

आत्मबोधः

ĀTMABODHAḤ

A PRIMER TO VEDĀNTA

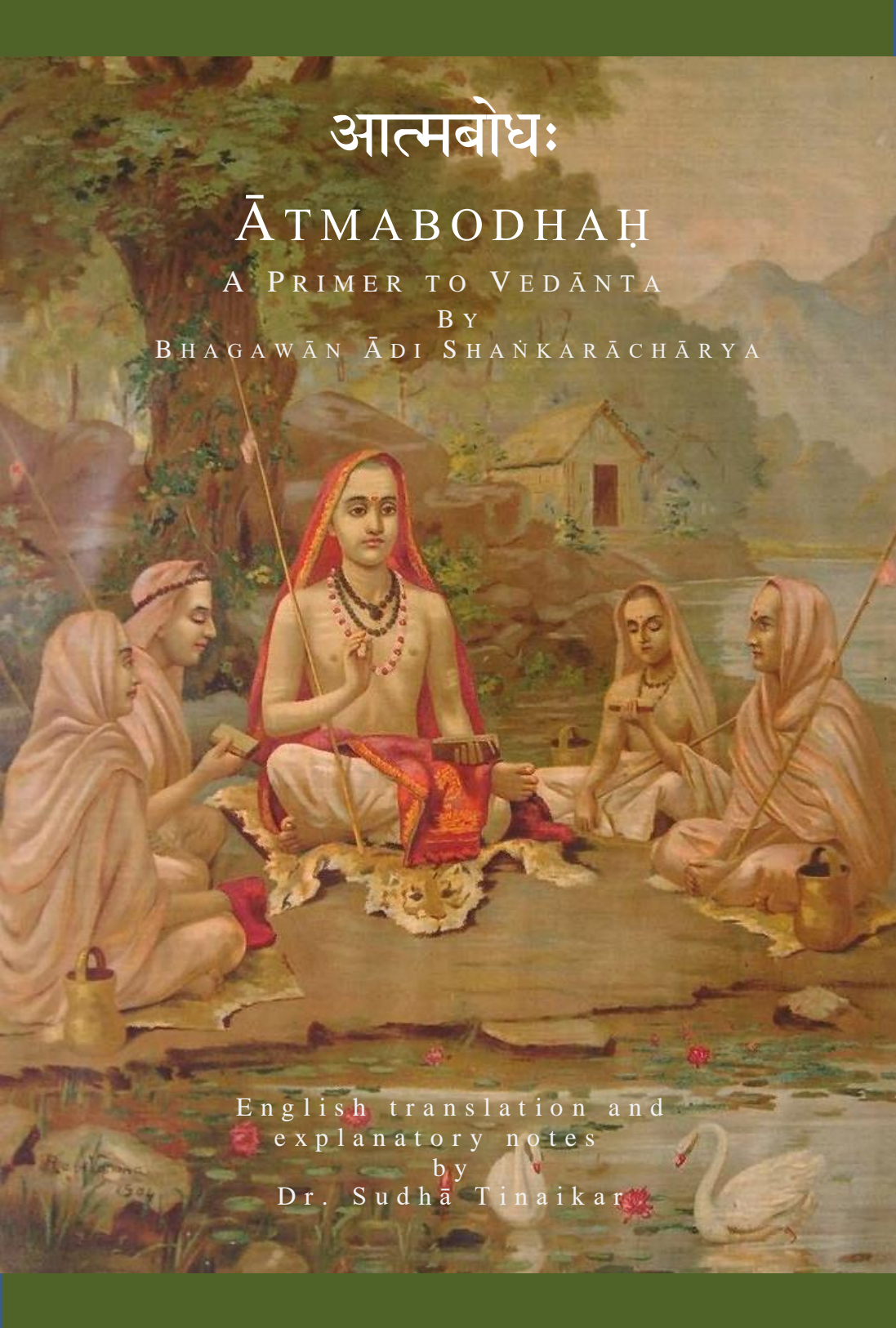
BY

BHAGAWĀN ĀDI SHAṆKARĀCHĀRYA

English translation and
explanatory notes

by

Dr. Sudhā Tinaikar





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Cover: Ādi Shaṅkara (788-820), founder of Advaita Vedānta, with
disciples. Painting by Rājā Ravi Varmā (1904)

Preface

Under the instructions and blessings of Parama Pūjya Sadyojāt Shaṅkarāshram Swāmījī and our entire Chitrāpur Guruparamparā, I was asked to write a commentary on this introductory primer to the study of our scriptures.

Ātmabodhaḥ is another basic primer par excellence which introduces a student of Vedānta to the terms and concepts used in our scriptures. All students of Vedānta will greatly benefit by a committed study of these texts.

After the completion of Tattvabodhaḥ, which appeared in series in our well-known Kānarā Sāraswat Association magazine in 23 issues, I was blessed by H.H. Sadyojāt Shaṅkarāshram Swāmījī with an opportunity to write the commentary on Ātmabodhaḥ. This appeared as a series in the KSA magazine from October 2018 to February 2020.

I offer my praṇāma-s to our Guruparamparā for this divine opportunity and seek the Blessings and Grace of our Parama Pūjya Sadyojāt Shaṅkarāshram Swāmījī, Lord Bhavānīshaṅkar, Devī Bhuvaneshwarī and our entire Guruparamparā before starting the interpretation of this text.

SUDHĀ TINAIKAR

September 2020
Beṅgaḷūru



Introduction

Under the ādesha of Parama Pūjya Sadyojāt Shaṅkarāshram Swāmījī and the blessings of our entire Guruparamparā, I start with a brief commentary on one of the most beautiful and short texts of our vast repertoire of *prakaraṇa grantha-s*—Ātmabodhaḥ.

Ātmabodhaḥ is considered to be a natural sequel to Tattvabodhaḥ in the basic teaching of Vedānta. Tattvabodhaḥ was elaborate in a text format while Ātmabodhaḥ on the contrary, is in a simple verse format - *Anuṣṭup chandas*. This makes this text a pleasure to even just chant. It is a short work of 68 verses where every verse talks about the journey of a *mumukṣhu* right from *sādhana chatuṣṭaya sampattiḥ* up to the *Mahāvākya vichāra* and *mokṣha*. Another feature of Ātmabodhaḥ is that every concept in each verse is supported by a relevant and familiar example, which makes the understanding of Vedānta simple and interesting.

We have already seen in Tattvabodhaḥ that the direct means to *mokṣha* is the knowledge of the essential unity / non-difference of the individual Self and *Brahman* (जीव ईश्वर अभेद). This Knowledge can be attained only from our scriptures which are the only valid proof (शास्त्र प्रमाण / वेदान्त प्रमाण / शब्द प्रमाण). Even for scholars, these scriptures can be difficult to interpret and understand. Āchārya-s, like Bhagawān Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya, wrote many smaller texts which deal with specific aspects for easier understanding called *prakaraṇa grantha-s*.

Ātmabodhaḥ's authorship is ascribed to Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya. The very same Āchārya, who wrote elaborate commentaries (भाष्याणि) on the *Prasthāna Traya*, has made this text very simple, brief and interesting, starting directly with the verses. Other Āchārya-s who have written commentaries on this text start with different prayer verses.

Since, the original does not have a prayer verse, let us go directly to the verses.



तपोभिः क्षीणपापानां शान्तानां वीतरागिणाम्
मुमुक्षुणामपेक्ष्योऽयमात्मबोधो विधीयते ॥१॥

In half a verse, Bhagawān Shaṅkarāchārya has said who is going to benefit from this work. The one prepared for this Knowledge is called a *Sādhana chatushtaya Sampanna Adhikārī* (साधन चतुष्टय सम्पन्न अधिकारी). As we have seen in Tattvabodhaḥ, here also, the beneficiary is the one who has prepared his mind, weeding off its impurities by -

1. *Ātma-anātma vivekaḥ* (आत्म-अनात्म विवेकः)
2. Dispassion (वैराग्यम्) for the worldly objects
3. Discipline (शमादि षट्क सम्पत्तिः) of the senses and mind
4. Intense desire (तीव्र मुमुक्षुत्वम्) for freedom from the bondage of *saṁsāra*

Among the four, the fourth one, the intense desire for freedom from *saṁsāra* (repeated cycles of birth-death) is considered to be the most important one. Some commentators give the example of *Gajendra* wanting to escape from the grip of the crocodile symbolically in the famous *paurāṇic* story *Gajendra Moksha*.

बोधोऽन्यसाधनेभ्यो हि साक्षान्मोक्षैकसाधनम्
पाकस्य वह्निवज्ज्ञानं विना मोक्षो न सिध्यति ॥२॥

Here, Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya talks about the knowledge of the Self as the only direct means to *moksha*. All other means or *sāadhanā-s* are only supportive. *Karmayogaḥ*, *Upāsanāyogaḥ*, various forms of *Tapas*, meditation, worship are necessary but only as supporting *sāadhanā-s* to the knowledge of the Self. There is a well-known statement of the Veda-s—“ज्ञानात्तु एव कैवल्यम्”. Does it mean that all the other *sāadhanā-s* are of no use in attaining *moksha*?

No; it only means that the ultimate means of freedom from *saṁsāra* is only the Knowledge of the Self with all the other *sādhana*-s playing complementary roles.

A very common day-to-day example is given in the second line of this verse explaining the above view of the Veda-s. It is common knowledge that fire is the ultimate means to cook any food. There may be many accessory means like getting the rice, washing it, soaking it for some time, adding water to it in the right proportion. But, what ultimately makes it fit for eating - is the fire which cooks it. Cooking is not possible without all the preparatory measures; at the same time, without the ultimate use of fire, all the preparatory measures are useless. Such is the importance of knowledge or ज्ञानम् for a *mumukshu*.

अविरोधितया कर्म नाविद्यां विनिवर्तयेत्
विद्याऽविद्यां निहन्येव तेजस्तिमिरसङ्घवत् ॥३॥

There are some philosophies which propose that *karma* as prescribed in the *karmakāṇḍa* of the Veda-s (वेदपूर्व) is the only means for attaining the ultimate freedom from *saṁsāra* and *Jñāna* (वेदान्त) is secondary to the scripture's *karmakāṇḍa*. Ātmabodhaḥ negates this view. *Saṁsāra* is due to ignorance of the Self and any amount of *karma* however sacred, cannot destroy the ignorance causing this bondage. *Karma* only strengthens the bondage. Knowledge on the other hand, is exactly opposed to ignorance. Ignorance can only be removed by knowledge in any field. If one's bondage is due to the ignorance of the nature of oneself, it can only be removed by

Knowledge, just like darkness can be destroyed only by light, not by any other activity.

In the first three verses of *Ātmabodhaḥ*, Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya has categorically said that the knowledge of the Self alone is the way out of the bondage of *saṁsāra*. In other words, ignorance of nature of the Self is the cause of all human problems.

Here, a very valid doubt may occur in the minds of *mumukshu-s*. There are millions of forms of life - from the creator, Brahmā, to the smallest worm - which have their own individuality. Every individual *jīva*, feels limited and goes through its own share of varied experiences which are very different from other *jīva-s*. If so, how can our scriptures vouch that “knowledge of the Self alone frees a *jīva* from bondage”? Vedānta says, that duality or seeing ‘Myself’ - as a separate and limited entity - is the very cause of *saṁsāra*. As long as I perceive myself to be finite, sorrows will continue. Then, why is this finitude and limitation felt in the first place?

