

Ashtavakra Gita

Translated by
Bart Marshall

Translator's Preface

In Vietnam when I was twenty-one a hand grenade or mortar round--the circumstances made it difficult to determine which--blew me into a clear and brilliant blackness. For the next thirty-seven years that glimpse of infinite emptiness, so intimate, so familiar, kept me looking almost obsessively in esoteric books and far corners for an explanation of myself. Then, "suddenly," the veil, as they say, was lifted.

A few months after that occurrence, as my interest in reading began to slowly return, I found myself drawn mainly to the sayings and writings of old masters. What did Buddha have to say? What did Christ? Lao Tsu? Patanjali? I wanted to read them with new eyes.

Oddly, in those thirty-seven years of seeking, I had never read the *Ashtavakra Gita*, and indeed was barely aware of its existence. Then recently, as I sat at the bedside of a dying friend and teacher, another friend placed it in my hands. I opened it and was astonished. Here, in one concise volume, was all that needed to be said.

I immediately acquired other versions and poured over them. Each had its good points, but none of them spoke the way my inner ear was hearing.

The literal transcriptions from Sanskrit were valuable as reference but required patient study to understand.

English translations by Indian scholars made the meaning more clear, but tended to lack a certain rhythm, poetry and nuance of language I felt need of.

Translations by native English-speaking scholars were better in this regard, but sometimes ranged too far from the original, or just didn't hit the notes I was hearing.

Then one day I wrote down a verse the way I heard it. I liked what I read. It was infectious. I couldn't stop.

There are a few conventions worth mentioning. Capitalized words like Self, Awareness, God, Absolute, Consciousness, Knowledge, Witness, That, This, Void, Light, All, One, Everything, Nothing, No-thing, Being, Me, You, It, Himself, Bliss, Supreme, Unity and Truth are used as synonyms, although sometimes in context subtle – and ultimately non-existent--differences may be intended. These words all point to What Is – the true nature of Reality.

The words universe, world, creation and illusion are synonyms referring to the apparently real (but not) manifest world of physical objects, people, personal self, ideas, thoughts, gods, knowledge, concepts, myths, religions, history, memories, emotions, time, space – everything we perceive through the

mind and senses, including the mind and senses themselves. Maya.

Synonymous words and phrases used to denote a “person” who has realized Self, who knows Truth, who perceives the Real include: wise one, desireless one, liberated one, liberated soul, great soul, sage and yogi.

Translator’s Introduction

The *Ashtavakra Gita* is an ancient spiritual document of great purity and power. Pure, because it is relentlessly one-pointed. Every word is aimed at triggering Self-realization--no suggestions for self-improvement, no rules for moral behavior, no practical wisdom for daily life. Powerful, because the mere reading – or repeated reading--of it can be enough to send a ripe mind reeling into Truth.

Little is known about the *Ashtavakra Gita*. Ashtavakra is a name that appears in Indian lore, but almost certainly he did not write it. The author, likely an anonymous sage, merely uses the characters of Ashtavakra and King Janaka to set up a classic dialogue between guru and disciple. It quickly becomes a guru-guru dialogue, however, because after the first salvo of wisdom from Ashtavakra, Janaka realizes his true Self, and from then on they get into an advaitic jam session of the highest sort.

Because of this, some translators have done away with the dialogue format and attributed everything to Ashtavakra. Indeed, since all the verses of the *Ashtavakra Gita* exist at the highest possible level of spoken wisdom, it would appear meaningless to attribute some to the teacher and some to his newly-enlightened disciple. There is nevertheless a story line set up in the *Ashtavakra Gita*, and for me it goes something like this:

Chapter 1: It all starts when King Janaka asks the sage Ashtavakra how he can attain Knowledge, detachment, liberation. Ashtavakra tells him.

Chapter 2: It works! Upon hearing Ashtavakra’s words Janaka realizes his True Nature. Enraptured, he describes the joy and wonder of his new state.

Chapter 3: Ashtavakra is delighted for Janaka but sees inconsistencies. He fires off a series of confrontational verses about attachment to worldly pleasure.

Chapter 4: Janaka asserts that the Lord of the Universe can do as he pleases.

Chapter 5: Ashtavakra does not disagree, but in a terse four verses points to the next step – dissolution.

Chapter 6: Janaka says “I know that already,” matching him in style and

number of verses.

Chapter 7: Unable to leave it at that, however, Janaka goes on to further describe his enlightened state.

Chapter 8: Still hearing too much “I” in Janaka’s language, Ashtavakra instructs him in the subtleties of attachment and bondage.

Chapter 9: Ashtavakra continues to describe the way of true detachment.

Chapter 10: Ashtavakra hammers away at the folly of desire – no matter how elevated or subtle.

Chapter 11: Ashtavakra further describes the state of desirelessness to which he points.

Chapter 12: Janaka replies by describing the state of timeless stillness in which he now finds himself.

Chapter 13: Janaka, having been instructed by Ashtavakra in Chapter One to “be happy,” reports that he indeed is.

Chapter 14: Janaka then summarizes his exalted state with calm indifference.

Chapter 15: Impressed but not through teaching, Ashtavakra relentlessly points to the vast emptiness of Self.

