

**The Quantum Leap Into
The Absolute**

(Essence of Ashtavakra Gita)

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Swami Shantananda Puri

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(Essence of ASHTAVAKRA GITA)**

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© Publisher : Parvathamma C.P. Subbaraju Setty
Charitable Trust
13/8, PMK Road, Bangalore - 560 004.

First Edition : May 2001
Second Edition : February 2005
(Revised)
Third Edition : October 2008

Cover Page
design : Sri C.S. Krishna Setty

Type Setting
& Printing : **Omkar Offset Printers**
3/4, 1 st Main Road, New Tharagupet
Bagangalore - 560 002
Ph : 26708186, 26709026.
e-mail: omkaroffset@gmail.com
website: www.omkarprinters.com

SAMARPAN

*This book is dedicated with veneration
to the Lotus Feet of my revered Guru*

Swami Purushottamanandaji
of Vasishtha Guha, U.P., Himalayas,

*but for whose infinite Compassion
I would not have been able to formulate
my thoughts and put them down
in this book
and to the thousands of Spiritual
Sadhakas all over the world.*

– Swami Shantananda Puri

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CHAPTER I**INTRODUCTION**

Ashtavakra Gita (known also as Ashtavakra Samhita) is a unique treatise on the Non-dualistic (Advaita) philosophy which guarantees to transport a seeker instantaneously by a direct path from time to eternity, from the relative to the Absolute and from bondage to liberation (MUKTI). There is no pre-requisite, no rituals no control of breath (Pranayama) or thoughts, no Japa or chanting of sacred syllables and not even any meditation or contemplation. It is all an effortless quantum flight to the ultimate goal (MOKSHA). One second, you are here on what you consider as the terra firma of the phenomenal world and the next you find yourself in a summit of timelessness and bliss, where both the world and yourself are dissolved into nothingness. “When ‘I’ ceased

to exist, there was liberation and so long as 'I' existed, there was only bondage.'¹ Ashtavakra does not lay down any pre-condition or prior qualification. He accepts his clients on an 'as is where is' basis. There is neither any cultivation of particular qualities nor any renunciation of existing conditioning. It is just **Being** and no becoming. "How and where can anyone think of acceptance or rejection?" "His mind neither renounces nor accepts; neither rejoices nor gets angry".² The entire process seems to be revolutionary and contradictory to all accepted norms of traditional Sadhana.

While Bhagavad Gita leads one to the goal of liberation progressively through L.K.G. class to the Ph.D. (Doctorate level), Ashatavakra Gita catapults you direct to the

१. "यदा नाहं तदा मोक्षो यदाहं बन्धनं तदा।" (VIII-4)

२. "अतः कस्य कथं कुत्र हेयोपादेय कल्पना" (XV-12)
"न मुञ्चति न गृह्णाति न हृष्यति न कुप्यति" (VIII-2)

ultimate destination without the need for any steps. The choiceless perception of all events and happenings from the **Witness** state, unprejudiced, uninvolved and bereft of any judgement or categorisation (as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant) and Ashatavakra's exhortation about the futility of utter dependence on the preceptor (**Guru**) reminds one of the teachings of J. Krishnamurthy, an eminent philosopher of recent times. "Even if the Divine Trinity of Siva, Vishnu or Brahma were to instruct you, the Self-knowledge cannot be handed over to you on a platter. You will have to work for it by forgetting everything else but the Supreme Self."³

Ashtavakra Gita is a conversation with the melody of music (in the form of a song) between Ashtavakra, a great Self-realised saint of Mahabharata fame and King Janaka - a philosopher king, famous for his lack of body-

३. हरो यद्युदेष्टा ते हरिः कमलजोऽपि वा ।
तथापि न तव स्वास्थ्यं सर्वं विस्मरणाद् ऋते ॥ (XVI-11)

consciousness (Videha). While Bhagavad Gita has lent itself to several interpretations and its meanings have been twisted and distorted by many commentators, both ancient and modern, Ashtavakra Gita is so simple and emphatically direct that it is impossible to misinterpret the text and very few have ventured to translate it and add any commentaries. This is a text which cannot be understood through intellectual brilliance or by mere scholarship. It can only be understood through the heart, by an intuitive spiritual experience. Out of the total 298 stanzas almost each one of them is an independent **Bliss-capsule**, self-sufficient and capable of taking one to the ultimate destination by itself.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was desirous that his best pupil Naren (later known as Swami Vivekananda) should go through Ashtavakra Gita; but the latter stubbornly resisted it. But Sri Ramakrishna resorted to a ruse by requesting Naren to

read out the book to him, whenever he was having oil massage. Finally Naren became mad after this book.

As this book contains the seed of the theory of non-creation (**Ajāta Vāda**) developed later by Gaudapāda in his 'Māndookya Kārika' it is generally believed that Ashtavakra Gita must belong to a period much earlier to that of Gaudapāda. It is not known who compiled the text and when. Whoever may have done it, he was no less than an Ashtavakra. Let us concern ourselves with the wonderful contents of the book and not with least important aspects which normally exercise the minds of critics.

As regards the connection between the sage Ashtavakra and King Janaka, there are several stories current and some of them are to be found in Mahabharata.