परिच्छिन्न इवाज्ञानात्तन्नाशे सति केवलः
स्वयं प्रकाशते ह्यात्मा मेघापायेऽशुमानिव ॥४॥

Our scriptures say that the unlimited space (even though one single, indivisible whole) appears as multiple spaces of different shapes and sizes based on the enclosures. One indivisible space enclosed in different sized pots appears to be multiple isolated pot spaces. Space enclosed in a big hall of four walls appears to be separate from the space outside the four walls. It is the ignorance of the one-ness of space that causes this limitation. Similarly, as long as I perceive myself to be a limited and finite entity, *saṁsāra* will exist for me.

Ātmabodhaḥ says that this sense of limitation and finitude is born out of my ignorance about my infinite and unlimited nature. The light of Self-Knowledge destroys this ignorance. Hence, all the perceived limitations are gone with my true nature shining in its pristine glory. Here, Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya gives an example of the brightly shining Sun blocked by the clouds. Just as the clouds cannot really block sunlight, *Ātmā* or Consciousness cannot be limited by the body-mind-sense complex.

Having said that, the limitation, finitude and multiplicity belong to the body-mind-sense complex and not to the *Ātmā*. Bhagawān Shaṅkarāchārya gives the method to destroy the ignorance (अज्ञान निवृत्ति उपायः) in the following verses -

अज्ञानकलुषं जीवं ज्ञानाभ्यासाद्विनिर्मलम्
कृत्वा ज्ञानं स्वयं नश्येज्जलं कतकरेणुवत् ॥५॥

What is *jīva*?

Vedānta says that the all-pervading *Ātmā* associated with a particular body-mind-sense complex assumes a sense of doership-enjoyership, a sense of individuality and separateness from others. Though the *jīva* is non-separate from *Brahman*, the *jīva*'s *jīvatvam* is out of sheer ignorance of its real nature. This is what is said in this verse; the *jīva*-hood is falsely superimposed upon the *Ātmā* (अज्ञानकलुषम्). What is it that purifies this mixed-up *jīva*? It is knowledge, in the form of words of *Veda-s*, revealed by the Guru explaining the essential one-ness of *jīva* and *Brahman* (ब्रह्मात्मैकत्वबोधकानि शास्त्राचार्योपदिष्टानि वाक्यानि). Bhagawān Shaṅkarāchārya makes it clear that these words of Vedānta have to be contemplated upon repeatedly (ज्ञानाभ्यासः).

How does this ज्ञानाभ्यासः work?

Again, a fitting example is given. When alum powder (कतकरेणुः) is added to water, it removes the impurities from water and disappears along with them. That is the beauty of any knowledge; it destroys the ignorance and quietly disappears like the alum powder, when its job is done without leaving any trace of itself behind!

संसारः स्वप्नतुल्यो हि रागद्वेषादिसङ्कुलः
स्वकाले सत्यवद्भाति प्रबोधे सत्यसद्भवेत् ॥६॥

Vedānta affirms that the world around us (जगत्) is just an appearance. It appears to be actually there, but on enquiry, it is found to be of an empirical existence. This world of objects is nothing but various transactions between the *jīva*-s born out of desires (रागद्वेषादि सङ्कुलः) and interactions born out of them. When it is experienced, all the actions along with their results bind the *jīva*. However, Vedānta says that the entire waking world of various experiences is just like a dream. At the time of dream - the dream world, the objects within it, the transactions going on there, the emotions of pain and happiness - all appear to be real. The dream world's bondage also seems very real. Once the dreamer wakes up, the entire dream world along with all its consequent bondage disappears in an instant.

In the same way, the Knowledge of the Self, wakes up the *Jñānī* to the ultimate truth and the waking world (संसारः) also loses its grip. Does the waking world disappear totally like the dream? No, the waking world continues to exist, but no longer causes any bondage to the knower of the truth. This is what Vedānta defines as *mithyā* (मिथ्या).

Mithyā does not mean non-existence. It technically means ‘only an appearance which has no existence of its own’ (ज्ञानेन बाधित सत्यम्).

Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya compares the entire universe to a projection like a dream. That, which appears real for the time being, but has really no existence of its own, is called ‘*mithyā*’ in Vedānta. *Mithyā* does not mean that it is not there, but it is available for experience and transaction. When deeply enquired into, it really does not exist. Some examples given by our scriptures are – 1) magic performed by a magician and 2) appearance of silver on a sea-shell in bright sunlight, at the sea-shore.

The next verse explains the *mithyā* status of the *jagat* with another example of silver on a sea-shell.

तावत्सत्यं जगद्भाति शुक्तिकारजतं यथा
यवन्न ज्ञायते ब्रह्म सर्वाधिष्ठानमद्वयम् ॥७॥

In bright sunlight, a sea-shell shines brightly and gives an impression of a silver coin. However, when one observes at close quarters, it becomes obvious that the shining silver coin is nothing but a sea-shell. Now, Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya says, once the cognition – ‘this is a shell’ - occurs, the impression of the silver coin just disappears along with that cognition. There is no need for anything to be done; one needs to simply know the sea-shell as a shell. The knowledge of the shell has dispelled the false impression of the silver coin, just as explained in the verse 6 (the example of कतकरेणुः). Here, the shell is the support (अधिष्ठानम्) and the silver is the supported (अध्यस्थम्). Also, the shell is the ‘Truth’ (सत्यम्) and the silver coin is a ‘false projection’ (मिथ्या).

Similarly, the support of the entire universe (अधिष्ठानम्) is called *Brahman* (ब्रह्मन्). Once, the cognition of *Brahman* as the 'Truth' takes place, the projected, *mithyā-jagat* just does not appear to be of any significance. As in the case of silver coin or the dream, the *jagat* does not disappear, but does not cause any bondage to the knower of this truth. In the very same manner, as long as one does not understand the supporter of *jagat* (अधिष्ठानम्), the supported *jagat* (अध्यस्थम्) appears real.

In the next verse, Ātmabodhaḥ says that this entire projected *mithyā-jagat* rises in *Brahman*, exists in *Brahman* and resolves in *Brahman*. Thus, *Brahman* is called as the *upādāna kāraṇam* (उपादान कारणम्) or material cause of this entire projected universe. Just as a gold ornament arises, exists and resolves in its material cause, Gold, so also the entire universe arises, exists and resolves in its material cause *Brahman*.

उपादानेऽखिलाधारे जगन्ति परमेश्वरे
सर्गस्थितिलयान्यान्ति बुद्बुदानीव वारुणि ॥८॥

In this verse, *jagat* rising, existing and resolving in its very *adhiṣṭhānam Brahman* is explained with another apt example. In a water body, waves of various shapes and sizes, bubbles and foam arise from the same water, exist for some time in it and finally resolve in it. All of them appear different from water because of their individual shapes and names. However, all of them are in water all the time. They cannot be separated from water. Their appearance, existence and disappearance is in their *adhiṣṭhānam* - water. Similarly, the *jagat* though appears in different names and forms, it is

only a projection on its *adhishthānam* which is called *Brahman*. *Brahman* being eternally present is called *Satyam* (सत्यम्) and the *jagat* which appears and disappears is called *Mithyā* (मिथ्या). The same can be explained in a different way - *Brahman* is *nityam* (नित्यम्) and the *jagat* is *anityam* (अनित्यम्).

The next verse describes the nature of the *adhishthānam Brahman*.

सच्चिदात्मन्यनुस्यूते नित्ये विष्णौ प्रकल्पिताः
व्यक्तयो विविधास्सर्वा हाटके कटकादिवत् ॥९॥

The nature (स्वरूपम्) of *Brahman* (*Ātmā*) is described in this verse as *Sat* which means eternal (नित्यम्) and *Chit* which means Consciousness (चैतन्यम्). The entire universe with its myriad names and forms unfolds from this *sat-chit Ātmā* which is eternal, imperishable and all-pervading (indicated by the word विष्णुः in this verse). Similarly, all the gold ornaments such as ear-rings, bangles and chains come out of one lump of Gold.

This verse is very significant because, it describes the *adhishthānam Brahman* as the material cause (उपादान कारणम्) of the manifest universe. More importantly this material cause is **not insentient** (जडः); but **is sentient or conscious** (चैतन्यम्). Vedānta expounds चेतन कारणत्वम् for *Brahman* unlike some other philosophies.

Now, what is the cause of the universe appearing in multiple forms?

The next verse explains the experience of duality/plurality taking the example of one indivisible space appearing as multiple spaces in different vessels. The difference is only an appearance due to the

upādhi (उपाधि) or the enclosures. Vedānta teaches, that in reality, it is one indivisible whole.

Ādi Śaṅkarācārya explains that the one indivisible consciousness manifests itself in varied names and forms as the *jagat*; giving the example of one substance gold manifesting itself in the form of various ornaments.

Now, the next verse explains the same concept using the example of space.

यथाऽऽकाशो हृषीकेशो नानोपाधिगतो विभुः
तद्देदान्द्रिन्नवद्भाति तन्नाशे केवलो भवेत् ॥१०॥

Space (आकाशः) though indivisible, appears as enclosed space when seen with reference to an enclosure. The space within a pot is called pot space (घटाकाशः) and that within the four walls of a building is called the building space (मठाकाशः). Once the pot or the four walls cease to exist, the enclosed space also no longer exists as separate from the indivisible whole space.

Similarly, one indivisible, whole *Brahman/ Ātmā* when available in the body-mind-sense complexes of various *jīva-s* is called the *jīvātmā* (जीवात्मा) or *Hṛṣhikेशah* (हृषिकेशः) - the Lord of the body-mind-sense complex. Lord Kṛṣṇa refers to this enclosed *Ātmā* as *Kṣhetrajñah* (क्षेत्रज्ञः) in Bhagawadgītā (chapter 13 verse 2). However, with the dissolution of the body-mind-sense complex, *Brahman/Ātmā* remains one indivisible consciousness; pristine in itself.

From now onwards, Ātmabodhaḥ talks about the reasons for the bondage that a *jīva* feels and the means for freedom from this bondage.

नानोपाधिवशादेव जातिवर्णाश्रमादयः
आत्मन्यारोपितास्तोये रसवर्णादिभेदवत् ॥११॥

Brahman, which, by itself is ever-free, gets as though, affected and bound by the attributes of the body-mind-sense complexes (कार्यकरणसङ्घातः) of the various *jīva*-s. All the specific attributes of any *jīva* is because of its three bodies (स्थूलसूक्ष्मकारण शरीराणि); as we say, “I am a *brāhmaṇa*, I am a *gr̥hastha* etc”. The particular group (*āshrama* or *varṇa*) is focusing on the body and its placement in a specific situation. Thus, the attributes belonging to the three bodies are superimposed upon *Brahman/Ātmā* which are not its natural attributes.

Here again, an example is given. Water by itself is colourless and tasteless. However, when mixed with sugar, salt, lime or any other substance, it gets its respective taste. The taste is not an inherent quality of water itself, but superimposed upon it by what is mixed in it. Similarly, any colour added to water is not the inherent nature of water but can superimpose and colour it. Similarly, *Ātmā* or Consciousness is in no way bound by any attributes but appears ‘as though’ superimposed by its *upādhi*-s. Ātmabodhaḥ calls this superimposition as bondage (बन्धः).

What, three *upādhi*-s cause bondage to *Brahman/Ātmā*? This is explained in the next few verses. The three bodies (स्थूलसूक्ष्मकारण शरीराणि) have been explained in detail in the *Tattvabodhaḥ* commentary. The

reader may refer to the same. Here, a brief mention is made to the three bodies.

पञ्चीकृतमहाभूतसम्भवं कर्मसञ्चितम्
शरीरं सुखदुःखानां भोगायतनमुच्यते ॥१२॥

The gross body (स्थूल शरीरम्) is a product of the grossified five elements (पञ्चीकृतमहाभूतसम्भवम्). It is born as a result of the accrued *karmaphala-s* of the individual *jīva*. It is the locus (आयतनम्) of all types of experiences that a *jīva* goes through.

