever *satyam*.

All that is here, all that is perceivable, is a *mithyā* ('as though') manifestation of consciousness. Consciousness, although self-evident, remains ever unknowable as an object of perception (thought or feeling). Consciousness may therefore not be known originally, but only through its reflection or manifestation. Never will it be known through direct experience, no matter how refined.

Tuccham refers to what is absolutely unreal and never can exist, such as the horn of a hare, or a square circle.

UPĀDHI

An *upādhi* is that which, by its close proximity, falsely transfers its attributes to another.

For example, if a blue flower is moved close to a colourless lump of crystal, the crystal appears blue. From having no colour, the crystal apparently acquired the limiting attribute ‘blue’. Remove the flower and the crystal no longer appears blue. Never was the crystal blue (and limited only to blue) and yet, undeniably, for a time it appeared so.

The *upādhi* in this example is the flower, not the blueness. But the flower does not function as an *upādhi* unless it is close to the crystal. Kept away, the flower is just a flower. So, it is the item and the effect of its close proximity—namely the transfer of one or more attributes—that together make for an *upādhi*.

The body is an *upādhi* for consciousness, the two seeming indistinguishable. Similarly with water and its *upādhi*, a wave.

ADHYĀSA and ADHYĀROPA

Erroneous perception is *adhyāsa*, in which one thing is mistaken for another. *Adhyāsa* is caused by ignorance, *avidyā*.

Erroneous-perception-caused superimposition is *adhyāropa*.

A rope being mistaken for a snake is an example of *adhyāsa*. Here, *adhyāropa* is the subsequent superimposition of a snake’s attributes, such as fearsomeness, on that rope. *Adhyāropa* is, therefore, not possible without *adhyāsa*.

A cold, heavy, solid, iron ball, when put in a fire, apparently becomes radiantly hot, whereas it is fire alone that is hot. Heat and brilliance – properties belonging to fire – are mistakenly seen to belong to the iron ball. Seeing the ball as hot (when it is not) is *adhyāsa*. When removed from the fire, the ball’s natural attributes seem to slowly reappear. But they were never lost or absent, only overlaid, in our perception, with those of the fire. Error-caused superimposition, *adhyāropa*, made heat and radiance seem to belong to the iron ball rather than to fire alone.

Often, *adhyāsa* works both ways: as well as a cold, iron ball being mistaken for what it is not – hot and radiant – fire too is mistaken here for what it is not: it appears solid, weighty and spherical. Such mutual wrong perception is called *anyonyādhyāsa*.

Due to *adhyāsa*, the body-mind-sense complex is mistaken for the *ātmā*, the self, i.e. the object is mistaken for the subject.

Ignorance, *avidyā*, leads to erroneous perception, *adhyāsa*; *adhyāsa* leads to superimposition, *adhyāropa*; *adhyāropa* leads to a wrong notion of the self, *ahaṃkāra*.