Ashtavakra while yet an embryo in the womb of his mother became well versed in

the scriptures (**Vedas**) and one day criticized (humbly though) the bad pronunciations of his father Kahoda, who used to recite the Vedas daily. Kahoda a renowned scholar that he was, got infuriated by the audacity of his unborn son and cursed him to be born with eightfold deformity and contortions.

Soon enough Kahoda left for the court of King Janaka where scholars who proved their worth were normally rewarded with immense riches. Ashtavakra, who became enlightened by the time he was twelve years old, one day walked into the court of King Janaka who was discussing philosophy with many renowned philosophers, scholars and saints. On seeing the ambling distorted gait of Ashtavakra and his physical contortions while walking, the entire assembly including the King burst into laughter. Ashtavakra also laughed, the loudest of all. When enquired about the reason for his laughter, Ashtavakra retorted ‘I came thinking that I was walking into an assembly of philosophers and

spiritually evolved people. When I found that the people here are all mere cobblers whose eye is all on the skin and who are incapable of seeing the beauty inside, I could not help laughing.’’ The king, as also the entire assembly, was stunned into silence by these words of supreme wisdom. Ashtavakra easily defeated in argument the court scholar, **Vandin** by name, who had earlier defeated his own father (**Kahoda**) and innumerable scholars and consigned them to a very big well wherefrom nobody returned alive.

Actually, all the scholars, consigned to the well were taken to the world of Varuna who required them all for the performance of a sacrifice. Ashtavakra’s father along with others returned at the completion of the sacrifice, laden with riches and by his blessings Ashtavakra was rid of all eightfold deformities. One day, Janaka took Ashtavakra to his palace and there the conversation ensued which has been recorded in the

Ashtavakra Gita and which has turned out to be a great blessing for all posterity.

Another story in circulation is that once Janaka when relaxing and lying down on his couch with his wives attending on him began to have the following vision:

Suddenly, the soldiers of an enemy king rushed into his room, made him a captive and took him (Janaka) before their master. The enemy king was generous enough not to kill Janaka but decreed that he should go outside the boundary of that kingdom before midnight. Janaka ran for his life and was extremely thirsty and hungry. All the subjects were prohibited by a proclamation from helping the king as whosoever dared to give even a drop of water to King Janaka was to be beheaded immediately.

Somehow, Janaka managed to cross the boundary just by midnight and reach a charity-house (a choultry). The manager

expressed his inability to give him any food at that time but suggested that he might try his luck with the cooking utensils which were lying unwashed. With difficulty Janaka was able to scrape out a handful of cooked rice sticking to the sides of the vessels. But just when he was about to eat it, two dogs jumped from nowhere, grabbed the handful of rice and ate it away. Janaka began to wail and weep at this cruel play of fate.

Suddenly the vision disappeared and Janaka found himself relaxing comfortably in the sweet company of his wives. Janaka began to ask **“Is this true or was that true.”** As nobody was aware of Janaka’s earlier vision, nobody could answer his enigmatic question. At last the sage Ashtavakra was ushered into the presence of the king. He told Janaka that **neither this was true nor that was true.** Truth is that which never gets sublated or superseded at any point of time - whether past, present or future. The hunger and thirst

which he experienced during the vision of his banishment no longer existed in the present. Hence that could not be the truth. This present state of happy living in the midst of his wives and ruling over the Kingdom of Mithila ceased to exist at the time he saw himself running away full of thirst and hunger, hence that also could not be the truth.

Thus, Reality or Truth lay beyond all the three states viz., waking, dream and deep sleep.

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CHAPTER II**INSTANT RECIPE FOR MUKTI**

Scriptures prohibit voluntary instructions or any information or advice unless specifically requested for. The first chapter starts with Janaka questioning Ashtavakra as to how to get Self-knowledge, liberation (Mukti) and dispassion (Vairagya). By liberation is meant the dissolution of our relationship with the phenomenal world resulting in the cessation of all miseries and being established in our natural state of Existence, Consciousness and Absolute Bliss (Satchidananda). Ashtavakra gives such a forceful and direct instruction in barely twenty stanzas that King Janaka immediately becomes spiritually illuminated and starts describing his own experience.

According to Ashtavakra, **one could get instant liberation and bliss if only one were**

to separate oneself from the body and remain effortlessly resting in pure Consciousness¹.

A basic conviction or knowledge that I am not the body but the pure consciousness is an essential sine qua non in most of the spiritual paths including 'Self Enquiry' as propounded by Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi.

Lord Krishna also starts his sermon in the Bhagavad Gita more or less in the same strain explaining how the body is different from the Self, the former being subject to birth and death while the Self remains eternal and immortal. **The very first step on this path is to understand clearly that the Self is all consciousness, always liberated, an uninvolved witness of all events and happenings, all pervasive and perfect like a**

१. यदि देहं पृथक्कृत्य चिति विश्राम्य तिष्ठसि।
अधुनैव सुखी शान्तो बन्धमुक्तो भविष्यसि। (I-4)