पञ्चप्राणमनोबुद्धिदशेन्द्रियसमन्वितम्
अपञ्चीकृतभूतोत्थं सूक्ष्माङ्गं भोगसाधनम् ॥१३॥

The subtle body (सूक्ष्म शरीरम्) is a composite of five physiological *prāṇa-s*, five organs of perception (ज्ञानेन्द्रियाणि), five organs of action (कर्मेन्द्रियाणि) the mind and intellect (अन्तःकरणः). The subtle body is a product of non-grossified five elements. It is the instrument through which the *jīva* goes through all its experiences (भोगसाधनम्).

अनाद्यविद्याऽनिर्वाच्या कारणोपाधिरुच्यते
उपाधित्रितयादन्यमात्मानमवधारयेत् ॥१४॥

The causal body (कारण शरीरम्) is also known by different names such as *Prakṛti*, the beginning-less seed of the gross and subtle bodies, the cause of the entire manifest universe, original ignorance, of inexplicable nature, *Māyā* etc.

The above mentioned three bodies with their attributes are superimposed on the pure, clear *Brahman/Ātmā*. Out of ignorance,

the *jīva*-s go through repeated birth and death cycles with all their binding experiences.

The same three bodies from another angle can be divided into five sheaths (पञ्च कोशाः). The five sheaths of the *jīva* have also been explained in detail in Tattvabodhaḥ commentary.

पञ्चकोशादियोगेन तत्तन्मय इव स्थितः
शुद्धात्मा नीलवस्त्रादियोगेन स्फटिको यथा ॥१५॥

Brahman/Ātmā though pure like crystal, in association with the five (अन्नमयः प्राणमयः मनोमयः विज्ञानमयः आनन्दमयः) *kosha*-s, seems to get sullied by the qualities of each of these *kosha*-s just as a pure, colourless crystal appears blue because of a blue cloth next to it. The ‘blue-ness’ belongs to the cloth and not to the crystal.

The transference of a quality of something else on to another is called *adhyāsaḥ* (अध्यासः) or superimposition.

After having talked about the three bodies and the five *kosha*-s as *anātmā* (not the real ‘I’), Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya goes on to talk about how to understand the difference between the *Ātmā* and *anātmā*.

Vedānta says that the real cause of all bondage of every *jīva* is the superimposition (अध्यासः) of the *anātmā upādhi* on to the blemish-less *Brahman/Ātmā* (‘I’). The only way out of this bondage is through ‘*Ātma-anātmā vivekaḥ*’ (आत्म-अनात्म विवेकः) which is the subject matter of the next few verses.

Let us see what our scriptures say about this enquiry. When one says ‘I’, this includes five aspects - the gross body, the subtle body, the

causal body (स्थूलसूक्ष्मकारण शरीराणि), the individuality or ego (अहंकारः) and the Witness Consciousness/Awareness (साक्षिचैतन्य आत्मा). All the five are so closely associated that there is always confusion about who is the real 'I'. Vedānta explains that the first four are mere attributes (उपाधि) and not the real 'I'. An *upādhi* is a product of matter - it appears at a period in time and undergoes changes and ultimately disappears. *Upādhi* is also an object of perception (पाञ्चभौतिक, अनित्य, सविकारी, दृश्य). Anything which has the above characteristics is only of empirical existence and not the real truth. Therefore, these four aspects of 'myself' are called *anātmā* (अनात्मा) and all *anātmā* is empirical - *mithyā* (मिथ्या).

However, the Witness Consciousness (साक्षिचैतन्य आत्मा) is of the nature of pure Consciousness - present in all periods of time, does not undergo any change and is not an object of perception but the very subject itself (चैतन्य स्वरूप, नित्य, निर्विकारी, दृग् स्वरूपः). *Brahman/Ātmā* exists independently and supports the entire *anātmā*; hence it is called the absolute truth (सत्यम्). *Satyam* is the very support (अधिष्ठानम्) and the entire *anātmā* is the supported (अध्यस्थम्). In a nutshell, this is the '*Ātma-anātmā vivekaḥ*' (आत्म-अनात्म विवेकः).

Now Ātmabodhaḥ talks about the same, giving an example.

वपुस्तुषादिभिः कोशैर्युक्तं युक्त्यवघाततः
आत्मानमन्तरं शुद्धं विविच्यात्तण्डुलं यथा ॥१६॥

Just as the rice grain is covered with layers of husk, 'I' (साक्षिचैतन्य आत्मा) is, as though, surrounded by layers of *anātmā* (अनात्मा). To extract the rice grain, one has to carefully pound the paddy and denude the grain of all its layers of husk. Similarly, a very careful and logical enquiry as

guided by the *Shruti* (Vedānta) has to be done to discriminate *anātmā* from *Ātmā*. Upaniṣhad-s give another example of the *muñjā* grass. It has a very sweet central stem surrounded by spiky and thorny layers of grass. The outer layers have to be very carefully removed to get to the central sweet-core of the *muñjā* without damaging it.

It has already been explained in the verse 9 that this 'I' (साक्षिचैतन्य आत्मा) is all-pervading Existence/Consciousness (सर्वगत सत्-चित् आत्मा). If so, why is it not seen objectively everywhere? This doubt is clarified in the next verse.

सदा सर्वगतोऽप्यात्मा न सर्वत्रावभासते
बुद्धावेवावभासेत स्वच्छेषु प्रतिबिम्बवत् ॥१७॥

Consciousness (*Brahman/Ātmā*) is all-pervading and the very support of everything in the universe. Then, why is it not obviously seen? Vedānta says that *Brahman/Ātmā* is the very Consciousness in the perceiver and not an object of perception. The sense-organs or the mind cannot objectify the *Brahman/Ātmā* unlike any other object in the world. However, for a sharp, pure and focused intellect, it is easily available for understanding.

Sunlight is all-pervading but cannot be reflected by all the objects. However, a pure reflecting surface like a clean mirror can reflect the sunlight. A reflection in a dirty mirror will not have the same clarity. Similarly, a prepared and focused intellect reflects the Witness Consciousness like the bright reflection on a clean mirror. *Buddhiḥ* or intellect of a *jīva* is explained as the locus of availability (उपलब्धि स्थानम्) to understand the presence of the Witness Consciousness. This instrument - the intellect, has to be without any dirt (शुद्ध अन्तःकरणः). In

Kathopanishad, Lord Yama the teacher, says that “This Consciousness is not available for perception. It can only be understood by a sharp and focused intellect (दृश्यते तु अग्रया बुद्ध्या सूक्ष्मया सूक्ष्मदर्शिभिः).”

In the next verse, Ātmabodhaḥ says, that, though this Witness Consciousness (*Brahman/Ātmā*) is so closely available within the body, It is not involved in the functioning of the *anātmā*.

देहेन्द्रियमनोबुद्धिप्रकृतिभ्यो विलक्षणम्
तद्वृत्तिसाक्षिणं विद्यादात्मानं राजवत्सदा ॥१८॥

Brahman/Ātmā is other than the body-mind-sense complex and is the very Witness of all the functions of the same. All the actions and functions at the level of the body-mind-sense complex are happening only because they are lighted up and given existence in the mere presence of the *Brahman/Ātmā* (साक्षिचैतन्य आत्मा). Here, an example is given of a king. The king does not need to do anything or involve himself in any activity. His mere presence and watchful gaze is enough to make the entire kingdom do what everyone is supposed to do.

A possible doubt arises here. It is seen that the body-mind-sense complex, as an active group, is engaged in action all the time. There must then be an active doer of all the actions and an enjoyer of the results of such actions. Who is this? Could this be *Ātmā*? Ātmabodhaḥ says that *Ātmā* is neither a doer nor an enjoyer (अकर्ता अभोक्ता).

व्यापृतेष्विन्द्रियेष्वात्मा व्यापारीवाविवेकिनाम्
दृश्यतेऽभ्रेषु धावत्सु धावन्निव यथा शशी ॥१९॥

The *Brahman/Ātmā* is in and through all the sense-organs and their functions, but not really an integral part of them. Those people who are not able to discriminate between *Ātmā* and *anātmā* ascribe all activities of the body-mind-sense complex to be happening in the *Ātmā*. Vedānta says, 'there is absolutely no doer-ship or enjoyer-ship in *Ātmā*. All perceived movement in *Ātmā* is only an illusion'.

A very apt example is given to explain this concept. When the clouds are moving in the background of a bright moon, it appears that the moon itself is moving. It is actually the movement of the clouds which is falsely superimposed upon the moon which is just in its place. Similarly, all the activities of the body-mind-sense complex are falsely superimposed on the *akartā abhoktā* (अकर्ता अभोक्ता) *Ātmā*.

If this is so, how can a non-sentient body-mind-sense complex carry on its designated functions so accurately and in a harmonious fashion?

आत्मचैतन्यमाश्रित्य देहेन्द्रियमनोधियः
स्वक्रियार्थेषु वर्तन्ते सूर्यलोकं यथा जनाः ॥२०॥

Ātmabodhaḥ says that the body-mind-sense complex has the capacity to borrow sentience from the *Brahman/Ātmā* and with the borrowed sentience carries on all its activities. An example of sunlight is given here. As the morning dawns and sunlight starts pervading the earth, all the living beings including plants automatically get into their designated activities. Sunlight is a mere witness and by its presence

makes the whole world function. However, the sunlight itself never gets sullied by either the actions or the results of actions of the living beings.

Similarly, *Ātmā* is ever un-involved in any of the actions of *anātmā* and never gets influenced by them. This nature of *Ātmā* is called *avikriyatvam* (अविक्रियत्वम्).

Now, the questions that a seeker may ask are-

1. Is *Ātmā* totally different from the body-mind-sense complex? If so, then the very message of *Advaita* is at stake because there will be two things,
2. Is *Ātmā* same as the body-mind-sense complex? If so, then all the attributes such as change, death etc will apply to *Ātmā* also.
3. Is *Ātmā* partly different and partly same as the body-mind-sense complex? If so then, it brings about a logical fallacy in it.

The above mentioned ideas form the basis of various philosophies proposed by different philosophers (भेद वादः, अभेद वादः, भेदाभेद वादः). Vedānta strongly says that neither of the three is correct with respect to *Ātmā*. This is explained in the next verse.

देहेन्द्रियगुणान्कर्माण्यमले सच्चिदात्मनि
अध्यस्यन्त्यविवेकेन गगने नीलतादिवत् ॥२१॥

So, what is the relationship between *Ātmā* and the body-mind-sense complex?

We see the sky. It is nothing but space. However, it looks blue. It looks like a dome. It also looks as if it is associated with clouds and dirt. If we look deeply into this phenomenon; is the sky really a dome? Is it really blue? Does it really have dirt and clouds associated with it? None of these qualities are really associated with the sky. It is absolutely un-tainted (निर्लेपः). All the qualities of shape, blueness, dirty appearance, cloudiness are superimposed on the sky by our intellect.

In the same way *Ātmā* - 'I', is taintless and blemish-less. It is neither connected nor un-connected with the body-mind-sense complex. All the actions of the complex such as speaking, moving, seeing, eating, breathing belong to the complex and are falsely superimposed upon the *Ātmā*.

When I say "I am speaking", the speaking action is happening in the organ of speech which borrows the capacity to speak from the *Ātmā*, but the *Ātmā* is by itself neither the speaker nor the organ of speech.

We can understand it better with a common example of a movie being projected on a screen. The screen is neither different, nor the same nor a mixture of both with regard to the movie. The screen is a mere support for the projection of the movie. The screen is neither involved nor affected by the movie, but in its absence, the projection does not take place. This is called superimposition (अध्यासः). *Ātmā* is the support (अधिष्ठानम्) for the projection and the body-mind-sense complex is the projected (अध्यस्थम्).