Chapter 16: Ashtavakra attacks the futility of effort and knowing.

Chapter 17: Ashtavakra describes the nature of one who is truly free.

Chapter 18: Finally, Ashtavakra hits him with everything he’s got – 100 verses of pure non-duality. If this doesn’t do it, nothing will.

Chapter 19: It works! Janaka no longer describes his enlightened state, but can speak only in questions revealing absence.

Chapter 20: In a final flurry of questions pointing only at their own meaninglessness, Janaka burns off the last vestiges of personhood and enters dissolution. He ends with: “No more can be said.”

Ashtavakra smiles, nods approvingly, and says no more.

Bart Marshall
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1: Instruction on Self-Realization

Janaka said:

Master,
how is Knowledge to be achieved,
detachment acquired,
liberation attained?

Ashtavakra said:

To be free,
shun the experiences of the senses
like poison.
Turn your attention to
forgiveness, sincerity, kindness, simplicity, truth.

You are not earth, water, fire or air.
Nor are you empty space.
Liberation is to know yourself
as Awareness alone –
the Witness of these.

Abide in Awareness
with no illusion of person.
You will be instantly free and at peace.

You have no caste or duties.
You are invisible, unattached, formless.
You are the Witness of all things.
Be happy.

Right and wrong, pleasure and pain,
exist in mind only.
They are not your concern.
You neither do nor enjoy.
You are free.

You are the Solitary Witness
of All That Is,
forever free.
Your only bondage is not seeing This.

The thought: "I am the doer"
is the bite of a poisonous snake.
To know: "I do nothing"

is the wisdom of faith.
Be happy.

A single understanding:
"I am the One Awareness,"
consumes all suffering
in the fire of an instant.
Be happy.

You are unbounded Awareness —
Bliss, Supreme Bliss-in
which the universe appears
like the mirage of a snake in a rope.
Be happy.

It is true what they say:
"You are what you think."
If you think you are bound you are bound.
If you think you are free you are free.

You are Self — the Solitary Witness.
You are perfect, all-pervading, One.
You are free, desireless, forever still.
The universe is but a seeming in You.

Meditate on this: "I am Awareness alone--Unity itself."
Give up the idea that you are separate, a person,
that there is within and without.

You have long been bound thinking:
"I am a person."
Let the knowledge: "I am Awareness alone"
be the sword that frees you.

You are now and forever
free, luminous, transparent, still.
The practice of meditation
keeps one in bondage.

You are pure Consciousness —
the substance of the universe.
The universe exists within you.
Don't be small-minded.

You are unconditioned, changeless, formless.
You are solid, unfathomable, cool.
Desire nothing.

You are Consciousness.

That which has form is not real.
Only the formless is permanent.
Once this is known,
you will not return to illusion.

Just as a mirror exists
both within and without
the image reflected,
the Supreme Self exists
both within and without the body.

Just as the same space exists
both within and without a jar,
the timeless, all-pervasive One
exists as Totality.

2: Joy of Self-Realization

Janaka said:

I am now spotless and at peace-Awareness
beyond Consciousness.
All this time
I have been duped by illusion.

By this light alone
the body and the universe appear.
I am Everything
or Nothing.

Seeing there is no
universe or body,
by grace the Self is revealed.

As waves, foam and bubbles
are not different from water,
so the universe emanating from Self
is not different from Self.

Look closely at cloth,
you see only threads.
Look closely at creation,
you see only Self.

As sweetness

pervades sugarcane juice,
I am the essence of creation.

Not seeing Self, the world is materialized.
Seeing Self, the world is vanished.
A rope is not a snake,
but can appear to be.

I am not other than Light.
The universe manifests
at my glance.

The mirage of universe appears in me
as silver appears in mother-of-pearl,
as a snake appears in a rope,
as water appears on a desert horizon.

As a pot returns to clay,
a wave to water,
a bracelet to gold,
so will the universe return to Me.

I am wonderful indeed-beyond
adoration.
I cannot decay nor ever die,
though God and all the universe
should perish to the last blade of grass.

I am wonderful indeed-beyond
adoration.
Even with a body I am One.
I neither come nor go.
I am everywhere at once.

I am wonderful indeed-beyond
adoration.
I am astounded at my powers.
The universe appears within me
but I do not touch it.

I am wonderful indeed-beyond
adoration.
I am everything thought or spoken,
and have nothing.

In Reality,
knowledge, the knower, and the knowable

do not exist.
I am the transparent Self
in which through ignorance
they appear.

Looking at One and seeing many
is the cause of all misery.
The only cure is to realize
what is seen is not there.
I am One – aware, blissful, immaculate.

I am unbounded Awareness.
Only in imagination do I have limits.
Reflecting on this,
I abide in the Absolute.

I am neither free nor bound.
The illusion of such things
has fallen into disbelief.
Though I contain creation,
it has no substance.

Having seen for certain
that this universe and body
is without form or substance,
I am revealed as Awareness alone.
Imagination has no place here.

The body exists only in imagination,
as do heaven and hell,
bondage, freedom, fear.
Are these my concern?
I, who am pure Awareness?