‘Super Conductor’ and it has nothing to do with the body at all.² It is only due to an inexplicable delusion that the world is superimposed on it and it looks as if it is bound and subject to all miseries including that of birth and death. One should abandon the idea of identification with this body-mind-complex and remain as a sheer witness to all events and goings-on, divorcing oneself from the mental imaginations of joy and sorrow and without judging them as good or bad, right or wrong, pleasant or unpleasant etc. **It will be a choiceless perception.** The relationship between the body and the Self is as between an electric bulb and electricity. Electricity is different from the bulb and both have opposite characteristics. The bulb has a date of manufacture and may fuse or get broken one day while the electric energy is neither born nor can be destroyed. As the main

२. आत्मा साक्षी विभुः पूर्ण एको मुक्तश्चिदक्रियः।
असाङ्गो निस्पृहः शान्तो भ्रमात् संसारवानिव ॥ (I-12)

attachment to the body is due to the attraction of the senses to various worldly objects, Ashtavakra exhorts Janaka **to avoid all objects of senses as if they are deadly poison.** (1-2)

The second process after separating oneself is to rest in Consciousness. Consciousness is the capacity to know that **'I am'** or **'I Exist'**. This knowledge of **'I am'** is a direct knowledge which comes to us directly without passing through the medium of our senses like the eye, ear etc. It is an intuitive knowledge while the knowledge of the presence of other objects and persons in the world is a conditioned knowledge filtered and modified through the senses, mind and memory. The senses are unreliable instruments as proved by the sighting of a mirage in a desert. The fact that **'I AM'** is an incontrovertible direct Knowledge which requires no other proof. **Remaining quietly in that "am-ness" or "is-ness", remaining as**

pure existence without any further qualification, is remaining in pure Consciouness (चिति विश्राम्य तिष्ठसि). Do not entertain any projected ideas that I am a woman, I am seventy years old, I am an Engineer, I am a father, I am an Englishman etc. Remain as 'I AM' and do not repeat in the mind like a Mantra 'I AM'. Simply 'BE'. Nisarga Datt Maharaj of "I AM THAT" fame has claimed that he got his enlightenment in less than three years through the only sadhana of remaining in 'I AM'. **Ashtavakra claims that enlightenment can be instantaneous (अधुनैव).** This is the quantum flight from body consciousness to the eternal Existence. There are no processes, stages, auxiliary means or anything else involved. One should be careful not to meditate or think as 'I AM' but to simply remain in that fact of one's **Existence**. One should not also associate himself with any extensions of existence, for instance 'I am a Brahmin, I am a monk' etc.³ A newly born

३. "न त्वं विप्रादिको वर्णो नाश्रमी नाक्षगोचरः।" (I-5)

child, say an hour old, has no vocabulary or knowledge of the external world. Its only instinctive understanding in which it rests will be “Ah, I am”. Be like that child. A new born child having no vocabulary cannot think. It is only aware that it is alive (**‘IT IS’**). It just remains in that feeling of **‘I AM’** and is happy. In the same way one should not have any thought including **‘I AM’**, but remain in that awareness of **‘AM-NESS’** (Being). All miseries, stress, anxiety, tension etc., stem from our identification with the body. Delinking oneself from the body-sense and remaining in pure existence is a relaxed, peaceful and an effortless state. **If we start remaining in such a state even for 3 to 4 hours a day, we shall certainly have self-realisation.**

The second explosive **Moksha-capsule⁴** which is far more potent than the previous one is **“You just remain in the conviction**

४. मुक्तभिमानी मुक्तो हि बद्धो बद्धाभिमान्यपि।
किंवदन्तीह सत्योयं या मतिः सा गतिर्भवेत्॥ (I-11)

that you are liberated and free and you will be liberated. On the contrary if you consider yourself as a bound and limited being, you will continue to be bound.” It is as simple as that. **“As you think, so you become.”** You have been conditioned and hypnotised into thinking that you are the body subject to various limitations including that of birth, death, old age and bodily afflictions. **The process of de-hypnotising lies in considering oneself as consciousness and thus remain ever-liberated.** This is logical and scientific. It is not enough to have an intellectual conviction that “I am the **ATMAN** and ever liberated.” The conviction should come from inside, from the entire being, with every cell in the body being, permeated with the knowledge **“I AM EVER LIBERATED.”**

It is not a question of externally affirming that I am liberated but continuing to be involved in the world, choosing the pleasant and favourable and rejecting the unpleasant, favouring some and hating some

others etc. **We have to behave in actual life as the liberated self, free, unconcerned and uninvolved, choiceless and desireless.** Those, who dare not go all the way, may try it even for half a day once a month or so. When you try to remain in that state, you will be bereft of all result-oriented actions, still, calm and subject to no reaction even if the heavens were to fall. You will not react to any news, good or bad, will not advise or instruct any body in connection with any worldly affairs, nor attend to or make any telephone calls however emergent they may be and will not keep a cell-phone by your side. You will not bother even if the President or Prime Minister of a country were to visit you.

Even if we may not rank with Janaka, by repeatedly hearing the Ashtavakra Gita, understanding would dawn one day. There cannot be an easier technique than Ashtavakra's.