Similarly, all doer-ship, enjoyer-ship, emotions, experiences of happiness etc; are only superimpositions on the pure crystal-like Consciousness (*Ātmā*) - 'I' (आत्मचैतन्यम्).

Talking further about the superimposition of the body-mind-sense complex and its attributes over the pure, blemish-less *Ātmā*, Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya explains that the experiences such as "I am happy", "I am unhappy", "I did this", "I experienced such and such an emotion" etc; are all the time seen in all our transactions in our daily living. However, these experiences and emotions are not the intrinsic nature of *Ātmā*, but belong to the *pañcha kosha-s*. Why does this superimposition of the properties of *anātmā* on *Ātmā* take place?

अज्ञानान्मानसोपाधेः कर्तृत्वादीनि चात्मनि
कल्पन्तेऽम्बुगते चन्द्रे चलनादि यथाम्भसः ॥२२॥

When a reflection of the moon is seen in a moving water body, it looks as if the reflection itself is moving. This happens purely out of an illusion born out of ignorance and the nature of the mind to see the movement of water on the reflection.

Similarly, *Ātmā* is totally free of any attributes. But due to the deluded intellect, the *Ātmā* is always subject to the superimposition of attributes of the *anātmā* (body-mind-sense complex). Thus, "I am the doer", "I am the experiencer" etc; are falsely superimposed on 'I'.

Now a question may arise - how can we say that all the above experiences belong to the *pañcha kosha-s* and not the *Ātmā*?

रागेच्छासुखदुःखादि बुद्धौ सत्यां प्रवर्तते
सुषुप्तौ नास्ति तन्नाशे तस्माद्बुद्धेस्तु नात्मनः ॥२३॥

All the emotions such as desire, happiness, sorrow and any other emotion belong to the mind and intellect (अन्तःकरणः) not to the Witness Consciousness - *Ātmā*. How can one confirm this?

It is common experience that all our emotions, thoughts, doer-ship and enjoyer-ship are only found during the waking state and to some extent in the dream state. In deep-sleep state, none of these thoughts and emotions are experienced. This is because; the mind and intellect are folded up into a seed form in deep-sleep. Once, one wakes up, all the thoughts and emotions reappear with their full force. If they belonged to the *Ātmā*, they would be there permanently, irrespective of whether one was awake or asleep.

This method of explaining a particular phenomenon of co-presence and co-absence of two things is called the logic of *anvaya-vyatireka* (अन्वय व्यतिरेक). This is an important module of teaching in Vedānta.

In that case, what then is the real nature of *Ātmā* (आत्म स्वरूपः)?

प्रकाशोऽर्कस्य तोयस्य शैत्यमग्नेर्यथोष्णता
स्वभावः सच्चिदानन्दनित्यनिर्मलताऽऽत्मनः ॥२४॥

The nature (स्वभावः) of anything is its natural state-of-being. This means that the natural state does not change at any period of time. The nature of Sun is to emit light which is an inherent quality of the Sun and this inherent nature does not change at any time or place. Similarly, the nature of water is coolness, irrespective of where it is,

the inherent nature does not change. Of course, in the presence of heat, the temperature of water may go up, but comes back to its original temperature once it is away from the fire. Similarly, fire is hot even in the coldest of the places. Thus light, coolness and heat are the natural qualities of sun, water and fire respectively and they cannot be stripped of their inherent nature.

In the same way, the inherent nature (स्वभावः) of *Ātmā* is existence, awareness-Consciousness and completeness. It is imperishable, infinite and ever pure/untainted. Anything other than the above mentioned nature, is a temporary superimposition on the *Ātmā* due to delusion.

If this is the nature of *Ātmā*, then, what is the mechanism of cognition in the form of “I know...”?

आत्मनः सच्चिदंशश्च बुद्धेर्वृत्तिरिति द्वयम्
संयोज्य चाविवेकेन जानामीति प्रवर्तते ॥२५॥

In any experience, the experiencer is able to say “I know this...”. This is called cognition. Cognition is nothing but a thought which belongs to the intellect (बुद्धिवृत्तिः) and the mind/ intellect are nothing but a flow of thoughts which go on ceaselessly like waves on the surface of a water body. We already know that the thoughts are insentient (जडः). In this situation, the existence/Consciousness (सच्चिदंशः) associates with the insentient thoughts. Such an association, of a thought, with borrowed consciousness (वृत्ति चित् संयोगः), is experienced by the *jīva* as “I know”. This association between them is not real because an insentient thought cannot really associate with Consciousness (*Ātmā*) just like light and darkness cannot co-exist together. Then, how can

this association be perceived? Ātmabodhaḥ says that such an association is also a false projection (अध्यासः) due to ignorance of the true nature of *Ātmā*.

The intellect (the most suitable and subtle medium) reflects the *Ātma-chaitanyam*. This reflection, thus formed in the intellect, is called the reflected consciousness (आभास चैतन्यम्). The reflection makes the reflecting medium (the intellect) bright and sentient. The *vr̥tti*-s of the intellect are hence, capable of cognizing the experience - as explained in Vedānta.

We saw in the verses 24 and 25 that the process of cognition is due to a superimposed association between the insentient intellect and the *chit* aspect (चिदंशः) of Consciousness. It was also explained that the actual association between *Ātmā* with any other is not possible because Consciousness is incapable of being tainted or blemished by *anātmā*. The same is explained in detail in the next few verses with examples.

आत्मनो विक्रिया नास्ति बुद्धेर्बोधो न जात्विति
जीवः सर्वमलं ज्ञात्वा कर्ता द्रष्टेति मुंह्यति ॥२६॥

Ātmā being pure Consciousness principle has no process of change in it. We should remember that only matter principle has inherent potential for change. Any change requires movement and *Ātmā* being all-pervading and without any movement (सर्वगतः, अचलः, स्थाणुः in Lord Kṛṣṇa's words in Bhagawadgītā), is incapable of any change whatsoever. If so, how is Consciousness involved in the process of cognition - which involves constant changes, in what is known?

Similarly, intellect is matter principle, however subtle a matter it may be. Being matter, it is *anātmā* which is insentient (जडः). How can any sentient process such as 'knowing' happen in the insentient intellect?

Vedānta says that this process of mutual superimposition of sentience on *anātmā* and change on *Ātmā* is called *Anyonya tādātmyam* (अन्योन्य तादात्म्यम्). This happens due to delusion or confusion between the two. Why does this confusion take place? Vedānta says that it is due to a very intimate closeness or proximity of *Ātmā* and *anātmā*. It is this confusion because of which 'I' the *Ātmā* is misunderstood to be a doer and enjoyer (कर्ता/भोक्ता). Therefore, anything else that is associated with this confused 'I' becomes 'mine'.

In this regard, the classical example of perceiving a rope as a snake is always quoted in almost all the Vedāntic works.

रज्जुसर्पवदात्मानं जीवं ज्ञात्वा भयं वहेत्
नाहं जीवः परात्मेति ज्ञातश्चेन्निर्भयो भवेत् ॥२७॥

When a rope is seen in dim light, there is always a chance of mistaking it for many other things. One may perceive it as a snake, a hose pipe, a garland of flowers, a stick or a crack in the ground. The false perception is due to ignorance of the reality of the rope in dim light. If one perceives it as a snake, it can invoke a sense of fear and the person may run away. Once the reality of the rope is understood (rope is understood as rope) by bringing in light, the fear disappears.

Similarly, the ever-free, blemish-less *Ātmā* is perceived as a doer, and enjoyer in a bound *jīva* because of the ignorance of the true nature of 'I' the *Ātmā*. Hence, one suffers the bondage of *samsāra*. Bondage is

nothing but fear and insecurity brought on by the superimposition of the ever-changing *anātmā* on the changeless *Ātmā*. Just as bringing in light shows the rope as rope, bringing in the light of Knowledge by the study of Vedānta (शास्त्र प्रमाणम्) through a competent teacher reveals the true nature of *Ātmā* (नित्य शुद्ध बुद्ध आत्मा अहमस्मि). When One Knows Oneself to be the ever-free Consciousness, all the superimposition disappears and so does the bondage and fear of *samsāra*.

In the next verse the importance and the need of शास्त्र प्रमाणम् in knowing the true nature of the Self is explained.

आत्मावभासयत्येको बुद्ध्यादीनीन्द्रियाण्यपि
दीपो घटादिवत्स्वात्मा जडैस्तैर्नावभास्यते ॥२८॥

Consciousness (*Ātmā*) is the very perceiver and lights up all the perceived objects. No object can light up or indicate the perceiver Consciousness. That means, the Self cannot be revealed as an object by the intellect. That (*Ātmā*), which reveals the very intellect itself, cannot be revealed by the intellect. Thus, *Ātmā* is not an object that can be defined and understood by any sense-organ including the intellect. The very existence and functioning of the sense-organs and the mind is revealed by the *Ātmā*. The example given here in this verse is a very practical day-to-day example. A source of light like a lamp can reveal an object like a pot. Can the pot reveal the light? A subject only can reveal an object and not vice versa. If no sense-organ or mind can reveal the nature of the perceiving Consciousness, then one needs a means of knowledge (प्रमाणम्) which can reveal the very revealer. Such a means of Knowledge is Vedānta (शास्त्रम्). This has

to be dealt with by a competent teacher who knows how to wield this instrument.

Now Ātmabodhaḥ says;

स्वबोधे नन्यबोधेच्छा बोधरूपतयाऽऽत्मनः
न दीपस्यान्यदीपेच्छा यथा स्वात्मप्रकाशने ॥ २९ ॥

The perceiver Consciousness does not need any other revealer to reveal it. It reveals itself and simultaneously everything else. A source of light does not need another light to reveal it. *Ātmā* reveals itself when the appropriate प्रमाणम् (means of knowledge) is used. Vedānta is that means of Knowledge.

In that case why does one not understand oneself to be the very *Ātmā*? Ātmabodhaḥ explains that it is because of the close association with the body-mind-sense complex. One has to make an effort to understand and remove the limitation caused by the superimposed *upādhi*, the body-mind-sense complex and come face to face with the self-revealing *Ātmā*.

It should be observed that the scriptures use many words to indicate the Witness Consciousness - *Ātmā*, *Brahman*, *Sākṣi Chaitanyam*, 'I', *Aham*, *Paramātmā*, *Sat*, *Chit* (पर्याय पदानि).

निषिध्य निखिलोपाधीन् नेति नेतीति वाक्यतः
विद्यादैक्यं महावाक्यैर्जीवात्मपरमात्मनोः ॥ ३० ॥

Vedānta reveals the nature of *Ātmā* by negating any name, form, action or any other attribute superimposed upon it by the well-known statement 'not this...not this' (नेति नेति). It means that any object

that is identified and perceived with a name, form and any type of attribute is not the Witness Consciousness. When all the perceived name-form-attribute *upādhi-s* (दृष्ठाणि) of the *jagat* are negated, the very perceiver Consciousness (दृग्) alone remains. Vedānta says that this perceiver Consciousness is the *Ātmā*; the real Self. This is the very support of the entire universe usually referred to as *Brahman* or *Paramātmā*. All the *Mahāvākya-s* indicate the non-difference between the individual Witness Consciousness (*Ātmā*) and *Brahman/Paramātmā*. The oft quoted *Mahāvākya-s* are – “प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म” from ऐतरेय उपनिषद्, “अहं ब्रह्मास्मि” from बृहदारण्यक उपनिषद्, “अयमात्मा ब्रह्म” from माण्डूक्य उपनिषद् and “तत्त्वमसि” from छान्दोग्य उपनिषद्.