I see no differences or separation.
Even the multitudes appear
as a single formless desert.
To what should I cling?

I am not the body.
I do not have a body.
I am Awareness, not a person.
My thirst for life bound me
to a seeming of life.

In the limitless ocean of Myself
the winds of the mind

roil the myriad waves of the world.

But when the wind subsides
in the limitless ocean
the ark of personhood is swallowed up,
along with the universe it carries.

And how wonderful it is!
In the limitless ocean of Myself,
waves of beings
arise, collide, play for a time,
then disappear--as is their nature.

3: Test of Self-Realization

Ashtavakra said:

Having realized yourself as One,
being serene and indestructible,
why do you desire wealth?

Just as imagining silver in mother-of-pearl,
causes greed to arise,
so does ignorance of Self
cause desire for illusion.

Having realized yourself as That
in which the waves of the world rise and fall,
why do you run around in turmoil?

Having realized yourself as pure Awareness,
as beautiful beyond description,
how can you remain a slave to lust?

It is strange
that in a sage who has realized
Self in All and All in Self
this sense of ownership should continue.

Strange that one abiding in the Absolute,
intent on freedom,
should be vulnerable to lust
and weakened by amorous pastimes.

Strange that knowing lust
as an enemy of knowledge,
one so weak and nearing death

should still crave sensual pleasure.

Strange that one who is unattached
to the things of this world and the next,
who can discriminate between the transient and the timeless,
who yearns for freedom,
should yet fear the dissolution of the body.

Whether acclaimed or tormented
the serene sage abides in the Self.
He is neither gratified nor angered.

A great soul
witnesses his body's actions
as if they were another's.
How can praise or blame disturb him?

Realizing the universe is illusion,
having lost all curiosity,
how can one of steady mind fear death?

With whom can we compare
the great soul
who, content knowing Self,
remains desireless in disappointment?

Why should a person of steady mind,
who sees the nothingness of objects,
prefer one thing to another?

He who is unattached,
untouched by opposites,
free of desire,
experiences neither pleasure nor pain
as events pass through.

4: Glorification of Self-Realization

Janaka said:

Surely one who knows Self,
though he plays the game of life,
differs greatly from the world's
bewildered burdened beasts.

Truly the yogi feels no elation,
though he abides in the exalted state

yearned for by Indra and all the
discontented gods.

Surely one who knows That
is not touched by virtue or vice,
just as space is not touched by smoke,
though it seems to be.

Who can prevent the great soul,
who knows the universe as Self,
from living life as it comes?

Of the four kinds of beings,
from Brahma to a blade of grass,
only the sage can renounce
aversion and desire.

Rare is he who knows himself
as One with no other —
the Lord of the Universe.
He acts as he knows
and is never afraid.

5: Four Ways to Dissolution

Ashtavakra said:

You are immaculate,
touched by nothing.
What is there to renounce?
The mind is complex — let it go.
Know the peace of dissolution.

The universe arises from you
like foam from the sea.
Know yourself as One.
Enter the peace of dissolution.

Like an imagined snake in a rope
the universe appears to exist
in the immaculate Self
but does not.
Seeing this you know: "There is nothing to dissolve."

You are perfect, changeless,
through misery and happiness,

hope and despair,
life and death.
This is the state of dissolution.

6: The Higher Knowledge

Janaka said:

I am infinite space;
the universe is a jar.
This I know.
No need to renounce, accept or destroy.

I am a shoreless ocean;
the universe makes waves.
This I know.
No need to renounce, accept or destroy.

I am mother-of-pearl;
the universe is the illusion of silver.
This I know.
No need to renounce, accept or destroy.

I am in all beings;
all beings are in me.
This I know.
No need to renounce, accept or destroy.

7: Nature of Self-Realization

Janaka said:

In me, the shoreless ocean,
the ark of universe
drifts here and there
on the winds of its nature.
I am not impatient.

In me, the shoreless ocean,
let the waves of the universe
rise and fall as they will.
I am neither enhanced nor diminished.

In me, the shoreless ocean,
the universe is imagined.
I am still and formless.
In this alone I abide.

The Self is not in objects,
nor are objects in the pure and infinite Self.
The Self is tranquil,
free of attachment and desire.
In this alone I abide.

I am Awareness alone.
The world is passing show.
How can thoughts arise
of acceptance or rejection?
And where?

8: Bondage and Liberation

Ashtavakra said:

When the mind desires or grieves things,
accepts or rejects things,
is pleased or displeased by things-this
is bondage.

When the mind does not
desire or grieve,
accept or reject,
become pleased or displeased,
liberation is at hand.

If the mind is attached to any experience,
this is bondage.
When the mind is detached from all experience,
this is liberation.

When there is no "I"
there is only liberation.
When "I" appears
bondage appears with it.
Knowing this,
it is effortless to refrain
from accepting and rejecting.

9: Detachment

Ashtavakra said:

Opposing forces,
duties done and left undone—

when does it end
and for whom?
Considering this, be ever desireless,
let go of all things,
and to the world turn an indifferent eye.

Rare and blessed is one
whose desire to live,
to enjoy and to know,
has been extinguished by observing
the ways of men.