The third method is elimination of 'I'.
The ego is the 'I' sense which identifies itself

with the body-mind-complex. This impostor of an 'I' is sustained solely because we always consider ourselves as the doers of various actions and as the ones who experience the fruits of such good or bad actions resulting in joy or sorrow. Righteousness and sin, pleasure and pain are all imaginations of the mind and are not real⁵. **Actually, there is no individual personality at all as all actions including breathing, thinking, eating, talking, walking, etc. are done by the Totality** (i.e. the all-pervasive cosmic Consciousness using each human body as an instrument). So we are not the doers at all. The Consciousness, after assuming a body, has forgotten its integral link with the Totality and instead indentifies itself with the body with all its limitations. So a false 'I' is created which thinks I am breathing, I think, I eat, I talk, I walk, etc. **The moment you cease to consider yourself**

५. धर्माऽऽधर्मौ सुखं दुःखं मानसानि न ते विभो ।
न कर्तासि न भोक्ताऽऽसि मुक्त एवासि सर्वदा ॥ (I-6)

to be the doer or enjoyer, you will recognise yourself to be ever liberated.

A story from Yoga Vasishta (another classic) is very relevant here. A demon called Sambara was causing a lot of misery to the gods of Swarga (heaven) and the latter also equally reciprocated it. Ultimately, Sambara created three robots-like demons programmed to go fearlessly and demolish the army of the gods. As these robots were not afraid of death, the gods became panicky and approached Brahma, the creator. Brahma told them “These robots, newly created, have no conditioning of fear. They have no ego of their own and simply follow the programme. For some time, you fight with them and run away. By going on doing like this, this experience will begin to leave impressions and when they see that they are able to strike terror among you and make you flee, slowly their ego will begin to grow and impressions of fear will be built up. Then, when once the

ego and fear are built up, even a child can knock them down”. The gods followed this advice and became victorious.

So long as one considers oneself as the doer, the actions being motivated by vasanas/ desires bind one by forging a chain of birth and death in order to reap the fruits of actions good or bad as the case may be. When once one gets out of the notion of doership, being impervious to desires and by considering any action done by one as emanating from the Totality and as being done by the respective senses, oneself remaining as the witness consciousness, one will no longer be bound by one’s actions.

Asthavakra, however, stresses as an elaboration of the first technique that **by simply remaining in the firm conviction that “I am the Pure consciousness”, you become freed from all miseries and established in happiness.** Instead of remaining as the one

immutable consciousness, unattached, actionless and pure, when one tries to meditate on it as “I am the Brahman” etc. it constitutes the main bondage⁶. (I-15)

According to a story current in some spiritual circles, King Janaka was once sitting all alone on the banks of the Ganges and loudly chanting “अहं ब्रह्मास्मि” (I am the Brahman). The sage Ashtavakra who happened to come to that place began shouting repeatedly standing before Janaka “This staff is mine, This Kamandalu (a vessel containing water) is mine”. King Janaka, who was irritated, left the place and went to another corner for his Japa. Ashtavakra followed the king and continued shouting as before. Janaka could not tolerate this any longer. He called Ashtavakra and told him “Oh! great sage, nobody is disputing the fact that the staff and Kamandalu are yours. They

६. “अयमेव हि ते बन्धः समाधिमनुतिष्ठसि” (I-15)

are yours. Where is the need for you to shout and proclaim it?” Ashtavakra laughingly countered - “My dear Janaka, will this not apply to you also? you are Brahman and nobody can dispute it. Why then are you shouting “I am Brahman?” Just BE.

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CHAPTER III**THE MARVELLOUS FLIGHT**

Just by hearing the instructions of Ashtavakra, King Janaka's spiritual illumination was instantaneous. What he attained bubbled out of his mouth as a song of illumination, repeatedly punctuated by pregnant exclamations of "Oh!" (अहो). What followed was all an expression by Janaka (supplemented amply by Ashtavakra) of the inexpressible, a description of the indescribable state of an enlightened Buddha as a Jivanmukta remaining established in the natural state of the Self. In the Indian T.V. and in foreign countries too, sometimes there is a programme called Jugalbandi where two musical maestros of different systems meet on a common platform and sing the same Raga in their respective traditions. In exactly similar way, both Ashtavakra and Janaka speak alternately in identical terms supplementing each other, the former from his long established state of

realisation and the latter from his newly experienced state of enlightenment. Both being competent and fully evolved are speaking from the same state and from the same stage. There is no competition between them to prove their respective superiority nor is there any question of the former testing the latter, as some recent commentators have presumed. Janaka was only a pretext and the Ashtavakra Gita is addressed to all serious aspirants and seekers of all times to come.

Janaka now affirms that there is no question of either bondage or release (Moksha) as both these are mere delusions of the mind¹. The entire universe is but a superimposition on the glorious Self and has no reality. All miseries and sufferings are due to our sense of duality where we see the world as apart from us. The individual souls (**Jivas**) are just like the waves (which are no different from

१. “न मे बन्धोस्ति मोक्षो वा भ्रान्तिः शान्ता निराश्रया ॥”

the vast ocean) which arise from, play with each other and dissolve into the infinite ocean. (II-18, 16 & 25)

In the third chapter, Ashtavakra delineates how the behaviour of the enlightened man should be and what should be his relationship with the world. Many sadhakas, after doing some sadhana, especially when some mystic powers like reading the minds of people or immediate materialisation of even casual desires arise in them, get deluded into thinking that they have attained enlightenment. In order to prevent such misconceptions, these warnings of Ashtavakra as to what sort of behaviour is incompatible with the highest state of self-realisation will prove very useful. Further, all philosophical sadhanas are based on Adhikari-bheda i.e. the three-fold categorisation of the pupils as eminently fit, mediocre and dull. The recent philosopher Osho used to cite an anecdote from Buddha's

life where Buddha instructed his pupil Ananda as follows:

There are four types of horses. The first type of an adamant horse will not budge an inch however much it may be thrashed with a whip. The second type of horse will run so long as it is continued to be whipped and will stop the moment the whipping stops. The third type of horse will begin to run just at the cracking of the whip. The last and excellent type will begin to run just on seeing the shadow of the driver's hand moving towards the whip.

