

## The Crown Jewell of Discrimination

Adi Shankaracharya

1. I honor the teacher, the limitless Self, whose nature is bliss, who cannot be objectified by the senses and the mind, who is known through the teachings of the Upanishads.

### Value of a Human Birth

2. It is by the grace of the Self that life's highest blessing is gained: the status of a human being endowed with a burning desire for freedom and a relationship with a qualified teacher.
3. A person who is endowed with the proper qualities and an understanding of the Vedas who holds on to the unreal and does not strive for freedom veritably commits spiritual suicide.
4. Without Self knowledge a person who studies scripture and practices rituals to propitiate the gods for various ends will never gain freedom.
5. Millions of actions will not produce Self knowledge. Actions can purify the mind for gaining self knowledge.
6. Therefore approach a compassionate teacher, a knower of the Self, and learn how to inquire into the truth.

### Qualifications for Self Knowledge

7. Qualifications are required for Self knowledge. Time, place and circumstances are auxiliary means.
8. Without the presence of a qualified teacher Self knowledge will not take place. Four qualifications are enumerated by those great teachers who have realized the Self and obtained the vision of non-duality as revealed by Vedanta.
9. The four qualifications are: 1. Discrimination between the ephemeral and the eternal. 2. Dispassion with reference to objects. 3. Six-fold secondary qualifications and 4: Burning desire for liberation.
10. Discrimination (*viveka*) is the firm understanding that the Self, limitless non-dual actionless ordinary awareness, is eternal and that the world of changing objects is non-eternal.
11. Absence of longing for changing things from the body up to spiritual states is dispassion (*viragya*).
12. The mind is resolved when, bolstered by dispassion toward objects, its attention is removed from the objects and repeatedly placed on the Self. (*sama*)
13. Putting the organs of perception and action in their respective places after withdrawing them from their respective objects is called self control (*dama*).
14. Non-dependence on external objects by the ego or absence of 'myselfness.' (*uparati*). Objectivity toward pain of all kinds without anxiety, complaint or attempt at revenge. (*titiksha*)
15. The hard and fast conviction that the words of the scripture and the teacher are true. (*shraddha*)
16. Always and in every way putting the mind on Awareness. (*samadhana*) Not pacifying or entertaining the mind.

17. Burning desire to let go of attachment to objects born of ignorance and recognizing the Self as the highest value. (*mumukshutva*)

### **The Teacher**

18. To gain liberation a qualified person who wants to know the truth should approach a teacher who has knowledge of the scriptures.
19. A qualified teacher is one who knows the import of the scriptures by direct knowledge/experience and whose mind is resolved in awareness. His or her mind glows like the coals of a fire deprived of fuel. He or she can wield the means of knowledge confidently, is compassionate without a reason, unaffected by desires for objects and is friendly to seekers who approach with a proper attitude.
21. The seeker should ask for protection from the agitations produced by involvement with *samsara*.
22. The composed saintly enlightened teachers who have crossed the ocean of *samsara* are like spring because they bring new life to inquirers by helping them to know the truth without expectation of results.
23. Once accepted as a student, a qualified enquirer who comes in contact with such teachers can relax in the shade of the tree of the teaching tradition because he or she understands that Vedanta is a valid and proven means for attaining liberation.
24. The teacher reveals the cause of suffering that leads to many births and deaths to be bondage to the world (*anatma*) brought about by ignorance of the inquirer's true nature and reveals the solution to be the discrimination between the Self (*atma*) and the not-self (*anatma*). The discrimination between the real and the apparently real destroys ignorance and its effects.

### **What is to be Known**

25. The answer to the following questions will now be explained: (a) the nature and origin of bondage, (b) how it is sustained, (3) how liberation is obtained, (4) the nature of the not-self, (5) the nature of the self and (6) how to discriminate between the self and the not-self.
26. Listen carefully as the discrimination is taught in detail and apply it diligently at all times.