Seeing all things as threefold suffering,
the sage becomes still.
Insubstantial, transient, contemptible-the
world is fit only for rejection.

Was there an age or time
men existed without opposites?
Leave the opposites behind.
Be content with what comes.
Perfection.

The greatest seers, saints and yogis
agree on very little.
Seeing this,
who could not be indifferent to knowledge
and become still?

One who
through worldly indifference,
through serenity and reason,
sees his true nature and escapes illusion –
is he not a true teacher?

In the myriad forms of the universe
see the primal element alone.
You will be instantly free,
and abide in Self.

Desire creates the world--renounce it.
Renounce desires
and you renounce the world.
Now you may live as you are.

10: Quietude

Ashtavakra said:

Give up desire,
which is the enemy.
Give up prosperity,
which is born of mischief and good works.
Be indifferent.

Look upon
friends, lands, wealth, houses, wives, gifts-and
all apparent good fortune-as
a passing show,
as a dream lasting three to five days.

Where there is desire, there is the world.
Be firm in non-attachment.
Be free of desire.
Be happy.

Bondage and desire are the same.
Destroy desire and be free.
Only by detaching from the world
does one joyfully realize Self.

You are One –
Awareness itself.
The universe is neither aware
nor does it exist.
Even ignorance is unreal.
What is left to know?

Attached as you have been to
kingdoms, sons, wives, bodies, pleasures –
life after life –
still they are now lost forever.

Prosperity, pleasure, pious deeds...
Enough!
In the dreary forest of the world
the mind finds no rest.

For how many lifetimes
have you done hard and painful labor
with body, mind and speech?
It is time to stop.

Ashtavakra said:

Existence, non-existence, change-this
is the nature of things.
Realizing this,
stillness, serenity and bliss
naturally follow.

One who knows for certain that
"Self creates All and is alone"
becomes still, desireless, unattached.

One who knows for certain
that adversity and success
come and go in obedience to destiny
becomes content.
He neither desires nor grieves.

One who knows for certain
that birth and death, happiness and misery,
come and go in obedience to destiny
sees nothing to accomplish.
He engages in non-action,
and in action remains unattached.

One who has realized
that only by caring
is misery caused in the world
becomes free, happy, serene, desireless.

"I am not the body, nor is the body my possession –
I am Awareness itself."
One who realizes this for certain
has no memory of things done or left undone.
There is only the Absolute.

"From Brahma to the last blade of grass-I
alone exist."
One who knows this for certain
becomes immaculate, serene, unconflicted.
Attainment has no meaning.

One who knows for certain
that this manifold and wonderful universe
is nothing
becomes desireless Awareness

and abides in the stillness of No-thing.

12: Abiding in the Self

Janaka said:

Becoming first intolerant of action,
then of excessive speech,
then of thought itself,
I come to be here.

Neither sounds nor other sense perceptions
attract my attention.
Even the Self is unperceived.
The mind is free, undistracted, one-pointed.
And here I am.

Effort is required
to concentrate a distracted mind
superimposed with illusion.
Knowing this, I remain here.

Nothing to reject,
nothing to accept.
No joy, no sorrow.
Lord God I am here.

The four stages of life,
life without stages,
meditation, renunciation, objects of mind –
nothing but distractions.
I am forever here.

Doing and not-doing
both arise from ignorance.
I know this.
And I am here.

Thinking of the unthinkable One
unavoidably conjures thought.
I choose no-thought
and remain here.

Blessed is he
who attains this by effort.
Blessed is he
who is such by nature.

13: Happiness

Janaka said:

The tranquil state
of knowing Self alone is rare —
even among those who own but a loincloth.
I therefore neither renounce nor accept
and am happy.

The body is strained by practices.
The tongue tires of scripture.
The mind numbs with meditation.
Detached from all this,
I live as I am.

Realizing that nothing is done,
I do what comes
and am happy.

Yogis who preach
either effort or non-effort
are still attached to the body.
I neither dissociate nor associate
with any of that
and am happy.

I have nothing to gain or lose
by standing, walking or sitting down.
So whether I stand, walk or sit
I am happy.

I do not lose by sleeping
nor attain by effort.
Not thinking in terms of loss or gain
I am happy.

Pleasure and pain fluctuate
and are inconsistent.
Without good or bad
I live happily.

14: Tranquility

Janaka said:

Though appearing asleep like other men,
one whose interest in the world is exhausted,
whose mind has been emptied,
who thinks only by inadvertence,
is in Reality awake.

When desire has melted,
how can there be wealth,
or friends, or the seduction of senses?
What use is scripture and knowledge?

I have realized the Supreme Self,
the Witness, the One.
I am indifferent
to bondage and freedom.
I have no need for liberation.

The inner condition
of one who is devoid of doubt
yet moves among creatures of illusion
can only be known by those like him.

15: Knowledge of the Self

Ashtavakra said:

A man of open intuition
may realize the Self upon
hearing a casual instruction,
while a man of cluttered intellect
inquires bewildered for a lifetime.

Aversion to the world's offerings is liberation.
Attraction to the world's offerings
is the suffering of bondage.
This is the truth.
Now do as you please.

This knowledge of Truth
turns an eloquent, wise and active man
mute, empty and inert.
Lovers of the world therefore shun it.