The committed pursuit of understanding the *Ātmā/Brahman/Paramātmā* in this way is called *jñānayoḡaḥ* (ज्ञानयोगः). It involves three steps –

1. Committed listening (श्रवणम्)
2. Ruminating over that which is heard to make the knowledge doubt free (मननम्)
3. Contemplating on the *Mahāvākya-s* through-out one’s life (निदिध्यासनम्)

In the next verse *Ātmabodhaḥ* stresses on what is to be known through the study of the *Mahāvākya-s* as described in the scriptures;

आविद्यकं शरीरादि दृश्यं बुद्बुदवत्क्षरम्
एतद्विलक्षणं विद्यादहं ब्रह्मेति निर्मलम् ॥३१॥

Vedānta ultimately conveys in various ways that the entire *jagat* including one's body-mind-sense complex is only an empirical appearance like bubbles in water. Just as bubbles appear and disappear in water, the *upādhi* is perishable and appears as 'me' and 'mine' out of sheer ignorance of one's real nature. This is very similar to projecting a snake on a rope, out of ignorance. However, the Self, 'I' is other than the body-mind-sense complex and of the nature of pure, untainted Consciousness absolutely free from all the superimposed *upādhi-s* and 'I' am none other than *Brahman*, the very support (अधिष्ठानम्) of all the *upādhi-s*.

Now Ātmabodhaḥ talks about the process of मननम् on how 'I' the Witness Consciousness is other than the body-mind-sense complex.

देहान्यत्वान्न मे जन्म जराकार्श्यलयादयः
शब्दादिविषयैः सङ्गो निरिन्द्रियतया न च ॥३२॥

'I' the Witness Consciousness being other than the gross body, is not subject to birth and death like the gross body. Similarly, all the changes that happen to the gross body between birth and death such as growth, ageing, weakening (भाव-षड्विकाराः) are not the nature of the *Ātmā*. Thus, 'I' am not born, age or die. These are the attributes of the gross body which are superimposed upon it. At the same time, the *Ātmā* also is not in any way connected to the objects of the world as it is not associated with any sense organ. Thus, when one says "I see", "I hear", "I Talk", "I grasp", none of these actions are happening in *Ātmā*, but the actions of the sense organs are superimposed upon the *Ātmā*. I am देह इन्द्रिय विलक्षण आत्मा.

If 'I' am other than the body and sense organs, am 'I' the mind with all its emotions and thoughts?

अमनस्त्वान्नमे दुःखरागद्वेषभयादयः
अप्राणो ह्यमनाः शुभ्र इत्यादिश्रुतिशासनात् ॥३३॥

Muṇḍakopanishad, explains the *Ātmā* to be free of all emotions such as like, dislike, happiness, unhappiness, doubt, decisiveness, faith, fear etc. Disturbances in the *prāṇa* do not make the *Ātmā* exhausted, sick or tired. All the above are the afflictions of the mind and the *prāṇamayah koshah* and not of *Ātmā* (पञ्चकोश विलक्षण आत्मा). If they belonged to *Ātmā*, then, the afflictions would be felt in deep-sleep also! The fact that none of these afflictions are present during deep-sleep shows that these belong to the mind and intellect.

So then what is my true nature?

निर्गुणो निष्क्रियो नित्यो निर्विकल्पो निरञ्जनः
निर्विकारो निराकारो नित्यमुक्तोऽस्मि निर्मलः ॥३४॥

I am attribute-less. No action happens in me. I am imperishable, changeless, indivisible and unblemished. I am formless, ever-free and pure Witness Consciousness. This is the contemplation (निदिध्यासनम्) that Vedānta talks about; which should be done ceaselessly.

In the previous verses, *Ātmā* was described in its true nature – It is not available as an object of perception to the senses, that which has no attributes (निर्गुणः), that which has no form (निराकारः) and action-less (निष्क्रियः). Then, there is a possibility of inferring that *Ātmā* is nothingness (शून्यः). This is the tenet of a branch of Buddhist philosophy that

nothing-ness is the stuff of this universe. Our scriptures prove that the basis (अधिष्ठानम्) of this universe is existence-Consciousness which is a positive entity, a presence which pulsates in every living being as 'I am', 'I am'. It is available in and through every non-living being as the 'is-ness'.

This is what the next few verses try to explain-

अहमाकाशवत्सर्वं बहिरन्तर्गतोच्युतः ।
सदा सर्वसमः सिद्धो निस्सङ्गो निर्मलोऽचलः ॥३५॥

This verse explains the Awareness-Consciousness as the very *adhishthānam* (अधिष्ठानम्) of the individual explained in the vedāntic literature as the meaning of the word 'You' (त्वम् पद). This Consciousness, manifests in every individual as 'I am' (अहम् अस्मि). What is the nature of this *aham* (अहम्)? Vedānta says that 'I am' the Consciousness which pervades the whole universe inside out. This is a positive entity which never wears out or subject to any loss. It is present everywhere homogenously as the inner-dweller and controller of every living being (अन्तर्यामी). Vedānta gives the example of space and light to illustrate the all-pervading Consciousness principle. Like space and light, though present in and through every living being, Consciousness is not tainted by the defects of the objects it pervades. It is un-involved, ever-pure and blemish-less. Being all-pervading, it is steady and has no movement. Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣhad explains the same in verse 23.5 -- अन्तर्बहिश्च तत्सर्वं व्याप्य नारायणः स्थितः and in Bhagawadgītā chapter 13 verse 15 -- बहिरन्तश्च भूतानाम् अचरं चरमेव च ।

Now, the same Consciousness is explained from the point of view of *Īshwara* (तत् पद) and also the one-ness of the individual and *Īshwara* (जीवेश्वर ऐक्यम्).

नित्यशुद्धविमुक्तैकमखण्डानन्दमद्वयम् ।
सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं यत्परं ब्रह्माहमेव तत् ॥३६॥

Brahman, which is the अधिष्ठानम् of this entire universe, referred as तत् पद is the existence Consciousness which is eternal (that which is not limited by time). It is ever-pure and blemish-less, not being afflicted by the universe it pervades. It is ever-free; not limited by time and space. It is one unbroken, indivisible existence without a second. It pervades everything. The whole universe exists in it. It is infinite, complete and total. It is the very existence, Consciousness and the infinite which is the very crux of the entire manifest universe. The most important thing to note here is that it is not different from 'Me'—I am that very *Brahman* (ब्रह्माहमेव).

By repeated listening, constant rumination and contemplation over the one-ness of the *jīva* and *Īshwara* (महावाक्यः) one is able to abide in one's true nature. For such abidance in *Ātmā*, preparation of the mind is extremely important. A focused and sharp intellect alone can understand the true purport of the *Mahāvākya*. Such a complete understanding releases the person from the grip of ignorance and its consequences. The next verse says -

एवं निरन्तराभ्यस्ता ब्रह्मैवास्मीति वासना ।
हरत्यविद्याविक्षेपात्रोगानिव रसायनम् ॥३७॥

By constant practice of *jñānayoḡaḥ* (श्रवणम् मननम् निदिध्यासनम्), the oneness of *jīva* and *Brahman* is clearly understood. This clear understanding is capable of destroying the delusion born out of ignorance of one's true nature. Such clear understanding is compared to a medicine here. When the correct medicine is given in correct dosage for a specific disease, the disease is cured. Self-ignorance is the disease, which robs a person, of the reality of his unlimited nature and manifests with symptoms of delusion and sorrow. The only medicine for this disease is Self-Knowledge.

What is contemplation? This topic is very suitably dealt in the 6th chapter of *Bhagawadgītā*. Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya summarises the entire chapter in a few verses -

विविक्तदेश आसीनो विरागो विजितेन्द्रियः ।
भावयेदेकमात्मानं तमनन्तमनन्यधीः ॥३८॥

Nididhyāsanam or contemplation is the process of assimilation of what one has heard from the Guru. The Guru explains the purport of Vedānta, which is nothing other than जीवेश्वर ऐक्यम्, explained by the महावाक्यम्—“तत् त्वम् असि”. Lord Kṛṣṇa in *Bhagawadgītā* calls it *Dhyānayoḡaḥ*. Initially, it requires the contemplator to follow certain disciplines. A few of them are explained here - sitting in a quiet place where one is not disturbed by the surroundings (like the banks of a river, a hill or a quiet corner in one's own home). The contemplator then, has to withdraw his sense-organs and focus only on the 'I am' which is constantly pulsating in every *jīva*, to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

How does one do it is explained in the next verse.

In the next few verses, Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya talks about the method of contemplation (निदिध्यासनम् or ध्यानः). The 6th chapter of the Bhagawadgītā explains the preparatory steps for contemplation - as internal and external preparatory steps (अन्तरङ्गसाधनानि and बहिरङ्गसाधनानि). The external preparations (बहिरङ्गसाधनानि) include finding an appropriate place where the mind can contemplate without any distractions. The next step is to have a comfortable seat (आसनम्) for one-self. The next is to sit in a comfortable position (सुखासनम्) and keep the body straight from the neck down to the entire spine.

The internal preparations (अन्तरङ्गसाधनानि) include dispassion (वैराग्यम्) towards the objects of the world and withdrawing the sense-organs, to rest the mind (उपरम). Then the actual process starts - of focusing the mind on the meaning of the word 'I' (आत्मा) and its inseparable nature from 'That' (ब्रह्मन्). Ultimately, the contemplation becomes so ingrained and undisturbed that the meaning of the *Mahāvākya* becomes a constant and effortless flow known as 'abiding in one's nature' (समाधिः or ज्ञान निष्ठा).

Now, the entire process of contemplation is discussed briefly in the next few verses-

आत्मन्येवाखिलं दृश्यं प्रविलाप्य धिया सुधीः ।
भावयेदेकमात्मानं निर्मलाकाशवत्सदा ॥३९॥

The process described here is resolving the entire experienced universe (दृश्य जगत्) into the experiencer Consciousness (साक्षि चैतन्य आत्मा), technically called *kārya kāraṇa pravilāpanam* (कार्य कारण प्रविलापनम्) by the scriptures. This starts from the gross universe and the focus is gradually directed inwards till the mind abides in the 'I' - the Witness

Consciousness. Here, Ātmabodhaḥ gives a simile of clear sky to the Witness 'I' in which the meditator/contemplator (सुधीः) sees Himself, free from all the attributes of the body-mind-sense complex.

What is meant by 'free from all the attributes' is explained in the next verse-

रूपवर्णादिकं सर्वं विहाय परमार्थवित् ।
परिपूर्णाचिदानन्दस्वरूपेणावतिष्ठते ॥४०॥

The *nididhyāsaka* practices to abide in his true nature devoid of all the attributes which he has superimposed upon himself. Normally, the tendency in every one of us is to identify one-self with the attributes of the body-mind-sense complex; such as "I am fat", "I am sick", "I am healthy", "I am blind", "I am smart", "I am dull", "I am sad", "I am happy". Vedānta says that all these are the attributes of the *anātmā* (body-mind-sense complex) and 'I' in my true nature is in no way afflicted by these attributes (उपाधि धर्माः). Similarly, one identifies with a few objects and people of the world as 'mine' and gets affected by the external attributes (उपाधि धर्माः). *Nididhyāsanam* (निदिध्यासनम्) is the process in which one gets rid of the false identification with the *anātmā* and sees the clear and attribute-less (निर्गुणः) and infinite Consciousness (परिपूर्णाचिदानन्दस्वरूपः) as His true nature.