### **What is the Not-Self?**

27. The physical body (*sthula sarira*) is born as a result of the *karma* from previous lives. It is the locus of experience for the individual and is made of matter which evolved as a result of the grossification of the subtle elements.
28. The subtle body (*sukhma or linga sarira*) is composed of the five organs of perception, the five organs of action, the five physiological functions, the five subtle elements beginning with space, the ego, mind, intellect, memory, ignorance, desire and action.
29. It is born of the elements in their subtle state and contains the impressions of previous experience (*vasanas*). It is the experiencer of the results of both good and bad actions and is the beginningless *upadhi* for the *jivatma*. Dream is its natural state. It illumines the dream objects without the help of the physical body.

30. It is the individual's tool for performing action. The individual (*jiva*) whose nature is consciousness is free of the subtle body but becomes an apparent actor when it illumines the subtle body.
31. A power (*maya*) resides in limitless consciousness. It is called the unmanifest (*avyakta*) and it gives birth to the world. It is beginningless ignorance and is of the nature of the three *gunas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*) and beyond their effects. It is inferred from its effects by anyone with a clear mind.
32. This power is a great wonder and cannot be rationally explained because it is neither real nor non-existent nor a combination of the two. It is not separate or non-separate from consciousness nor it is made up of parts.
33. The unmanifest appears as the three *gunas* and is the causal body (*karana sarira*) of awareness. Sleep, the state in which activities of the senses and the mind are resolved is its subtlest state.

### **Who is the Limitless Self?**

34. Now I will teach the nature of the limitless self (*paramatma*) knowing which one is freed of bondage and attains oneness with everything that is.
35. Awareness is self existent, always manifest in the 'I' thought, distinct from the five sheaths (*pancha kosa*) and witness of the three states of experience.
36. As the 'I', awareness knows the presence and the absence of the mind and its thoughts in the waking, dream and deep sleep states of experience.
37. Awareness sees itself by itself but no one sees awareness. It illumines the mind but the mind does not illumine it.
38. Awareness shines as 'I' in the three states of experience and witnesses the mind revealing the formless elements (air and space) and the elements of form (fire, water earth). It does not change.

### **What is Bondage?**

39. The "I" in the *anatma* erroneously thinks it is a person, feels bound to objects and suffers the afflictions of birth and death. Just as a silkworm traps itself in its cocoon, the *jiva* thinks its decaying body is real and ignorantly nourishes, anoints and protects it.

### **How Does Bondage Happen?**

40. Maya's predominate power (*tamas*) covers beginningless effulgent non-dual awareness as an eclipse covers the sun.
41. Awareness is free of impurities but when it is eclipsed by ignorance the *jiva* takes the body to be the self. It is then afflicted with the strong power of *rajas* and subject to binding desire, anger etc.
42. These two powers are responsible for bondage and make the *jiva* assume that the body is.

### What Sustains It?

43. Ignorance is the seed of the tree of *samsara*, the sense of 'I' in the physical body is the sprout, manifold desires the foliage, actions the sap, the body the trunk, the *pranas* the branches, the organs of action and perception the twigs, the sense objects the flowers and the fruits are the various joys and sorrows born of many actions which the *jiva*...like a bird sitting on a branch...eats and enjoys.

### How to gain Freedom?

44. To utilize the scripture properly one should be committed to one's own *dharma*. From this commitment purification of the mind follows. Recognition of the self takes place in a pure mind and destroys ignorance and its effects.

