

Advaita Vedanta - Jiva, Iswara, Jivatma, Paramatma, Atma, Brahman – Part 1

Jiva = Iswara or Jiva ≠ Iswara

Question

- 1) Please provide the references from **Vedantic texts** for:
- Jiva = Iswara
 - Jiva ≠ Iswara
- 2) Please provide the references from **Swami Dayananda talks and books** for:
- Jiva = Iswara
 - Jiva ≠ Iswara

Response

Yes. The key is that in Advaita Vedānta **both statements are used**, but **at different levels** and with **different meanings of the terms**:

- **Jiva ≠ Īśvara** when we take their **direct/literal meanings (vācya-artha)** and their **respective upādhis**.
- **Jīva = Īśvara** only when we take their **essential/implied meanings (lakṣya-artha)**: the **consciousness** that is the **truth of both** is **one Brahman**.

This distinction is explicit in the traditional teaching and is especially important in Swami Dayananda Saraswati's presentation.

1. References from Vedāntic texts

A. Jīva = Īśvara — *identity at the level of essential nature* [Paramarthika]

A1. The strongest reference is Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.8.7:

tat satyaṃ sa ātmā tat tvam asi śvetaketo

“That is the Reality; that is the Self; **you are That**, Śvetaketu.”

This statement is repeated nine times, from ChU 6.8.7 through 6.16.3.

In the Advaita interpretation:

- **tat** → immediately refers to the cause of the universe, Īśvara.
- **tvam** → immediately refers to the individual, jīva.
- **asi** → establishes identity.
- But the identity cannot be between the contradictory attributes of the two.
- It is between their underlying **ātma/caitanyam/Brahman**.

Thus:

$$\text{Jīva}_{\text{lakṣyārtha}} = \text{Īśvara}_{\text{lakṣyārtha}} = \text{Ātman} = \text{Brahman}$$

This is precisely what is called **jīveśvara-aikyam**.

A2. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.10

Another particularly important passage is:

ahaṃ brahmāsmi

“I am Brahman.” More significantly, the same passage condemns the idea of absolute separation between oneself and God:

anyo'sāv anyo'ham asmīti na sa veda

“He who worships a deity thinking, ‘He is one and I am another,’ does not know.”

This is one of the clearest Upaniṣadic texts against treating jīva and the ultimate reality as **absolutely different**.

But again, Śaṅkara does not mean:

“This limited body-mind individual is the omniscient creator.”

Rather:

The consciousness because of which I am the jīva is not different from the consciousness that is the truth of Īśvara.

A3. Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad 2

sarvaṃ hy etad brahma ayam ātmā brahma

“All this is indeed Brahman. This Ātman is Brahman.”

This gives the equation:

$$\bar{\text{Ātman}} = \text{Brahman}$$

and therefore, supplies the foundation for jīva-Īśvara aikyam.

A4. Bhagavad Gītā 13.2

This is especially useful for your question because Kṛṣṇa directly identifies the individual kṣetrajña with himself:

kṣetrajñaṃ cāpi māṃ viddhi sarvakṣetreṣu bhārata

“Know Me also to be the knower of the field in all fields.”

Swami Dayananda attaches particular importance to this verse. In his commentary he interprets it as revealing that **the kṣetrajña in the individual is non-separate from Īśvara**. A set of study notes based on his commentary summarizes the point: “Kṣetrajña, you the individual, is non-separate from Īśvara ... You are Īśvara—Sat-Cit-Ānanda Advayam Brahma.”

B. Jīva ≠ Īśvara — difference at the empirical/upādhi level [Vyabharik]

There are equally strong scriptural texts showing a distinction.

B1. Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 3.1.1–2

Two famous **birds**:

dvā suparṇā sayujā sakhāyā...

Two birds, inseparable companions, sit on the same tree. One eats
the fruits; the other merely witnesses.