What kind of an abidance or समाधिः is it? This is explained in the next verse-

ज्ञानज्ञातृज्ञेयभेदः परे नात्मनि विद्यते ।
चिदानन्दैकरूपत्वाद्दीप्यते स्वयमेव तत् ॥४१॥

In any cognition/knowledge, three entities are invariable; the knower, the process of knowing and the known object (ज्ञातृ-ज्ञान-ज्ञेय). Vedānta says that when one is deeply abiding in the *Ātmā* (परिपूर्णचिदानन्दस्वरूपः), the subject-object division in the form of the above three components known as *tripuṭi* (त्रिपुटि) disappears and one constant, unbroken, indivisible Consciousness reveals itself. This is what is called as *Nirvikalpa samādhiḥ* / *Ātma nishthā* / *Jñāna nishthā* (निर्विकल्प समाधिः/आत्म निष्ठा /ज्ञान निष्ठा).

What is the ultimate result of such a *nishthā* in the self?

एवमात्मारणौ ध्यानमथने सततं कृते ।
उदितावगतिर्ज्वाला सर्वाज्ञानेन्धनं दहेत् ॥४२॥

In the Vedic times, fire was kindled by rubbing two pieces of wood together. The lower piece had a small depression and the upper piece would be churned in the depression of the lower piece. This friction would give rise to sparks and such sparks were caught by cotton or camphor and the ritualistic fire was lighted. The pieces of wood were called *Araṇī* (अरणी) and the process of churning was called *Araṇī mathanam* (अरणी मथनम्). Hence, *nididhyāsanam* (निदिध्यासनम्) is compared to this churning process. The intellect is actually churning in itself, the teaching of Vedānta over and over again till firm knowledge is born. Fire, born out of this churning is compared to the light of Knowledge and Ātmabodhaḥ says that this process of *nididhyāsanam* burns away all the effects of self-ignorance. In Bhagawadgītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa says, “ज्ञानाग्निं सर्व कर्माणि भस्मसात् कुरुते” (chapter 4, verse 27).

अरुणेनेव बोधेन पूर्व सन्तमसे हते ।
तत आविभवेदात्मा स्वयमेवांशुमानिव ॥४३॥

Aruṇa is the charioteer (*sārathi*) of *Sūrya Bhagawān*. It is said that *Aruṇa* arrives first and removes the darkness before the Sun appears. Sun does not need any other light to reveal it, being self-revealing. Similarly, this knowledge assimilated by *nididhyāsanam* - removes the darkness of ignorance and the light of Consciousness shines in its pristine glory.

In the last verse, Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya illustrates that like the dawn, Self-Knowledge destroys the self-ignorance and *Ātmā* which is 'I' shines by itself.

Ātmā is the ever known awareness-Consciousness which pulsates in every *jīva* as 'I am', 'I am'. If it is ever-present and existing, why is it that one does not know it? Vedānta says that no *jīva* lacks the *Ātma-anubhava* (आत्म अनुभव), but does not know that what I constantly experience as 'I am', 'I am' is the *Brahman*. In this regard, Ātmabodhaḥ gives a common example of a false notion of losing one's necklace when it is still around the neck.

आत्मा तु सततं प्राप्तो अप्यप्राप्तवद्विद्यया ।
तन्नाशे प्राप्तवद्भाति स्वकण्ठाभरणं यथा ॥४४॥

The true nature of my Self is as though veiled by ignorance. The consequence of such ignorance is the delusion as to who I really am. Lord Kṛṣṇa says in *Bhagawadgītā*—“अज्ञानेनावृतम् ज्ञानं तेन मुह्यन्ति जन्तवः”. Once, the ignorance is destroyed by Knowledge, the delusion and false notions regarding my true nature also disappear revealing the

ever-present 'I' just like the necklace worn around my neck is mistaken to be lost and someone tells me that it is right around my neck. It is like finding what I already have (प्राप्तस्य प्राप्तिः). This, ever-present *Ātmā* is the experiencer of all experiences, all the time, present as the knowing Consciousness.

स्थाणौ पुरुषवद्भ्रान्त्या कृता ब्रह्मणि जीवता ।
जीवस्य तात्विके रूपे तस्मिन्दृष्टे निवर्तते ॥४५॥

If 'I am' the ever-existent *Brahman*, why do I confuse myself to be a *jīva*? *Ātmabodhaḥ* says that it is out of delusion. In semi-darkness, a stump of a tree can be mistaken for a man and the deluded person can get scared that it could be a thief. Similarly, limitless, ever-present *Ātmā* is mistaken for a limited and mortal *jīva* with all its limitations. Once the delusion is gone, the stump of a tree is seen as such. Hence, all false notions about there being a thief are removed and with it fear also is removed. What removed the delusion in this case? It is the clear understanding of the stump as a stump. Similarly, a clear understanding that – "I am the ever-present, limitless *Brahman*" and not a limited '*jīva*' - clears the delusion born of ignorance.

तत्त्वस्वरूपानुभवात् उत्पन्नं ज्ञानमञ्जसा ।
अहं ममेति चाज्ञानं बाधते दिग्भ्रमादिवत् ॥ ४६ ॥

When the true nature of 'I' is understood, notions such as 'me' and 'mine' also disappear. False identification with one's own body-mind-sense complex gives the notion of 'me' and anything connected to the 'me' is considered to be 'mine', by extension. In reality, I am not the body-mind-sense complex and nothing belongs to the 'I' or with

any object of the experienced world. Hence, 'I am' the only reality - present within and outside this *upādhi*. The example given here is that of a person who has lost the sense of direction (दिक्). The space is ever there. It is out of confusion (भ्रमा) regarding the direction that one gets lost. The right understanding gives one the correct directions. Similarly the right understanding of 'I' removes the false notions of 'me' and 'mine'.

सम्यक् विज्ञानवान् योगी स्वात्मन्येवाखिलं जगत् ।
एकं च सर्वमात्मानम् ईक्षते ज्ञानचक्षुषा ॥४७॥

How does a man of understanding, see Himself and the entire universe? Ātmabodhaḥ calls a person of the right understanding as one who has realized His true nature through the eyes of wisdom (सम्यक् विज्ञानवान्) and does not see anything different from Himself. He sees everything, whatever is here, manifest and un-manifest as arising in that Consciousness, existing in it and resolving in it. He sees Himself as that very existence of everything. This vision of seeing everything as Oneself is called *sarvātmabhāvaḥ* (सर्वात्मभावः). Kaivalya Upaniṣhad says, “मय्येव सकलं जातं मयि सर्वं प्रतिष्ठितम्। मयि सर्वं लयं याति तद्ब्रह्मास्म्यहमद्वयम् ।”

आत्मैवेदं जगत्सर्वम् आत्मनोन्यन्न विद्यते ।
मृदो यद्बद्धघटादीनि स्वात्मानं सर्वमीक्षते ॥४८॥

There is nothing other than *Ātmā*. The entire experienced universe along with the un-manifest (yet to manifest) universe of objects and people is this very *Ātmā*. *Chāndogya Upaniṣhad* uses a set of unique examples to make this point. Just as clay articles do not exist outside clay. They arise in clay, exist in clay and resolve in clay. Similarly, gold

ornaments are not different from their cause - gold. Water itself manifests as the ocean, waves, foam and bubbles. Similarly, one existence-Consciousness (आत्मा-ब्रह्मन्) manifests as this entire experienced universe. This is the vision of a wise one (ज्ञानी) who was mentioned in the previous verse as a 'person with the right vision' (सम्यक् विज्ञानवान्).

In the previous few verses, Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya described a person of the right vision with respect to His real nature - as the one with the eye of wisdom (ज्ञान चक्षुः). Such a person is also called *Jñānī* (ज्ञानी), who has understood the vision of Vedānta – 'I am that *Brahman*, not the limited body-mind-sense complex' by *Mahāvākya vichāra*. In Bhagawadgītā Lord Kṛṣṇa calls such a person by various names - स्थितप्रज्ञः, स्थिरप्रज्ञः, ज्ञानी भक्तः, धीरः etc. Vedānta calls him a *Jīvanmuktaḥ* (जीवन्मुक्तः).

Jīvanmuktaḥ is free from the bondage of *saṁsāra* here and now (in this life itself). A *Jīvanmuktaḥ* escapes the cycles of birth and death and thus, also called a *Videhamuktaḥ* (विदेहमुक्तः).

Now Ātmabodhaḥ wants to describe the *Jīvanmuktaḥ*.

जीवन्मुक्तस्तु तद्विद्वान् पूर्वोपाधिगुणान्स्त्यजेत् ।
सच्चिदानन्द रूपत्वाद् भवेद् भ्रमर कीटवत् ॥४९॥

A knower of *Ātmā* is free from *saṁsāra* here and now even as He is living in the present body-mind-sense complex itself. Such a person is called *vidwān* (विद्वान्).

Who is a *vidwān*? Vedānta says that *vidwān* (*Jīvanmuktaḥ*) is the knower of *Brahman* (knowing One-self to be that limitless, imperishable *Brahman*). A जीवन्मुक्तः gives up his identification with the *anātmā* body-mind-sense complex. Along with this, his identification as an agent of doer-ship and enjoyer-ship also disappears. He abides in his true nature constantly as that of an ever-existent Consciousness and infinite *Brahman*.

An example given in our scriptures, in this regard (in *Shrīmad Bhāgawata*) is of a worm (कीटः) picked up by a wasp and kept captive in a cocoon. The wasp also constantly pecks at the worm. It is said, that the worm is constantly thinking of the wasp and over a period of time, comes out of the cocoon as the wasp itself. This is the well-known *bhramara-kīṭa nyāyaḥ* (भ्रमर-कीट न्यायः). In the same way, a *mumukshu* constantly meditating over his true nature as *satyam-jñānam-anantam Brahman* becomes (abides) in that very *Brahman*. Vedānta says the knower of *Brahman* realizes Himself to be none other than that *Brahman* (ब्रह्मविद् ब्रह्मैव भवति).

Now Ātmabodhaḥ wants to elaborate upon the *phalam* (benefit) of this knowledge and how a *Jīvanmuktaḥ* actually lives His life.

तीर्त्वा मोहार्णवं हत्वा रागद्वेषादिराक्षसान् ।
योगी शान्तिसमायुक्त आत्मारामो विराजते ॥५०॥

An example given here is about the benefit of this Knowledge. Rāmāyaṇa is the source of this example. When Rāma loses Sītā, he has to cross over the ocean of his sorrow, by crossing a bridge. He destroys demons like, Rāvaṇa and his clan, to unite again with his consort which gave Rāma the ultimate peace of mind. The example is

very symbolic. Sītā represents the peace and happiness which is one's own nature. Rāma loses his Sītā to the demons - afflictions of the mind like desires, hate (काम क्रोधादि दुर्वसनानि). He has to ultimately cross-over these afflictions by destroying them and regain the peace and happiness which are His own nature.

Similarly a *mumukshu* called *yogī*, in this verse, has to cross-over the ocean of delusion and sorrow (मोहार्णवम्), using the teaching of Vedānta as his bridge (सेतुः) and realize the ever-lasting peace which is His very nature (आत्मारामः).

How does a *Jīvanmuktaḥ* live his life?