Ashtavakra himself says “**A person of pure intellect is able to realise his Self even through casual instructions while others continue to wallow in their delusions despite a lifetime of enquiry and exposure to elaborate instructions.**”² Hence Ashtavakra

२. यथा तथोपदेशेन कृतार्थः सत्त्व बुद्धिमान्।

आजीवमपि जिज्ञासुः परस्तत्र विमुह्यति ॥ (XV-1)

wants to take with him not only the most brilliant people like Janaka but desires that others should also be benefitted. So he sums up briefly the following instructions regarding the cultivation of certain distinguishing characteristics of an enlightened saint:-

- ★ **A knower of the Self will not be interested in earning and amassing wealth (II-1).**
- ★ **There will be no attachment to the illusory objects of senses, which arises in those ignorant of the Self. (II-2)**
- ★ **There will be no desires and consequent running after material prosperity.**
- ★ **The sense of possession i.e. “This is mine” will cease to exist.**
- ★ **An enlightened person will not indulge in amorous sports or in lust and passion towards other sex.** The one who remains unperturbed in mind at the sight of a woman full of passion as also at the prospect of

imminent death is verily liberated.³ (II-4, II-6, II-7, II-11 and XVII-14)

- ★ **The last barrier** for a seeker, one at the very threshold of enlightenment, **is fear from liberation itself resulting in the dissolution of individuality and the body-sense⁴** (III-8). He is afraid of losing his individuality as Moksha or liberation aims at merging in the Totality and losing the ego sense. The same idea has been elaborated⁵ in the Gowdapada's Karika (poetic commentary) on Māndukya Upanishad. (No. 39 **Advaita Prakarana**)
- ★ Whether feted and feasted or teased and tormented by people, **an evolved person will neither become happy nor angry.**

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३. सानुरागां स्त्रियं दृष्ट्वा मृत्युं वा समुपस्थितम्।
अविह्वलमनाः स्वस्थो मुक्त एव महाशयः ॥ (XVII-14)
 ४. आश्चर्यं मोक्षकामस्य मोक्षादेव विभीषिका ॥ (III-8)
 ५. योगिनो बिभ्यति ह्यस्मादभये भयदर्शिनः ।
(गौडपादकारिका-अद्वैत-३९)

- ★ **He will be indifferent to both praise and censure.**
- ★ **He will exercise the attitude of a witness towards all happenings and events.**
- ★ **Death, however imminent, will hold no terror for him.**

As a Self-Realised saint is freed from all internal impurities and is free from all desires and attachment, even if he is subjected to experiences of enjoyment or sorrow, due to some destiny or past karmas (actions), he remains unaffected, bereft of any reaction like pleasure or pain and treats it all as a sport.

(III-14, IV-1, IV-2)

He is beyond papa and punya (sin and merit) and beyond likes and dislikes. As no individual doership or conditioning due to past latent tendencies is left, whatever he does, he does it spontaneously without fear or favour and nobody dares to forbid him.

Such actions stem from the Totality and are not based on individual will, caprice or desires.

(IV-3, 4, 5 & 6)

Janaka gives three methods for remaining established in the Self, appropriate respectively to (1) those who believe in duality (**Dvaita**) that the Self or God is absolutely different from the world, both of which are real (2) those who believe in qualified non-dualism (**Visishtadvaita**) that though God and the world are both real, both are made of the same substance as reality i.e., the world is an Amsa (part) of God and (3) those who believe in Non-dualism (**Advaita**) that Self or God is the only reality and the world is but a false superimposition on the former due to ignorance.

In the first case one should remain unaffected considering oneself as a vast and infinite ocean on which the ship of the universe

wanders hither and thither driven by the wind of the mind.

In the second case one should consider oneself as the infinite ocean on which the waves of the world arise and disappear without causing any loss or gain to the ocean itself.

In the third case one should consider oneself as the infinite rippleless ocean where the world has been superimposed by imagination (just like the delusion of a serpent superimposed on a rope at dark).