Traditionally:

- fruit-eating bird → **jīva**, the experiencer of karma-phala;
- witnessing bird → **Īśvara / Paramātmā**.

Thus, there is a clear experiential and functional distinction.

The point, however, is not eternal duality. Verse 3.1.2 proceeds toward the jīva discovering the glory of the other and becoming free from sorrow.

B2. Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 4.6–7

It repeats essentially the same two-birds imagery:

- one enjoys;
- one does not enjoy;
- the sorrowing individual becomes free upon recognizing the Lord.

Again:

jīva as bhoktā = Īśvara

at the empirical level.

B3. Bhagavad Gītā 15.7

mamaivāṃśo jīvaloke jīvabhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ

“An eternal part of Myself, having become the jīva in the world of living beings...”

This establishes dependence of the jīva upon Īśvara. It must be interpreted carefully in Advaita: **aṃśa** cannot mean a literal physical “piece” of an indivisible Brahman.

Nevertheless, the verse preserves an empirical distinction between the individual and the total.

C. The crucial Advaita distinction

We can now state the doctrine precisely:

Standpoint	Jīva	Īśvara	Relationship
Vācya-artha / upādhi	limited, alpajña, alpashaktimān, karta- bhoktā	sarvajña, sarvaśaktimān, jagat-kāraṇam	Jīva ≠ Īśvara
Lakṣya-artha / svarūpa	consciousness	consciousness	Jīva = Īśvara
Paramārthika	no independent jīvatva	no independent Īśvaratva	Brahman alone

Consequently, saying simply

“Jīva = Īśvara”

Without qualifications is potentially misleading. The

more precise Advaita statement is:

Jīva is not Īśvara as jīva; the truth of jīva is the truth of Īśvara.

Or:

$Jīva_{vācya} \neq Isvara_{vācya}$

but

$Jīva_{lakṣya} = Isvara_{lakṣya} = Ātman = Brahman$

2. References from Swami Dayananda Saraswati – talks and books

A. Jīva = Īśvara

Swami Dayananda is particularly explicit about this distinction.

A1. Bhagavad Gītā Home Study — Chapter 10

In his commentary, Swamiji explains:

From the standpoint of upādhi, the jīva is **kiñcijña**—one of limited knowledge—whereas Īśvara is **sarvajña**, all-knowing.

Therefore:

“Viewed from the standpoint of upādhi, identity between jīva and Īśvara is not possible.”

But immediately thereafter:

“Although there seems to be a difference, essentially there is no difference.”

And he identifies the common reality as **Sacchidananda ātmā**, explaining that this identity is revealed by **tat tvam asi**.

This is probably **the single best Dayananda reference for both sides of your question**, because he states both propositions together:

svarūpa standpoint: jīva = Īśvara

He uses the **wave–ocean–water** example:

- wave ≠ ocean as forms;
- but the truth of both is water.

So:

- jīva ≠ Īśvara as nāma-rūpa/upādhi;
- Their essential reality is one.

A2. Bhagavad Gītā Home Study — Chapter 5 conclusion

Swami Dayananda makes an even stronger statement here:

“The teaching, that is self-knowledge, is for the doer/enjoyer alone, the jīva — **and the jīva is**

Parameśvara.”

He continues: “Thus there is an equation between the jīva and Īśvara.”

And says that understanding the identity between the individual and the Lord is what brings resolution of saṃsāra—mokṣa.

However, in exactly the same discussion he gives an important, logical qualification:

“The doer is Parameśvara, whereas Parameśvara is not the doer.”

and uses the logical formula:

“B is A, but A is not B.”

This is extremely useful for understanding Swamiji's teaching. He is

not saying:

the limited empirical jīva = the omniscient empirical Īśvara.

Rather, he is saying:

the reality of the jīva is Parameśvara.