A *Jīvanmuktaḥ* continues to have the same body-mind-sense complex, lives in the same set of surroundings and continues to do the same things which he has been doing. In this case, what is the transformation brought about in him by this knowledge? What makes him different from a person who has not realized his true nature? This is what Arjuna asked Lord Kṛṣṇa in Bhagawadgītā, "How does a person of this Knowledge transact in this world? How does He speak? How does He sit? How does He move about?" ("स्थितप्रज्ञस्य का भाषा?"). The next verse talks about it -

बाह्यानित्यसुखासक्तिं हित्वात्मसुखनिर्वृतः ।
घटस्थदीपवत्स्वस्थः स्वान्तरेव प्रकाशते ॥५१॥

A lamp kept in a pot shines by itself within the pot and lights up the pot from within. It will not light up anything outside the pot. Similarly, a *Jīvanmuktaḥ* is disinterested in the ephemeral and momentary experiences of happiness and pleasure associated with the world of

objects. Though he is surrounded by the world with all its beauty, novelty and utility, He does not go after them. He knows the momentariness of such experiences. He is happy and contented with His own Self wherever He is and whatever is available to Him. He is not affected by the polar opposites of life in the form of gain/loss, praise/censure, happiness/unhappiness etc. He abides ever-fulfilled in Himself, leading His life as a mere instrument of *Īshwara*. Lord *Kṛṣṇa* describes the attitude of a *Jīvanmuktaḥ* in many verses scattered throughout the eighteen chapters of the *Bhagawadgītā*. A *Jīvanmuktaḥ* becomes an example to be followed by a *mumukṣhu*.

Ātmabodhaḥ described a *Jīvanmuktaḥ* in the last few verses. In the last verse, *Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya* describes Him/Her as the one who has given up entanglement with the objects of the world and revels in His/Her own nature, fulfilled and complete. How does a *Jīvanmuktaḥ* live?

उपाधिस्थोपि तद्धर्मैरलिप्तो व्योमवन्मुनिः।
सर्वविन्मूढवत्तिष्ठेदसक्तो वायुवच्चरेत् ॥५२॥

A *Jñānī* is also called a *Muniḥ*. *Muniḥ* is the one who constantly dwells upon *Brahman* (मननात् मुनिः). A *Jīvanmuktaḥ* is not affected by the body-mind-sense complex, though He is intimately associated with this *upādhi*. He has no doubt, that He, the *sat-chit-ānanda Ātmā*, is in no way affected by the doer-ship, enjoyer-ship (कर्तृत्व भोक्तृत्वम्) and the attributes such as old age and disease which belong to the *upādhi* (उपाधिधर्मैः अलिप्तः).

An example is given here - space occupied in a pot or any other object is not affected by the contents of the container. Such a *Brahmavit*

being the Knower of *Brahman* is a *Sarvajñaḥ* (सर्वज्ञः) but goes about in this world as if He knows nothing. Knowing that one thing, which is the very stuff with which the entire universe is made - He knows everything (Muṇḍakopaniṣhad 1-1-3). He moves about quietly, continuing to do whatever He did, like a quiet waft of wind - without getting affected by the direction it blows in and the smells it carries.

In the next verse, Ātmabodhaḥ talks about *videha muktiḥ* (विदेह मुक्तिः) as the natural consequence of a *Jīvanmuktaḥ*.

उपाधिविलयाद्विष्णौ निर्विशेषं विशेन्मुनिः ।
जले जलं वियद् व्योम्नि तेजस्तेजसि वा यथा ॥५३॥

What happens to a *Jīvanmuktaḥ* when He gives up His mortal body?

In an ignorant person, the physical body merges into the five gross elements and the *jīva* (the subtle body, causal body and the bundle of *sañchita karma-s*) travels in search of another body. The travelling *jīva* embodies itself, when the *prārabdha karma* fructifies and it is time for the *jīva* to experience its *karmaphala-s*. Thus, the cycle of birth and death continues infinitely for an *ajñānī jīva*.

For a *Jīvanmuktaḥ*, the ignorance is already destroyed and so the seed (*kāraṇa*) that sprouts into the subtle and gross bodies no longer exists. All His accumulated *karma-s* of millions of births have been destroyed by abidance in the *Ātma-swarūpa*. The subtle body merges into its respective subtle elements. The gross body also merges into its respective gross elements. Thus, there is no traveller left behind to come back again in search of a new body. This is called as *videha muktiḥ* (विदेह मुक्तिः) in Vedānta.

An example given here shows how effortlessly the three bodies of a *Muniḥ* (*Jīvanmuktaḥ*) just merge in their respective totality. When flowing rivers go towards the ocean, they merge effortlessly into the waters of the ocean. It is not possible to differentiate the water - of the river and that of the sea. When and where the merging of waters takes place - is not clear. When a pot breaks, when and where the pot-space becomes one with the total space - is not clear. When sparks come out of a conflagration of fire, when and where the light and heat of the sparks merge into the fire cannot be identified. Similarly, when a *Jīvanmuktaḥ* leaves His body, there is nothing left behind, no traveller *jīva* and no new body to come back to. These three examples are suitably cited in *Muṇḍakopaniṣad* and *Kathopaniṣad*.

A term *Vishṇu* is used in the verse *Vishṇau vishenmuniḥ* (विष्णौ विशेन्मुनिः). Here, the word *Vishṇu* does not mean the Lord with *śaṅkha*, *chakra*, *gadā* and *padma*. The word here means 'all-pervading' which is a synonym to *Brahman*. Some *Upaniṣad*-s especially *Kathopaniṣad*, use this word to indicate all-pervading *Brahman*. This only means that the *Jīvanmuktaḥ* becomes inseparable and one with *Brahman* when the *upādhi* disappears.

What is the nature of this *Brahman*?

यल्लाभान्नापरो लाभो यत्सुखान्नापरं सुखम् ।
यज्ज्ञानान्नापरं ज्ञानं तद्ब्रह्मेत्यवधारयेत् ॥५४॥

Chāndogya Upaniṣad says “सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म” which means that all that is here is *Brahman*. One who sees Himself as *Brahman* has attained the highest and nothing remains to be known. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*

says “यो वै भूमा तत्सुखम्”, *Brahman* is the infinite and complete. There is no fulfillment higher than *Brahman*. Bhagawadgītā says “यज्ज्ञात्वा नेह भूयोन्यज्ज्ञातव्यमवशिष्यते”. Vedānta and Bhagawadgītā vouch that *Brahman* is the highest one can think of; there is nothing more to know, nothing more to gain and nothing more complete than Knowing Oneself to be that *Brahman*. Kathopanishad says, “May you know ‘That’ to be you the *Brahman*” (“सा काष्ठा सा परागतिः”).

यद्दृष्ट्वा नापरं दृश्यं यद्भूत्वा न पुनर्भवेत् ।
यज्ज्ञात्वा नापरं ज्ञेयं तद्ब्रह्मेत्यवधारय ॥५५॥

Seeing which, nothing is left to be seen, after knowing which the desire to become something, ceases all together, and that, which is the only thing worth knowing - is that *Brahman*. It is said that, it is difficult even for *deva*-s (denizens of heaven) to Know that *Brahman*, to be Yourself.

From the verse 54, Ātmabodhaḥ asserts that the awareness-Consciousness sans all its superficial attributes is the real nature of both the *jīva* and *Īshwara*. It is this Consciousness, the subtlest of the subtle, the grossest of the gross, infinite, ever-free and imperishable is one and the only *vastu*. Everything else is nothing but an appearance or projection of a name and form. This understanding that, “I am this very Consciousness”- without a trace of doubt, frees one from the cycle of unstoppable lives and deaths.

Ātmabodhaḥ is now winding up the teaching in these last few verses.

तिर्यगूर्ध्वमधः पूर्णं सच्चिदानन्दमद्वयम् ।
अनन्तं नित्यमेकं यत्तद्ब्रह्मेत्यवधारयेत् ॥५६॥

It is this *Brahman* which is pervasive in the whole universe, as its warp and woof. Where is it? It is spread horizontally, above, below in whichever direction one looks. *Brahman* is of the nature of awareness-Consciousness, the very 'is-ness' of every name and form. It is of the nature of completeness (सत्, चित्, अनन्त रूपम् ब्रह्म). It is one without a second ("एकमेवाद्वितीयम्"). It is imperishable and infinite. If one knows this, one has understood the nature of *Brahman*.

Muṇḍakopaniṣhad (verse 2-2-12) and Chāndogyopaniṣhad (verse 7-24-1) are the *pramāṇa* for this verse of Ātmabodhaḥ which have been repeated almost verbatim here.

How does Vedānta derive at this 'One' without a second *Brahman*?

अतद्वयावृत्तिरूपेण वेदान्तैर्लक्ष्यतेऽद्वयम् ।
अखण्डानन्दमेकं यत्तद्ब्रह्मेत्यवधारयेत् ॥५७॥

Our scriptures (Vedānta) have a unique method of coming to this description of *Brahman*. It negates everything that is not *Brahman*. This means, that every object of the universe which can be objectified from the farthest of objects to one's own body-mind-sense complex (the matter principle closest to me) is negated as '*mithyā*'. *Mithyā* does not mean 'non-existent'. It only means that which has no intrinsic existence of its own. It has to be dependent on something else for its temporary existence. Vedānta says that all matter principle is *mithyā* because it cannot exist by itself. It needs the

support of something which exists independently and supports those which are dependent on it. *Brahman/Ātmā* is the only independently existent principle and the entire world of objects depends on this one principle. Thus, the core teaching of Vedānta is – ‘*Brahman* is the only Truth and everything else is *mithyā*’ (“ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्या”).

When every object of perception is negated as *mithyā*, that ultimate principle which cannot be negated is called *Satyam-brahma*. This method of teaching where every observed object is negated as *mithyā* till the *Satya Vastu* is reached is called ‘not this...not this’ (नेति नेति) or *Atadvyāvṛttiḥ* (अतद्व्यावृत्तिः) method of teaching. *Neti..neti* does not reject the objective universe. It only says that, what one observes as ‘this’ is not *Brahman*.

Now, Ātmabodhaḥ explains the infinite (पूर्णत्वम् or आनन्द/अनन्तत्वम्) as the very nature of *Brahman*.

अखण्डानन्दरूपस्य तस्यानन्दलवाश्रिताः ।
ब्रह्माद्यास्तारतम्येन भवन्त्यानन्दिनोऽखिलाः ॥ ५८ ॥

Brahman is infinite and anything finite is only a small reflection of the infinite. The infinite nature of *Brahman* is explained as the very completeness. *Ānanda*, here, does not mean ‘happiness’ in its literal sense. Vedānta says that any happiness/contentment experienced by any living being - starting from the most exalted *Brahmā* (the very creator of the universe) to the most primitive of any living organism - is only a fraction of the infinite happiness/contentment which is the very nature of *Brahman*. It is immeasurable as it is infinite. The Upaniṣhad-s explain that all the living beings exist on a very miniscule and fluctuating fraction of *Brahmānanda*.

Taittirīya Upaniṣhad has a whole section devoted to the relative degrees of happiness and contentment, experienced by the various living beings - starting from an ideal human being to the most exalted living being *hiraṇyagarbha*. This is the well-known 'Ānanda Mīmāṃsā' (आनन्द मीमांसा) chapter of Taittirīya Upaniṣhad. The ultimate infinite happiness is the very nature of *Brahman* and is the conclusion of this chapter.

In the next verse, Ātmabodhaḥ explains the all-pervasive nature of *Brahman*. *Brahman* is the very content of everything.

तद्युक्तमखिलं वस्तु व्यवहारस्तदन्वितः ।
तस्मात्सर्वगतं ब्रह्म क्षीरे सर्पिरिवाखिले ॥५९॥

The entire universe without any exception is pervaded by *Brahman*. It is like the yarn pervading the entire fabric. There is not an iota of time or space or object - not imbued by *Brahman*. *Brahman* is the very content, the very warp and woof, of the subtlest of the subtle and grossest of the gross. The Upaniṣhad-s say that it is inside and outside and in and through all that is here. An example given here, explains this concept - Butter in the form of fat, is evenly distributed, in every drop of milk. It cannot be searched in any one portion of milk as it is an inherent part-and-parcel of milk. Similarly, *Brahman* is all-pervasive and so is called the अधिष्ठानम्. It is the support-less support which supports everything.