The essence of all Sadhana is “DO NOT REACT” to pleasure or pain, praise or censure, life or death, like or dislike, heat or cold, success or failure, good or bad, love or hate etc. Here Janaka has given some tips as to how to reach this stage, in respect of three different types of Sadhakas. (Chapter VIII-1,2 & 3)

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Chapter IV

PREPARATION FOR THE FLIGHT**Desirelessness**

As all Hindu Scriptures and Buddhism aver, **desirelessness is the main sine qua non for progress in spirituality.** Normally, any enjoyment of worldly objects leaves some scar (called Samskāra or Vāsana), an impression on the mind which induces desires for repetition of the experience and also for enjoyments not experienced so far. **He is a rare Sadhaka who eschews such desires not only for enjoyment but for liberation too.** (XVII - 4, 5)

Ashtavakra affirms that detachment from sense objects is salvation while attachment for sense objects is bondage.¹

१. मोक्षो विषय वैरस्यं बन्धो वैषयिको रसः।
एतावदेव विज्ञानं यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु॥ (XV-2)

(XV-2, X-4 and IX-8). He repeats the necessity for desirelessness again and again as the main preparation required for the flight into the Absolute. (XVIII-2)

Witness attitude

Another unique point made out by Ashtavakra is that a Bhogi (who is after more and more of enjoyment) as also a yogi² who is bent on renouncing all enjoyments are both qualitatively on the same plane. The minds of both are on 'enjoyment' one for grasping it and the other for leaving it. **One has to go beyond both by adopting the attitude of a witness (Sākshi) i.e. by neither accepting nor rejecting.** (XVI-6,7, XIII-1, XVII-5)

Effortlessness and Inaction

The Jivanmukta (liberated while alive) is the master idler who deems it too much

२. विरक्तो विषयद्वेष्टा रागी विषयलोलुपः।

ग्रहमोक्षविहीनस्तु न विरक्तो न रागवान्॥ (XVI-2)

of an exertion even to go on shutting and opening his eyelids. He remains awake in the eternal vigilance and remains drowned in the unique happiness of the Self³. He is just doing those actions which are forced on him by destiny without judging whether they are good or bad. His actions are just like those of a child.⁴ One should realise that nothing whatsoever is ever done by the Self which is actionless. One has nothing to gain by striving (as one is already ever liberated) nor does one sustain any loss by inaction. **All happiness and misery as also birth and death are pre-destined by the effects of past actions (Prārabdha). There is nothing to be accomplished.** (XVIII-49, XIII-3,6, XI-4)

३. व्यापारे खिद्यते यस्तु निमेषोन्मेषयोरपि।

तस्यालस्य धुरीणस्य सुखं नान्यस्य कस्यचित् ॥ (XVI -4)

४. यदा यत्कर्तुमायाति तदा तत्कुरुते ऋजुः।

शुभं वाप्यशुभं वापि तस्य चेष्टा हि बालवत् ॥ (XVIII-49)

Control of Mind

One has to divorce oneself thoroughly from the sense of doership and being an experiencer - one who reaps the fruit of his actions.⁵ All the modifications of the mind including the ego get dissolved - this is essential for Self-Realisation. A mediocre sadhak who practises control of the mind may succeed temporarily but the moment he stops the practice, all desires and fancies take control of him. The complete stillness of the mind results without any effort or practice through mere self knowledge. This claim of Ashtavakra is contrary to the discipline prescribed in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali where control of mind (चित्तवृत्तिरोध) constitutes yoga (i.e., the path for Self-Realisation.) The paths to the Infinite are equally infinite so as to suit the conditioning,

५. अकर्तृत्वमभोक्तृत्वं स्वात्मनो मन्यते यदा।

तदा क्षीणा भवन्त्येव समस्ताश्चित्तवृत्तयः ॥ (XVIII-51)

the spiritual constitution and the taste of the various aspirants and seekers. Hence contradictions among them are inevitable.

It has been the experience of Ashtavakra that when once a person is established in Self-knowledge by leaving off the body-consciousness and resting in pure consciousness, the control of mind becomes a natural by-product.⁶ (XVIII-51, 41, 75, 33). What a direct path! This very idea is also echoed in Srimad Bhagavatam (II-6-33) where Brahma the creator exclaims⁷ that no untruth ever came out of his mouth, none of

६. क निर्रोधो विमूढस्य यो निर्बन्धं करोति वै।
स्वारामस्यैव धीरस्य सर्वदाऽसावकृत्रिमः ॥ (XVIII-41)

७. न भारती मेऽङ्ग मृषोपलक्ष्यते
न वै क्वचिन्मे मनसो मृषा गतिः।
न मे हृषीकाणि पतन्त्यसत्पथे
यन्मे हृदौत्कण्ठ्यवता धृतो हरिः ॥
(श्रीमद् भागवतम् - II.६.३३)

his senses ventured out on the wrong path and his mind always remained in control, not because he cultivated those qualities but because they were the natural result of his holding tight the Supreme Lord (same as Self) with intense longing and love in the sanctorum of his heart.

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CHAPTER V

THE PATHLESS PATH

Ashtavakra exhorts us lovingly just to **believe and have firm faith that we are that ultimate self-knowledge which is sought, the very Self and the Lord.**¹ This results in Self-realisation. In between no steps are necessary. (XV-8)

You are the self and ever liberated. Even the meditation on the Brahman or Self should be given up completely in order to have Self-enlightenment. The finite consciousness has to slide directly into the supreme consciousness of the Infinite Self by just hearing with total belief that we are the Self² (XVIII-48 & XV-20). There is no need

१. श्रद्धस्व तात श्रद्धस्व नात्र मोहं कुरुष्व भोः।

ज्ञानस्वरूपो भगवानात्मा त्वं प्रकृतेः परः ॥ (XV-8)