### How to Discriminate the Self and the Not-Self?

45. Freedom is separating limitless awareness from the objects appearing in it and resolving all the objects into awareness with the knowledge 'I am awareness.'
46. The physical body is made of food, is sustained by food, dies without food and seemingly covers awareness. This bag of skin, bone and waste can never be the pure self.
47. The physical body is an object of perception, an inert assemblage and does not exist before birth and after death. It gains new attributes every moment making its nature uncertain. How can it be the self, that which knows its modifications?
48. The *prana*, endowed with five organs of action, pervades the physical body and is called the *pranamaya-kosa* because it seemingly hides the self, limitless awareness.
49. It cannot be the self because it is a modification of the air element, goes in and out of the body, is not sentient and is always dependent.
50. The organs of perception and the mind make up the *manomaya-kosa*. It pervades the *pranamaya-kosa* and is very powerful in that it projects the seeming duality of 'I' and 'mine.' It can differentiate names and attributes.
51. The *mano-maya kosa* is not the self because it changes, begins and ends, is by nature sorrowful and it is an object of perception. Awareness never appears as a known object.
52. The intellect (*buddhi*) with its thought modifications and the organs of perception make up the *vijnanamaya-kosa*. It causes *samsara* and the sense of doership.
53. It illumines objects because it reflects awareness. It is a modified form of ignorance that functions as an organ of knowledge and action and thinks the body and the sense organs is the 'I.'
54. 55. The nature of the *vijnanamaya-kosa* cannot be determined because it is a modified form of ignorance. It is the locus of the 'I' sense and is the *jiva*, the one that thinks it acts. Because the impressions of previous actions are ingrained, it performs good and bad actions and enjoys the results. It moves through higher and lower bodies above and below. From it come joy and sorrow and the three states of experience.
56. It cannot be the self because it changes, borrows its light from awareness, is limited, an object of perception, is inconsistent and conditioned by time.
57. The *anandamaya-kosa* is a modification born of *tamas*, pervaded by reflected three degrees of experiential bliss (*priya, moda, pramoda*), and arises out of awareness with the

- gain of a desirable object. It is the pleasurable result of meritorious deeds. When it is experienced anyone who has a body enjoys without effort by becoming bliss itself.
58. It manifests fully in deep sleep. It is experienced partially in dream and waking through the contemplation or gain of desired objects.
  59. It is not the self because it is a modification of *prakriti*, depends on the mind which acts as an *upadhi*, is the result of meritorious actions and manifests in degrees.
  60. When the negation of the *kosas* is done by logical inquiry based on the scripture, awareness is isolated and known to be the self.

### **The Self, Your Essential Nature.**

61. The self, awareness, can be known by anyone with discrimination. It is self luminous, a partless whole, distinct from the five sheaths, witness of the three states of experience, changeless and untainted by anything that is in contact with it.
62. The inquirer said. "I negated the five sheaths but I see only emptiness. Is there something else to be known through inquiry?"
63. 64. The teacher said, "Yes, it is the knower of the emptiness. That is you, limitless awareness. You are adept at inquiry."
65. Please know in your intellect that you are the limitless timeless awareness that shines by itself in the waking dream and deep sleep states, that shines as experiential bliss (*ananda*) and also shines in the form of 'I', 'I' the innermost Self, and the reflected self which illumines objects.
66. The wise are released from *samsara* by the knowledge that the individual Self and the limitless Self are non-separate.
67. Limitless consciousness is existence and knowledge. It is self-evident, ever-present, pure, beyond *maya* and is the happiness unconditioned by time bound experiences.
68. The existence that the entire world enjoys is borrowed from consciousness. There is nothing but consciousness. It is delusion to think anything stands apart from consciousness.
69. The *Atharva Veda* says 'the world is only consciousness.' Whatever is superimposed on consciousness is only consciousness.
70. If the world was real the self would be affected by it, the Veda would cease to be a valid means of Self knowledge and the One who created the Veda would be a liar.
71. The Self, which declares the truth about its nature says, "I am not in the beings (objects). They are in me."
72. If the world was real, it would appear in deep sleep.
73. The Self, consciousness, is the substrate for the world. False perception causes objects to appear in consciousness and make them to appear to be separate from it.

### **Identity of You and That**

74. If the individual self (*jiva*) and the limitless self (*Isvara*) are inquired into properly their non-separation is revealed, as pointed out in the statement 'you are that.'
75. The oneness of 'you' and 'that' is established by their implied meanings, not their ostensible meanings...like wave and ocean...which indicate mutually opposed qualities.