After the *Mahavākya vichāra*, now the last few verses are reiterating the inherent nature or the *swarūpa lakṣhaṇāni* (स्वरूप लक्षणानि) of *Brahman* as revealed by the Upaniṣhad-s. In this verse, we saw that

the *Brahman/Ātmā* is the very content of the whole universe (समष्टिः) including the *jīva* (व्यष्टिः).

Now a few more aspects of *Brahman's* inherent nature are going to be explained -

अनण्वस्थूलमह्रस्वमदीर्घमजमव्ययम् ।
अरूपगुणवर्णाख्यं तद्ब्रह्मेत्यवधारयेत् ॥६०॥

Brahman being the subtlest pervades everything as its content - is said to be the subtlest of the subtle and the grossest of the gross. The first line of the verse is literally reproduced from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad*. *Kathopanishad* says the same. As it is the subtlest and not available for experience by any sense-organ it cannot be described with any attribute. It is formless, attribute-less and can be only understood by the *Shruti pramāṇaḥ* (श्रुति प्रमाणः). *Kathopanishad* expresses the same as “That, which cannot be heard, seen or felt. May one understand, *That Brahman is You*” (“अशब्दमस्पर्शमरूपमव्ययम्”). Another *Upaniṣhad* says “that which is the content of the smallest atom or subatomic particle and also that of the biggest that one can imagine” (“अणोरणीयाम् महतोमहीयान्”).

A few more descriptions of *Brahman*;

यद्भासा भास्यतेऽर्कादि भास्यैर्यत्तु न भास्यते ।
येन सर्वमिदं भाति तद्ब्रह्मेत्यवधारयेत् ॥ ६१ ॥

In this verse, *Brahman/Ātmā* is seen as the light of lights (ज्योतिषां ज्योतिः). The *Upaniṣhad-s* say that it is the light of Consciousness which manifests as the light in all the luminaries. Our worldly sources of

light - like the Sun, Moon, Lightning, Stars and the Fire - all shine due to the light of Consciousness. However, this light of Consciousness cannot be revealed by any of these five sources of light. Kathopanishad and Muṇḍakopanishad have a beautiful *mantra* which elaborates this -

न तत्र सूर्योभाति न चन्द्रतारकम्
नेमा विद्युतोभान्ति कुतोयमग्निः ॥
तमेवभान्तम् अनुभाति सर्वम्
तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति ॥

That which lights up everything, because of which the universe is revealed, is *Brahman*. The revealer *Brahman* reveals itself and after it, everything else is revealed. Being Self-revealing, no other light can reveal it.

In *Lalitā Sahasranāma* we find two names which indicate what is said here – ‘अप्रमेया स्वप्रकाशा’- that which is not an object of perception, but confirms its presence by revealing itself.

In the next verse, an example is given - How *Brahman*, the light of Consciousness, reveals itself and everything else after it.

स्वयमन्तर्बहिर्व्याप्य भासयन्नखिलं जगत् ।
ब्रह्म प्रकाशते वह्निः प्रतप्तायसपिण्डवत् ॥ ६२ ॥

When a ball of iron is in contact with fire, the heat and light of the fire are manifested by the iron ball both from outside and inside. The redness and the heat of the iron ball does not belong to it, but is borrowed from the fire. Similarly, the luminaries like the Sun, Moon etc shine with the light borrowed from *Brahman* which pervades in

and through them. The same is true of every object in the universe. The *jīva*'s sentience and existence is because *Brahman* pervades inside and outside the *upādhi* of the *jīva*. The existence manifested by the insentient world of objects is because of *Brahman* - which manifests within and outside - in every object of the universe. *Kathopanishad* expresses this appropriately - "Imperishable *Brahman*, the light of Consciousness manifests in everything from within and outside as Existence and Consciousness" ("दिव्योह्यमूर्त पुरुषः स बाह्याभ्यन्तरोह्यजः").

Now, Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya wants to say that whatever is - is *Brahman*. Anything which seems other than *Brahman*, is *mithyā* (which has a seeming existence).

जगद्विलक्षणं ब्रह्म ब्रह्मणोऽन्यन्न किञ्चन ।
ब्रह्मान्यद्भाति चेन्मिथ्या यथा मरुमरीचिका ॥६३॥

There is nothing other than *Brahman*. Whatever is experienced is nothing but *Brahman* with a name and form. In a mirage, what really exists is only sand. However, an appearance of water is experienced in the heat of the day. Water is only an experiential reality and not the fact. Such experiential reality, which has no existence of its own, is called *mithyā*. The truth of the mirage is sand which has an independent existence and is called *Satyam*.

Our scriptures say that, the only *Satyam* (the only truth) is *Brahman* and the entire universe including our body-mind-sense complexes are nothing but a short-lived experience. Our scriptures indicate this truth by two very apt statements – "There is nothing other than

Brahman” (“सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म”) and “All that exists is *Brahman* with a variety of names and forms. *Brahman* is the truth and the names and forms are a mere appearance” (“ब्रह्मसत्यम् जगन्मिथ्या”).

Chāndogya Upanishad says “One without a second” (“एकमद्वितीयम्”). Kathopanishad puts it in another way- “There is nothing else other than *Brahman* and I am this *Brahman*” (“नेह नानास्ति किञ्चन”).

Vedānta is very clear and asserts whenever possible that whatever is there, is only *Brahman*. One indivisible, without a second is the Consciousness *Brahman/Ātmā* and all that is seen as the *jagat* is a mere appearance in this *Brahman/Ātmā*. The entire universe of plurality (द्वैतम्) is only an appearance in the *Ātman* just like a dream, magic show or even a mirage. *Brahman* is the warp and woof of the entire manifest universe. The last five concluding verses of *Ātmabodhaḥ* talk about this central teaching of Vedānta – “ब्रह्म सत्यम् जगन्मिथ्या” and “सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म”.

दृश्यते श्रूयते यद्यद्ब्रह्मणोऽन्यन्न किञ्चन
तत्त्वज्ञानाच्च तद्ब्रह्म सच्चिदानन्दमद्वयम् ॥६४॥

Whatever is experienced in the universe around us by any of our sense-organs is nothing but *Brahman*. Why? Because *Brahman* is the very Consciousness in which every experience arises, exists and resolves. The name and form called *jagat* is not different from its *adhishthānam* Consciousness. What is that *Brahman*? It is existence behind every name and form. It is the Consciousness backing every sentient being. It is the very unbroken infinity, in which the entire objective world arises. An example of water and wave can be used

here. A wave cannot be separated from water. Yet, it is a mere appearance in water and the content of every wave is water. Similarly, *Brahman* is the very content of whatever is experienced, being the very content of every name and form.

सर्वगं सच्चिदात्मानं ज्ञानचक्षुर्निरीक्षते ।
अज्ञानचक्षुर्नेक्षेत भास्वन्तं भानुमन्धवत् ॥६५॥

The all-pervading Consciousness, *Brahman*, is recognized by a person who has understood the nature of *Brahman* to be *sat-chit-ānanda*. In spite of the plurality of the name and form universe, the focus of such a person is on the content *adhishthānam* rather than the appearance. When one looks at a gold ornament, the focus is on the gold, in spite of the attractive form. This change of focus from the superficial name and form to the content is the transformation that has happened in a *Jñānī*. A person whose focus is only on the name and form is like a blind man facing the blazing sun. Vedānta says that we are all blind in reality, because we miss the obvious and take an appearance to be the truth.

श्रवणादिभिरुद्दीप्तज्ञानाग्निपरितापितः ।
जीवस्सर्वमलान्मुक्तः स्वर्णवद्द्योतते स्वयम् ॥ ६६ ॥

The *ajñānī jīva* who has gone through the *jñānayogaḥ* (श्रवणम् मननम् निदिध्यासनम्) is blessed with the Knowledge of the nature of ‘That’ which is the only reality of the entire manifest universe. This Knowledge when clearly assimilated, transforms a person from an *ajñānī* to a *Jñānī*, by removing all the blemishes of ignorance. Such a person, shines with abidance in *Ātma-swarūpa*, just like gold when put under fire loses all its impurities and shines in its pristine glory.

हृदाकाशोदितो ह्यात्मा बोधभानुस्तमोऽपहृत् ।
सर्वव्यापी सर्वधारी भाति भासयतेऽखिलम् ॥६७॥

Brahman is the support of everything. The support is the only reality and what is supported is mere appearance. This is reiterated again in the penultimate verse. This *Ātmā/Brahman* which shines as the Consciousness in the *buddhiḥ* (intellect) of every *jīva*, removes all the darkness of ignorance. The one who is cleansed of this ignorance is able to see that ‘He, the *Ātmā*’ is the all-pervading support of whatever is seen. It reveals Itself and reveals everything else. Just as - the sand supports the appearance of a mirage, a rope supports the appearance of a snake and a seashell supports an appearance of silver - It is ‘I’ the *Ātma-chaitanyam* which is the support of this entire universe. In this regard, Kaivalya Upanishad has a relevant verse – “मय्येव सकलं जातं मयि सर्वं प्रतिष्ठितम् । मयि सर्वं लयं याति तद्ब्रह्मास्म्यहमद्वयम् ।”

Now, the last verse wraps up this beautiful work of Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya -

दिग्देशकालाद्यनपेक्ष्य सर्वगम्
शीतादिहृन्नित्यसुखं निरञ्जनम्
यःस्वात्मतीर्थं भजते विनिष्क्रियः
स सर्ववित्सर्वगतोऽमृतो भवेत् ॥६८॥

Now, Bhagawān Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya concludes *Ātmabodhaḥ* by comparing *Ātmā* with a holy confluence of rivers. Such a *tīrtha sthāna* is considered to wash away the accumulated *karmaphala-s* of a person who has *shraddhā* in it. But, what can be more sacred than abiding in one’s own nature? *Ātmā* is the greatest purifier because as Consciousness - “ ‘I’ am the ever blemish-less and pure One” (“नित्य शुद्ध

बुद्ध मुक्त आत्मा अहम् अस्मि"). This Knowledge is the final purifier which completely removes the sense of limitation and *saṁsāra* that a *jīva* experiences. Now, 'I' am not limited by the space, time, directions and polar opposites that I experience as a limited and bound *jīva*. 'I' am, in fact, the all-pervading *Ātman* in whom there is no doer-ship or enjoyer-ship. 'I' am, in fact, the immortal, imperishable, omnipotent, all-knowing Consciousness!

ॐ तत्सत्

I bow down to all the Guru-s of our Guruparamparā with whose Blessings I could complete the commentary on this work of

Bhagawān Ādi Shaṅkarāchārya.



About the Author

Dr. Sudhā Tinaikar, a medical doctor by profession, started Vedānta studies in the late 1990s. She systematically studied the *Prasthāna Traya-s* and *Prakaraṇa Grantha-s* at the Ārshavidyā Gurukulam, through both direct tutelage as well as remote learning. Since 2012, she has been sharing this wealth of knowledge with different groups of people. With the blessings of His Holiness Sadyojāt Shaṅkarāshram Swāmījī, she started weekly Vedānta classes at Shrī Chitrāpur Math, Beṅgaūru in 2014 and *Prasthāna Traya Bhāshya Paṭhana* training to an interested group in 2015. She has been contributing her translations and commentaries on various vedāntic texts to the monthly magazine, Kānarā Sāraswat Association, starting with Hānva Ām̐mi and then moving onto explaining the Tattvabodhaḥ and Ātmabodhaḥ. Her erudite and systematic method of teaching Vedāntic texts makes her classes very popular among interested students both young and old.