२. त्यजैव ध्यानं सर्वत्र मा किंतित् हृदि धारय।

आत्मा त्वं मुक्त एवासि किं विमृश्य करिष्यसि (XV-20)

even to think of the attributes of Atman (Self) viz. purity, non-duality etc.³ (XVIII-43 & 34)

All the scriptures lay emphasis on purification of the mind by erasing all vasanas (conditioned by past experiences or latent tendencies due to the imprint left in the computer memory called 'chitta' by past actions, which itch for repetition of the earlier experiences). They also prescribe various means of practices like japa (incantation of sacred syllables), pranayama (control of breath), reflection or Self-enquiry (vichara), etc. Just by the mere knowledge of the Reality and the (delusive) unreality of the world, one gets liberated thus by-passing the step of removal of vasanas. The mind becomes a void, the existence of vasanas is itself as much a dream as the body - mind complex and no vasanas ever existed for the

३. वस्तु श्रवणमात्रेण शुद्धबुद्धिर्निराकुलः।
तत्त्व निश्चयमात्रेण प्राज्ञो भवति निर्वृत्तः॥ (XVIII-34)

process of removal. Why beat a serpent imagined by superimposition on a rope?⁴

Similarly even the most popular Vedantic method (advocated in other Scriptures) of negating all the world as NETI NETI (not this, not this) becomes superfluous, as the concept of the world itself has been transformed along with the vasanas for a yogi following Ashtavakra's path, who, though seeing the world, is impervious to its impact⁵.

No rituals, spiritual practices like control of mind nor any other action are needed for attaining self-illumination. One

४. व्यामोहमात्रविरतौ स्वरूपादानमात्रतः।

वीतशोका विराजन्ते निरावरणदृष्टयः॥ (XVIII-6)

समस्तं कल्पनामात्रमात्मा मुक्तः सनातनः।

इति विज्ञाय धीरो हि किमभ्यस्यति बालवत्॥ (XVIII-7)

५. येन दृष्टं परं ब्रह्म सोऽहं ब्रह्मेति चिन्तयेत्।

किं चिन्तयति निश्चिन्तो द्वितीयं यो न पश्यति॥(XVIII-16)

remains liberated without any effort or action through the direct apprehension that one is always of the nature of the Supreme Brahman and the question of desiring to become the Brahman can never arise at all. (XVIII-36 & 37). Ashtavakra transcends the principal teachings of the Upanishads when he logically advises that when once we are established as the non-dual Self, there is no question of contemplating on oneself as “I am that Brahman” (अहं ब्रह्मास्मि). The latter contemplation indicates an inferior state of consciousness where ‘I’ exists apart from the Brahman and sees the Brahman. (XVIII-16)

Ashtavakra daringly proclaims that **there is no need even to discriminate between Atman (Self) and Anatman (non-self)**. By merely remaining in the realisation that everything is the Self or Brahman (सर्वं

खल्विदं ब्रह्म) one attains the highest bliss.⁶
**Ashtavakra's path enshrines neither
ladders nor steps. (XV-15&9)**

This path envisages a way of life where a person is not intellectually affirming his state of being the Supreme Atman (Self), but there is a deep conviction seeping through each and every cell of his body, mind and heart that he is verily the Brahman (the Supreme Being) and he behaves in his actual life in all circumstances as the pure unconditioned Brahman in an uninterrupted silence without the least reaction to any impact of the world.

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६. अयं सोऽहमयं नाहं विभागमिति सन्त्यज ।
सर्वमात्मेति निश्चित्य निःसङ्कल्पः सुखी भव ॥ (XV-15)

CHAPTER VI**AH! DESTINATION AT LAST
(State of the Self-Realised)**

The Natural state of Samadhi (Sahaja Samadhi) in which an enlightened person (Jeevan Mukta) remains and how he conducts himself in practical life has been described in various Vedantic texts like Jeevanmukta Gita, Bhagavad Gita, Viveka Chudamani etc., but nowhere it is so all-comprehensive, elaborate and set in beautiful expressions of poetic grandeur as in Ashtavakra Gita.

The qualities and nature of a Jivanmukta have not been enumerated with a view to enabling us to judge whether or not another person is enlightened. It is never possible to have an acid test to find out whether another person is a Jeevan mukta or not. The attributes mentioned are meant as a check-list for self-assessment in order to verify whether oneself has reached the state of enlightenment or not.

Many persons, who do not possess any of these essential characteristics, after some experiences during sadhana come under a strong delusion that they have attained liberation. This check list will be as useful to them.

The Jivanmukta behaves¹ like a dried leaf driven hither and thither by the wind of Totality which runs the entire world i.e. the cosmic programme, with no volition of his own. He is free from all vasanas (latent tendencies), requiring no external support, liberated from all bondage. (XVIII-21)

A person who has been normally eloquent, wise and fully active becomes, on attaining Self-knowledge, dumb, inert (dull) and lazy² (XV-3) According to some

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१. निर्वासनो निरालम्बः स्वच्छन्दो मुक्तबन्धनः।
क्षिप्तः संसारवातेन चेष्टते शुष्कपर्णवत्॥ (XVIII-21)
 २. वाग्मिप्राज्ञमहोद्योगं जनं मूकजडालसम्।
करोति तत्त्वबोधोऽयमतस्त्यक्तो बुभुक्षुभिः॥ (XV-3)

scriptures³ when the grace of the Lord descends, a mute person is made eloquent and a lame person is enabled to climb up a mountain. Here, Ashtavakra's description contradicts this traditional concept. Actually they represent different stages of Consciousness (as seen from the ignorant level) and Ashtavakra's is the Ultimate stage where one has become merged in the Absolute. In the fire of self-knowledge, personal ambitions, self aggrandisement, competition, aggressivenessæall are reduced to ashes.