76. The differences between the individual and the total is caused by the difference in *upadhis*. Maya is the *upadhi* of Isvara...the cause of the total...and the five sheaths (*panchakoshas*) are the *upadhis* of the individual.
77. When the *upadhis* are negated, no difference remains between the individual and the total. The difference between the king and the subject is only due to a difference in status. Both are just human beings.
78. The oneness of the individual and the total is established by implication. It is not enough to totally reject or non-reject the meaning of 'you' and 'that.' It must be through a rejection of the non-essential attributes of the two.
79. For example, in the sentence 'this person that you see here is that Devadatta' a discriminating person establishes their oneness by giving up the contradictory elements, i.e. time place and circumstance.
80. Anything made of clay is clay through and through. Anything that is made of awareness is awareness through and through. There is nothing but awareness so the individual and the total can only be one. In this way the identity of the individual and the total is revealed in hundreds of Vedantic statements.
81. Therefore, you are limitless non-dual awareness, free of change and impurities.
82. Just as the objects in a dream are not real, the objects in the waking state created by self ignorance are not real. Therefore the body/mind/sense complex is not real. You are the awareness of them, free from change and impurities.

### **The Benefits of the Knowledge of Non-Duality**

83. The thought i.e. knowledge which indicates the identity between the individual and the total (*antahkarana-vritti*) is free of duality and is consciousness alone. When the knowledge is firm the one who has the knowledge is liberated while living.
84. He or she is said to be liberated while living when self knowledge is clear, bliss is continuous and the world more or less forgotten.
85. Even though he or she lives in a body, the most salient characteristic of the liberated is the absence of the sense of 'I' and 'mine.'
86. He or she does not regret actions done in the past, is free of guilt, is not worried about the future and is dispassionate with reference to what happens in the present.
87. He or she views apparently distinct objects endowed with acceptable and unacceptable qualities equally.
88. He or she is not subject to elation when situations are in harmony with his or her likes and dislikes or to depression when they aren't.
89. He or she is indifferent to praise or blame.
90. There is no *samsara*, no life of becoming, for the liberated. If there is *samsara* there is no knowledge of awareness owing to extroversion of the mind.
91. Just as the actions done in a dream are dissolved on waking, the accumulated results of past actions are dissolved by self knowledge.
92. The good and bad deeds done in a dream do not send the waker to heaven or hell.
93. The liberated are free of experiences and impartial toward them and do not worry about the future.
94. Space is not affected by the objects sitting in it, nor by the smell of liquor. The self, awareness is not affected by the attributes of the limiting adjuncts.

### The Karma of the Liberated

95. The results of actions done before liberation fructify like an arrow released from a bow.
96. An arrow intended for a tiger does not stop when the archer realizes that he mistook a cow for a tiger.
97. It is not correct to say that the liberated are affected by the results of their past actions, just as it is not correct to say that a person who killed someone in a dream should be held accountable when he or she wakes up.
98. The infallible words of scripture say the self is unborn and not conditioned by time. If that is true, how can action and its results affect it?
99. Because the body is superimposed on the self, it is not independent. How can a superimposition be born? If it is not born, how can it die? How can something that is unreal produce effects?
100. The scripture speaks of *karma* from an empirical standpoint to satisfy the curiosity of dull-witted people who want to know why the body remains in the wake of self knowledge.
101. Vedanta boils down to one fact for which the texts are the means of knowledge: the individual and the world are one. Liberation is staying with this knowledge.

### The Realization

102. The inquirer said to the teacher, "By your grace I am blessed because I have accomplished all that has to be accomplished. I am released from *samsara*. I am whole and complete bliss, free from lack and always present. I am everything that is."
103. "I have regained my kingdom due to your grace and the grace of *Isvara*. You and *Isvara* are one. I bow to you again and again."

### After Enlightenment

104. The teacher said, "Spend your time seeing yourself in every situation and enjoying the bliss of the self."
105. You can go now. You are free. Live according to the results of your past actions."
106. The disciple paid his respects again and the teacher. His mind drowned in the ocean of bliss, he moved here and there blessing everyone he met with the teachings.
107. The nature of the self has now been unfolded in this dialogue for the easy understanding of seekers of liberation.
108. These liberating words of Shankara quench the existential thirst  
of those seeking relief from the scorching rays of the sun of  
*samsara*.

*This is James' rendition of Swami Dayananda's translation from the original Sanskrit of 108 of the most essential verses of Shankara's Vivekachoodamani selected by a great mahatma, Swami Paramarthananda of Chennai India.*