You are not the body.
You do not have a body.
You neither do nor enjoy.

You are Awareness only--the timeless Witness.
You are free.
Go in happiness.

Attachment and aversion
are attributes of the mind.
You are not the mind.
You are Consciousness itself-changeless,
undivided, free.
Go in happiness.

Realize Self in All and All in Self.
Be free of personal identity
and the sense of "mine."
Be happy.

You are That in which the universe appears
like waves appearing in the ocean.
You are Consciousness itself.
No need to worry.

Have faith, my son, have faith.
You are Awareness alone,
the Self, the One.
You are the Lord of Nature.

The body is made of worldly stuff.
It comes, it lingers, it goes.
The Self neither comes nor goes,
yet remains.
Why mourn the body?

If the body lasts until the end of time
or perishes today –
is there gain or loss for you?
You who are Awareness?

Let the waves of the universe
rise and fall as they will.
You have nothing to gain or lose.
You are the ocean.

You are the substance of Consciousness.
The world is You.
Who is it that thinks
he can accept or reject it?
And where does he stand?

In you who are One—
immaculate, still Awareness—
from where can birth, action
or a separate person arise?

Whatever you perceive
is You and You alone.
How can bracelets, armlets and anklets
be other than the gold they are made of?

Leave behind such distinctions
as "I am He, the Self,"
and "I am not this."
Consider everything Self.
Be desireless.
Be happy.

Your ignorance alone
creates the universe.
In reality One alone exists.
There is no person or god
other than You.

One who knows for certain
that the universe is illusion,
a no-thing,
becomes desireless,
pure Awareness,
and finds peace in the existence of nothing.

In the ocean of existence
only One is, was, and ever will be.
You are neither bound nor free.
Live content and be happy.

Do not stir the mind
with "yes" or "no."
You are pure Consciousness.
Be still,
and abide in the bliss of Self.

Give up completely
all contemplation.
Hold nothing in the mind or heart.
You are the Self, forever free.
Of what use is thinking to you?

16: Special Instruction

Ashtavakra said:

You can recite and discuss scripture
all you want,
but until you drop everything
you will never know Truth.

You can enjoy and work and meditate,
but you will still yearn for That
which is beyond all experience,
and in which all desires are extinguished.

Everyone is miserable
because they exert constant effort.
But no one understands this.
A ripe mind can become unshackled
upon hearing this one instruction.

The master idler,
to whom even blinking is a bother,
is happy.
But he is the only one.

When the mind is free of opposites
like "This is done," and "This is yet undone,"
one becomes indifferent to
merit, wealth, pleasure and liberation.

One who abhors sense objects avoids them.
One who desires them becomes ensnared.
One who neither abhors nor desires
is neither detached nor attached.

As long as there is desire-which
is the absence of discrimination-there
will be attachment and non-attachment.
This is the cause of the world.

Indulgence creates attachment.
Aversion creates abstinence.
Like a child, the sage is free of both
and thus lives on as a child.

One who is attached to the world

thinks renouncing it will relieve his misery.
One who is attached to nothing is free
and does not feel miserable
even in the world.

He who claims liberation as his own,
as an attainment of a person,
is neither enlightened nor a seeker.
He suffers his own misery.

Though Hara, Hari
or the lotus-born Brahma himself
instruct you,
until you know nothing
you will never know Self.

17: The True Knower

Ashtavakra said:

One has attained Knowledge
and reaped the fruits of yoga
who is content,
purified of attachments
and at home in solitude.

The knower of Truth
is never miserable in the world,
for the whole universe
is filled with Himself alone.

As the foliage of the neem tree
does not please an elephant
who delights in sallaki leaves,
so do sense objects not please
he who delights in Self.

Rare in the world
is one who does not
relish past enjoyments,
nor yearn for enjoyments to come.

Those who desire pleasure
and those who desire liberation
are both common in the world.
Rare is the great soul who
desires neither enjoyment

nor liberation.

Rare is the right-minded person
who neither covets nor shuns
religion, wealth, pleasure,
life or death.

The man of Knowledge
neither cares for the universe
nor desires its dissolution.
He lives happily
on whatever comes his way.
He is blessed.

Knowing Self,
mind empty and at peace,
the sage lives happily,
seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating.

There is no attachment or non-attachment
for one in whom
the ocean of the world has dried up.
His look is vacant,
senses still.
His actions have no purpose.

The sage is neither asleep nor awake.
He neither closes nor opens his eyes.
Thus, for the liberated soul,
everywhere there is only This.

The liberated soul
abides in Self alone
and is pure of heart.
He lives always and everywhere,
free of desire.

Seeing, hearing, touching, smelling,
eating, taking, speaking, walking,
the great soul
exerts neither effort nor non-effort.
He is truly free.

The liberated soul
does not blame or praise,
give or take,
rejoice or become angry.

He is everywhere unattached
and free.

The great soul
remains poised and undisturbed,
whether in the presence
of a passionate woman
or observing the approach of his death.
He is truly free.

The sage sees no difference
between happiness and misery,
man and woman,
adversity and success.
Everything is seen to be the same.