A3. Bhagavad Gītā Home Study — Chapter 7

Swamiji summarizes the whole Vedānta through **tat tvam asi**:

“Tvam is jīva, the individual; tat is Īśvara, the Lord. And there is an equation between them which is revealed by the word asi.”

He emphasizes that this equation is not something that will happen in the future:

It reveals an already existing fact.

This is important:

jīva does not become Īśvara

Rather:

the already-existing non-difference is understood

B. Jīva ≠ Īśvara

Swami Dayananda is equally explicit about the empirical distinction.

The clearest passage is again his **Bhagavad Gītā Chapter 10 commentary**:

“From the standpoint of upādhi, the jīva is kiñcijña, Īśvara is sarvajña.”

and:

“Viewed from the standpoint of upādhi, identity between jīva and Īśvara is not possible.”

That gives us:

Jīva	Īśvara
alpajña / kiñcijña	sarvajña
limited power	all power
individual mind	total
subject to karma	karma-phala-dātā
seemingly controlled by māyā/avidyā	māyā under His control
karta/bhoktā	order governing karta/bhoktā

This distinction also appears very clearly in Swamiji's commentary on **Bhagavad Gītā 4.6**. He explains that Īśvara keeps māyā under his control; his jñāna-śakti, kriyā-śakti and icchā-śakti are not limited as they are in the jīva.

Thus, the two are emphatically **not equal in attributes**.

C. Swami Dayananda's formulation of *Tat Tvam Asi*

A text presenting his teaching puts the objection exactly as you have framed it:

“How can I be Īśvara? He is sarvajña, I am alpajña; He is sarvaśaktimān, I am alpaśaktimān...”

Swamiji's answer is that the Sastra nevertheless declares **tat tvam asi**, requiring us to understand correctly what is being equated.

This is why **bhāga-tyāga-lakṣaṇā** or the traditional analysis of implied meaning becomes necessary.

We discard the mutually incompatible incidental attributes:

Jīva

limited knowledge + limited power + individuality

Īśvara

omniscience + omnipotence + totality

and recognize the common substantive reality:

sat-cit-ānanda / caitanyam

D. Connecting your six terms

This gives us a more precise map of the terms you listed:

Empirical / transactional presentation

$Jīva \neq \bar{I}śvara$

Jīva = individual.

Īśvara = total/cause/order of the universe.

But their essential selves are:

$$Jīvātma \rightarrow \bar{A}tman$$

and

$$Paramātmā \rightarrow \bar{A}tman$$

Therefore:

$Jīvātma = Paramātmā = \bar{A}tman = Brahman$

This is a much safer formulation than simply writing “**Jīva = Īśvara.**”

E. One refinement I would make to our earlier terminology

There is a subtle point worth sharpening. We

sometimes say:

“At the Paramārthika level, $jīva = \bar{I}śvara$.”

Strictly speaking, an even more precise Advaita formulation is:

Vyavaharika level

as their attributes/functions differ.

$$Jīva \neq \bar{I}śvara$$

Mahāvākya analysis

$$Jīvalakṣyārtha = \bar{I}śvaralakṣyārtha$$

because both resolve into the same consciousness.

Pāramārthika level

There are **not two entities called $jīva$ and $\bar{I}śvara$ left to be equated.**

There is:

Brahman alone

Thus, the final vision is **not**:

$$Jīva = \bar{I}śvara$$

as though two things have become one. It is:

There were never two independent realities in the first place.

This is why Swami Dayananda often uses **aikyam**, “identity/non-difference,” rather than a mathematical equality between two empirical objects. His recorded teaching explicitly calls the knowledge an “**jīveśvara-aikyam equation**” that cannot be established by perception or inference but must be revealed by Sruti.

3. Condensed formulation

I would therefore formulate the result as:

Jīva =/ Īśvara	— vācya-artha / upādhi / vyavahāra
Jīvātma = Paramātma	— lakṣya-artha
Ātman = Brahman	— absolute truth
Brahman alone is	— paramārthataḥ