Now you might accuse me of flogging an already dead horse, but I'd like to suggest that “this” is not the same as the “horse” that is considered already dead. The Vedantic Atman is not the same as that which is considered “self” in the general sense of the word.

Atman and Nairatman (Anatta) is a massive “bone of contention” between Advaita Vedanta and Bauddha dharma, but it is rooted in half-understood concepts of what specifically Atman means from the point of view of Advaita Vedanta.

In Vedanta there is the concept of Jiva (a generic concept found in other systems of Hindu Dharma as well). Jiva literally means “living being”. The key features of Jiva are as follows —

1. Jiva is born and therefore must die (has a beginning and an end)
2. Jiva is the personality that transmigrates from one lifetime to another (or in other words, re-incarnates)
3. Jiva comprises of the five sheaths or panchakoshas —
   - the annamaya kosha or the sheath of food (anna means rice, literally), or the physical body
   - The pranamaya kosha or the sheath of prana (life force), or the energy body
   - the manomaya kosha or the sheath of the mind, or the mental body
   - the vijnanamaya kosha or the sheath of the intellect
   - the anandamaya kosha or the sheath of bliss

As one goes from outward focus (of the mind) to inward focus (towards finding the source of the mind), one encounters each of these sheaths or layers in meditation. Just as one clearly experiences and operates with their physical body and the thinking mind, one also experiences their energy body, their intellect (which is different from the mind in the indic tradition) or even the blissful nature at a higher level of experience.

The jiva predicates Ishwara, or God as the source of creation. With the help of the mind, body and intellect, jiva lives it’s limited life, with one of several (or combinations thereof) of positions —

1. There is no ishwara and all of this (material world) is a result of happen-chance interaction of matter.
2. There is an Ishwara who is the creator, maintainer and destroyer and one’s actions in their lifetime predicates whether they go to heaven (eternal joy and pleasure) or hell (eternal suffering and pain). This type follow specific doctrinal guidelines which are purported to be resultant in their being able to go to heaven or hell, depending on how faithfully they have followed said doctrines.
3. There is an Ishwara who does create, maintain and destroy the universe, but the Jiva has the ability to unite with this Ishwara through devotion, right action,
yoga, etc etc. They still hold a separation between themselves and Ishwara, and their union with Ishwara is that of a benevolent Lord and devotee (or a parent and child).

Atman points to something else completely. Unlike the limited nature of the jiva who lives in a body, and depending on one’s belief — transmigrates across lifetimes or goes to heaven or hell for eternity or starts as matter and ends as matter, the Atman —

1. is pure subject predicate, without which no manifestation can happen. At least that much is verifiable intellectually, from an “individual” perspective.
2. It is neither a soul nor a personality. It is pure consciousness.
3. It is empty as it is not a thing which takes up space or exists in time.
4. However, both space and time appear in it.
5. It is not something that can be experienced using the normal faculties and apparatuses (like the mind and the inner and outer senses).
6. It can be directly known – Aparoksha Anubhuti.

What Emptiness means in this case, is that it is empty of “thing”ness. It cannot be captured with any of the sensory apparatuses. It cannot be described by the mind. If the mind tries to find it, it fails and finds only stillness and silence instead.

The question that many people ask is “if that is the case, why call it Atman or Self?”. The answer is because there is nothing more intimate than this. It is the root and the basis of everything we know. Knowing (with the mind and intellect) cannot be without it. What else can something so intimate be called?

That which is called “nairatman or Anatta” is the jiva itself. It is the non-self. Atman is the selfless Self. It is the lightless light.

However, it must be pointed out that ultimately, the Jiva is not different or separate from the Atman, because then, that would clearly be dualistic in nature. Jiva is a phenomenon that occurs as a result of mistaken identification with one of the five koshas, and primarily the lower 3 koshas.

More questions follow after this —

- Why does that happens?
  - It doesn't really happen. It only appears to happen…
- How can you explain the fact that you (and others) wrote so many pages and commentaries on this topic. If it doesn’t really happen, who and what is writing, and who and what is reading this?
  - The appearance of separate beingness (jiva) is reading this. The jiva who appears to have been awakened, is writing this. So the Self is
reading what the Self has written. Or no one is reading nothing, ultimately. It doesn't really matter

In my humble opinion and experience, irrespective of what one sees or experiences, the root of one’s consciousness in the manifest state, is the “I-ness” (aka I AM or I-I). This exists as witness to all things rising and falling, and staying with it, all things appear as part of it itself. The road, the landscapes, sky, people, animals, trees etc all are it’s very own Self. This I have experienced before starting with the mind expansions and also after the mind expanded. This root does not change — it remains empty and ever-present.