The enlightened one, being free from all desires and having lost his individuality and ego behaves as if he possesses no knowledge though knowing and though it looks as if he

३. अ) मूकं करोति वाचालं पङ्क्तुं लङ्घयते गिरिम्।
यत्कृपा तमहं वन्दे परमानन्द माधवम्॥

३. आ) द्वार कृपा का जब तू खोलो
पंचमं स्वर में गूँगा बोले।
अंधा देखे, लंगड़ा चलकर काशी पहुँचे रे॥

is talking or seeing does not in reality talk or see. Everything takes place automatically in Totality and as the impelling force of desire is absent, he does not do any work at all even though he looks as if he is doing some work.³ (XVIII-90). Ashtavakra specialises in the use of such apparently contradictory expressions which cannot be helped while expressing highly subtle concepts which are not capable of being expressed in words.

The enlightened one is always in the alertness of perfect Consciousness so that even while asleep he is not really asleep. Even though dreaming he is not identified with the dreamer (the one who identifies himself with the subtle body). Even in the waking state⁴ he is not really awake to the

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३. जानन्नपि न जानाति पश्यन्नपि न पश्यति।
ब्रुवन्नपि न च ब्रूते कोऽन्यो निर्वासनादृते॥ (XVIII-90)
४. सुप्तोऽपि न सुप्तौ च स्वप्नेऽपि शयितो न च।
जागरेऽपि न जागर्ति धीरस्तृप्तः पदे पदे॥ (XVIII-94)

objects of the world like a common worldly man whose perception remains conditioned. This is almost like the description given in Srimad Bhagawad Gita-

“या निशा सर्वभूतानां तस्यां जागर्ति संयमी।”

This state of Jivan Mukta is not the sole monopoly of a monk who has taken formal sannyas and has renounced his family and house. It is well possible even for a householder to reach this stage. **A householder who has become a Jivan Mukta remains free from attachment to his wife and children.**⁵ (XVIII-84). He remains unperturbed and immune to all the ridicule and contempt that may be heaped upon him by his servants, sons, wife and other relatives. (XVIII-55)

Ashtavakra ends his dissertation by affirming that **a man⁶ established in the Self**

५. निःस्नेहः पुत्रदारादौ निष्कामो विषयेषुच।

निश्चिन्तः स्वशरीरेऽपि निराशः शोभते बुधः॥ (XVIII-84)

६. न धावति जनाकीर्णं नारण्यमुपशान्तधी।

यथा तथा यत्र तत्र सम एवावतिष्ठते॥ (XVIII-100)

neither runs to a forest in search of solitude nor does he seek a crowded place. He remains the same everywhere and in all conditions. He is unconcerned whether the environment is favourable or otherwise.

Whatever the yogi (wise man) does (whether sitting, sleeping, speaking or eating, etc.), he does it with total ease and comfort in a very relaxed and peaceful manner; while a common man, even while doing one activity (like eating, walking or talking) is tense and restless and thinking of various plans for the future, his office or business affairs, etc.⁷ The Liberated one behaves externally like any common man even though he is the antithesis of a lay man. The light (lamp) of Knowledge is burning inside his heart and he is living in full Consciousness, while an ordinary man remains in delusion and ignorance⁸.

७. सुखमास्ते सुखं शेते सुखमायाति याति च।
सुखं वक्ति सुखं भुङ्क्ते व्यवहारेपि शान्तधीः॥ (XVIII-59)
८. धीरो लोकविपर्यस्तो वर्तमानोऽपि लोकवत्।
न समार्धिं न विक्षेपं न लेपं स्वस्य पश्यति॥ (XVIII-18)

We may add one note of warning - Ramana Maharshi used to say that his path of Self-enquiry as to **'WHO AM I'** was meant for those who were fully mature spiritually (pakwees), whose minds have become purified and are like dry wood ready to be ignited in a trice at the flicker of a matchstick. This position applies mutatis mutandis to the methods advocated by Ashtavakra too. For others, as told in "Upadesa Sara" of Bhagavan Ramana, puja, japa and meditation, etc. may be found to be more suitable.

Janaka concludes the narration of his highest spiritual experience as follows:

With the realisation of the unborn undivided Self, the ideas of existence and non-existence and the idea of one and multiplicity etc., which were all products of the mind have disappeared.⁹

९. क चास्ति क च वा नास्ति कास्ति चैकं क च द्वयम्।
बहुनात्र किमुक्तेन किंचिन्नोत्तिष्ठते मम॥ (XX-14)

Along with Ashtavakra he accepts the reality of Self alone. The Self is non-dual and there is no world or anything besides the Atman.

All that Janaka has talked so far sprang out of Totality and he finally lapses into Silence.

HARI OM