In the sage there is neither
violence nor mercy,
arrogance nor humility,
anxiety nor wonder.
His worldly life is exhausted.
He has transcended his role as a person.

The liberated one
neither avoids experience
nor craves it.
He enjoys what comes
and what does not.

The sage is not conflicted
by states of stillness and thought.
His mind is empty.
His home is the Absolute.

Though he may perform actions,
the man of Knowledge
does not act.
Desires extinguished,
free of thoughts of "I" and "mine,"
he knows with absolute certainty
that nothing exists.

The sage is free.
His empty mind no longer projects
delusion, dreaming, dullness.
This state is indescribable.

18: Peace

Ashtavakra said:

Praise That,
which is Bliss itself,
which is by nature stillness and light,
and which by Its knowing
reveals the world as a dream.

One may enjoy the abundant pleasures of the world,
but will never be happy
until giving them up.

How can one whose innermost heart
has been scorched by the sun of sorrow
that comes from duty
be happy until the sweet rain
of torrential stillness?

The universe is but a thought
in Consciousness.
In Reality it is nothing.
One who sees the true nature
of existence and non-existence
never ceases to exist.

The Self--which is
absolute, effortless, timeless, immaculate-is
without limits
and at no distance from you.
You are forever It.

For those whose vision becomes unclouded,
illusion evaporates
and the Self becomes known.
All sorrow is instantly dispelled.

Seeing everything is imagination,
knowing the Self as timelessly free,
the sage lives as a child.

Knowing himself as Absolute,
knowing existence and non-existence
to be imagination only,
what is there for the desireless one

to learn, say or do?

Knowing for certain that all is Self,
the sage has no trace of thoughts
such as "I am this" or "I am not that."

The yogi who finds stillness
is neither distracted nor focused.
He knows neither pleasure nor pain.
Ignorance dispelled,
he is free of knowing.

Heaven or poverty,
gain or loss,
society or solitude,
to the yogi free of conditioning
there is no difference.

Religious merit,
sensory pleasure,
worldly prosperity,
discrimination between this and that—
these have no significance
to the yogi free of opposites
such as "I do this"
and "this I do not."

The yogi who is liberated while living
has no duties in this world,
no attachments in his heart.
His life proceeds without him.

For the great soul
who abides beyond desire,
where is illusion?
Where is the universe?
Where is meditation on That?
Where even is liberation from them?

He who sees the world
may try to renounce it.
But what can the desireless one do?
He sees there is nothing to see.

He who has seen the Supreme Brahma
thinks, "I am Brahma."
But he who has transcended all thought,

what can he think?
He knows no other than Self.

He achieves self-control
who sees his own distraction.
But the great soul is not distracted.
He has nothing to achieve.
He has nothing to do.

The man of Knowledge
may live as an ordinary man,
but he is not.
He sees he is neither
focused nor distracted,
and finds no fault with himself.

He who is beyond existence and non-existence-who
is wise, satisfied, free of desire-does
nothing,
though the world may see him in motion.

The wise one
is not troubled by action or inactivity.
He lives happily,
doing whatever gets done.

Like a leaf in the wind
the liberated one
is untethered from life-desireless,
independent, free.

For one who has transcended the world
there is no joy or sorrow.
With a stilled mind,
he lives on with no body.

One who knows Self,
whose mind is serene and spotless,
does not desire to give up anything,
nor does he miss what is not there.

His mind being in a natural state
of emptiness,
the wise one knows nothing
of honor and dishonor.
He does what comes to be done.

One who acts knowing
"This is done by the body, not by I, pure Self,"
indeed does nothing-no
matter how much acting takes place.

The liberated one
acts without claiming to be acting,
but he is no fool.
He is blessed and happy
even though in the world.

Having had enough
of the endless workings of the mind,
the wise one comes to rest.
He neither thinks, nor knows,
nor hears, nor sees.

Beyond stillness,
beyond distraction,
the great soul thinks nothing
of liberation or bondage.
Having seen the universe is void-even
though it seems to exist-he
is God.

He who believes he is a person
is constantly acting,
even when the body is at rest.
The sage knows he is not a person,
and therefore does nothing,
even when the body is in motion.

The mind of the liberated one
is neither troubled nor pleased.
It is actionless, motionless, desireless
and free of doubt.

The liberated one
does not exert effort
to meditate or act.
Action and meditation just happen.

Hearing ultimate Truth,
the dull-witted man is bewildered.
The wise man hearing Truth
retreats within and appears
dull-witted.

The ignorant practice
meditation and no-thought.
The wise,
like men in deep sleep,
do nothing.

The ignorant man finds no peace
either by effort or non-effort.
The wise man
by Truth alone is stilled.

Though they are by nature Self alone,
pure intelligence, love and perfection;
though they transcend the universe
and are clearness itself,
men of the world will not see this
through meditation and practices.

The ignorant man
will never be liberated
by his repetitious practices.
Blessed is he who
by simple understanding
enters timeless freedom.

Because he desires to know God,
the ignorant man can never become That.
The wise man is God
because he is free of desire
and knows nothing.

Unable to stand steady
and eager for salvation,
the ignorant perpetuate
the illusion of world.
Seeing the world
as the source of all misery,
the wise cut it off at the root.

The fool thinks peace comes
by controlling the mind.
He will never attain it.
The wise one knows Truth,
and is stillness itself.

For he who thinks knowledge

is things and ideas
how can there be Self-knowledge?
The wise do not see separate things-only
the timeless Self.

The fool tries to control the mind
with the mind – what folly!
The wise one delights in Self alone.
There is no mind to master.

Some believe in existence;
others believe nothing exists.
Rare is the one who believes nothing
and is never confused.

Weak intellectuals may believe
the Self is One without other.
But being mired in illusion
they do not actually know Self,
so live out their lives in misery.

The mind of one seeking liberation
depends on things for perception.
The mind of the liberated one
perceives no-thing
and is free of desire.

Timid men fear sensory experience
much as they do tigers.
They seek refuge in caves
and try to un-think the world.

Sensory experiences are like elephants who,
upon encountering a desireless man,
see him as a lion.
They immediately turn on their heels,
or if unable to escape,
stay on to flatter and serve him.

A man with no doubts,
who knows only Self,
has no need of practice
or liberation.
Seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating –
he lives as he is, happily.

One whose mind is emptied and unconflicted

by the mere hearing of Truth
sees nothing to do,
nothing to avoid,
nothing to warrant his indifference.

The sage does whatever
appears to be done
without thinking of good or bad.
His actions are those of a child.

Depending on nothing,
one finds happiness.
Depending on nothing,
one attains the Supreme.
Depending on nothing,
one passes through tranquility
to One Self.

When one realizes
he is neither the actor
nor the one who watches,
the mind-storm is stilled.

The actions of the sage,
free of pretence and motive,
shine like clear light.
Not so those of the deluded seeker
who affects a peaceful demeanor
while remaining firmly attached.

Unbounded, unfettered,
untethered from the projections of mind,
the wise are free to play and enjoy,
or retire to mountain caves.

Whether honoring a spiritual scholar,
a god, or holy shrine;
whether seeing a desirable woman,
a king, or beloved friend-the
heart of the sage
is unmoved.

Though his servants, sons,
wives, daughters, grandchildren
and all his relatives
ridicule and despise him,
the yogi is undismayed.

Though pleased he is not pleased;
though pained he does not suffer.
This wonderful state is understood
only by those like him.

The belief in duty
creates a relative world
for its performance.
The wise one knows Himself
to be formless, timeless,
all-pervasive, immaculate,
and thus transcends duty and world.

Even doing nothing
the dull one is anxious and distracted.
Even amidst great action
the wise one remains still.

Even in practical life
the wise one remains happy.
Happy to sit,
happy to sleep,
happy to move about,
happy to speak,
happy to eat...

Because he knows Self
the wise one is not disrupted by practical life.
He is deep and still, like a vast lake.
He is not like ordinary people.
His sorrows have vanished.

For the deluded one,
even rest is an activity.
For the wise,
even action bears the fruit of stillness.

The deluded one is often adverse
to the things of his life.
To one with no thought for body,
attachment and aversion have no meaning.

The deluded mind is caught up
in thinking and not thinking.
Though the mind of the wise one
may think what thoughts come,

he is not aware of it.

The sage sees nothing being done
even when performed by his hands.
Like a child he is pure
and acts without reason.

Blessed indeed is he who knows Self.
Though seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating,
he never desires nor changes.

For one who is void and changeless,
where is the world and its imaginings?
Where is the end?
Where is the possibility of it?

Glorious indeed is he who,
free of desire,
embodies Bliss itself.
He has become absorbed in Self.

In short, the great soul
who has realized Truth
is free of desire, enjoyment and liberation.
In all of space and time
he is attached to nothing.

What remains for One
who is Consciousness itself,
who sees the non-existence
of a phenomenal world created
by the mere thought of a name?

Peace is natural for one
who knows for certain nothing exists,
who sees appearances are illusion,
to whom the inexpressible is apparent.

Rules of conduct, detachment,
renunciation, asceticism—
what are these to one
who sees the unreality of things,
who is the Light of Awareness?

How can there be joy or sorrow,
bondage or liberation,
for one who perceives non-existence

and lights the infinite?

Until Self-realization,
illusion prevails.
The sage lives without
thoughts of "I" or "mine."
His connection to illusion is severed.

What is knowledge?
What is the universe?
What are thoughts like
"I am the body," or "the body is mine"?
The sage is imperishable and sorrowless.
He is Self alone.

When a weak man gives up meditation
he falls prey to whims and desires.

Even hearing Truth,
the man of dull intellect
holds on to illusion.
Through effort and suppression
he may appear outwardly composed,
but inside he craves the world.

Though others may see him working,
the sage does nothing.
Knowledge has banished effort.
He finds no reason to do or say.

The sage is fearless, unassailable.
No darkness, no light, nothing to lose.
Nothing.

Patience, discrimination,
even fearlessness –
What use are these to the yogi?
His nature cannot be described.
He is not a person.

No heaven, no hell,
no liberation for the living.
In short, Consciousness is Void.
What more can be said?

The sage neither yearns for fulfillment
nor frets over non-attainment.

His mind is cool
and brimming with sweetness.

Detached from desire,
the sage neither praises peace
nor blames the wicked.
Equally content
in happiness and misery,
he would not change a thing.

The sage neither rejects the world
nor desires Self.
He is free of joy and sorrow.
He does not live
and cannot die.

The wise one lives without hope.
He has no attachment to his children, wife or anyone.
Pleasure means nothing to him.
His life is glorious.

The sage wanders about as he pleases
and lives on whatever may come.
Contentment ever dwells in his heart.
And when the sun sets,
he rests where he is.

Rooted in Being,
no thought of being born or reborn,
the great soul is indifferent
to the death or birth of his body.

The wise one stands alone,
caring for nothing,
bereft of possessions.
He goes where he will,
unhindered by opposites,
his doubts rent asunder.
He is truly blessed.

The wise one has no sense of "mine."
To him earth, stone and gold are the same.
The knots of his heart have unraveled.
He knows neither ignorance nor sorrow.
He is excellent in every way.

The liberated soul

has no desire in his heart.
He is content and indifferent.
He has no equal.

Only one free of desire
knows nothing of knowing,
says nothing needs saying,
sees nothing to see.

He who is without desire excels,
be he beggar or king.
He no longer sees good or bad.

What is lust or restraint,
or the desire for Truth
to the yogi who has reached life's goal,
and who embodies virtue and sincerity?

The inner experience of one
who is free of desire and suffering,
who is content and reposes in Self-how
can it be described,
and of whom?

The wise one's state never varies.
Sleeping soundly, he is not asleep.
Lying in reverie, he is not dreaming.
Eyes open, he is not wakeful.

The man of Knowledge seems to think,
but has no thoughts.
He seems to have sense perceptions,
but does not experience.
He seems to have intelligence,
but is empty-minded.
He appears to be a person,
but is not.

The man of Knowledge
is neither happy nor miserable,
neither detached nor attached,
neither liberated nor seeking liberation.
He is neither this nor that.

Even while distracted the blessed one is still.
In meditation, he does not meditate.
In ignorance, he remains clear.

Though learned, he knows nothing.

The liberated one,
who abides unconditionally in Self,
who is free of the concept of action and duty,
who is always and everywhere the same,
is desireless.
He does not worry
about what he did or did not do.

The wise one is neither pleased by praise,
nor annoyed by blame.
He neither rejoices in life
nor fears death.

One of tranquil mind
seeks neither crowds nor wilderness.
He is the same wherever he goes.

19: Repose in the Self

Janaka said:

With the tongs of Truth
I have plucked the thorn of thinking
from the innermost cave
of my heart.

Where is meditation, pleasure,
prosperity or discrimination?
Where is duality?
Where even is Unity?
I abide in the glory of Self.

Where is past and future,
or even present?
Where is space, or even eternity?
I abide in the glory of Self.

Where is Self?
Where is not-Self?
Where is good and evil, confusion and clarity?
I abide in the glory of Self.

Where is sleeping, dreaming, waking,
or even the fourth state?

Where is fear?
I abide in the glory of Self.

Where is close or far,
in or out,
gross or subtle?
I abide in the glory of Self.

Where is life and death?
Where is the world and worldly relations?
Where is distraction and stillness?
I abide in the glory of Self.

There is no need to talk about
the three ends of life.
To talk of yoga is purposeless.
Even talking about Truth is irrelevant.
I rest in Self alone.

20: Liberation-in-Life

Janaka said:

Where are the elements, the body,
the organs, the mind?
Where is the void?
Where is despair?
My nature is transparent clearness.

Where is scripture?
Where is Self-knowledge?
Where is no-mind?
Where is contentment and freedom from desire?
I am empty of two-ness.

Where is Knowledge and ignorance?
Where is "I"?
Where is "this"?
Where is "mine"?
Where is bondage and liberation?
Self has no attributes.

Where is the unfolding of karma?
Where is liberation-in-life,
or even liberation at death?
There is only One.

Where is the doer or enjoyer?
Where is the origin or end of thought?
Where is direct or reflected knowledge?
There is no person here.

Where is the world?
Where is the seeker of liberation?
Where is the contemplative?
Where is the man of Knowledge?
Where is the soul in bondage?
Where is the liberated soul?
My nature is Unity.

Where are creation and destruction?
Where is the end and the means?
Where is the seeker?
Where is attainment?
I am One.

Where is the knower?
Where is knowing?
Where is the known, or knowledge itself?
Where is anything?
Where is nothing?
I am pure Awareness.

Where is distraction, concentration,
knowledge or delusion?
Where is joy or sorrow?
I am Stillness.

Where is the relative?
Where the transcendent?
Where is happiness or misery?
I am empty of thought.

Where is illusion?
Where is existence?
Where is attachment or non-attachment?
Where is person?
Where is God?
I am Awareness.

Where is activity or inactivity?
Where is liberation or bondage?
I am timeless, indivisible.

I am Self alone.

Where are principles and scriptures?

Where is the disciple or teacher?

Where is the reason for life?

I am boundless, Absolute.

Where is existence or non-existence?

Where is Unity or duality?

Nothing emanates from me.

No more can be said.