Dakshinamurthy Stotram

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# Meditation

**मौनव्याख्या प्रकटित परब्रह्मतत्त्वं युवानं
वर्षिष्ठांते वसद् ऋषिगणैः आवृतं ब्रह्मनिष्ठैः ।
आचार्येन्द्रं करकलित चिन्मुद्रमानंदमूर्तिं
स्वात्मारामं मुदितवदनं दक्षिणामूर्तिमीडे ॥१॥**

The Lord Dakshinamurti sits under the banyan tree facing the south. Foremost of all teachers, He provides the ultimate knowledge of the Self to seekers of the world. With a face resplendent with Divine Consciousness, He revels in the bliss of His own Self, in the Knowledge that He alone Is with no other. Seated around Him are His disciples, the old wise sages Vashista, Vamadeva, and others. The disciples are old, but the teacher is youthful. What can such a young one teach these wise old men, we may wonder. With His hand held in cin-mudra or jnAna mudra (the index finger and the thumb held together to form a circle, symbolizing the union of the separate self with the Supreme Self), the Lord silently transmits the knowledge of the Supreme Self to His disciples who also sit silently around Him, absorbed in the Self.

With a burning desire for Knowledge and liberation, I bow to Him, the Lord Dakshinamurti, the embodiment of Self-Knowledge.

# Verse 1

**विश्वं दर्पणदृश्यमाननगरीतुल्यं निजान्तर्गतं
पश्यन्नात्मनि मायया बहिरिवोद्भूतं यथा निद्रया ।
यः साक्षात्कुरुते प्रबोधसमये स्वात्मानमेवाद्वयं
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥1॥**

This vast Universe of countless names and forms, moving and unmoving, makes up our external and internal world. Externally, it appears as objects. Internally, it manifests as feelings, perceptions, and emotions. Shankara is now inquiring into the nature of such a world. What is the nature of this world of objects (jagat) that we see and transact with? Who created it? What is the nature of the individual who feels trapped helplessly between the world and its Creator (Ishwara)? This is the discussion we will now embark upon, the worthiest of all discussions in the world.

Shankara focuses on the jagat (world) in the very first stanza because it is ever present and distinctly visible to us, while Ishwara and jIva are not so obviously present or visible. What is not obviously present and visible can be inferred from that which is present and clearly visible. The world that we see and transact with every moment of our lives is the reason for our suffering. We (jIva-s) are not a problem to ourselves, nor is Ishwara, the Creator, who is not visible to us. A problem arises only when there are two entities of different types confronting each other. For instance, the poison in a snake does not harm the snake because the snake and its poison are one. Similarly, an individual is not a threat to himself. The Lord, is also not a problem, since we do not see Him or transact with Him directly. A snake, even if it is poisonous, if it is in a distant place, it cannot harm us. Therefore, it is the world that is a problem to us because it is neither too far away like Ishwara or too close like our own self.

Once the problem with the world is resolved, problems with the individual and the Lord will also be automatically resolved. When the notion of a separate world arises, the notion of a separate individual also arises. If there is no notion of a separate world, there will be no notion of a separate individual. The object world is the upAdhi, the adjunct, through which Infinite Consciousness manifests as the finite individual (jIva). If there are no upAdhi-s, Consciousness will remain in Its own intrinsic nature as Infinite and Complete. The feeling of a separate self would not arise. Hence, it is the appearance of the world that gives rise to the notion of a separate individual and the notion of a Creator (Ishwara). If the world is absent, the separate individual and creator will also be absent! If the finite individual Consciousness expands, it dissolves into the Universal Consciousness. As long as we think we are limited individuals, Ishwara will appear as different from us. When we realize our true nature as Infinite Consciousness, our individual Consciousness will expand and permeate the entire world. All notions of a separate world and Creator will disappear.

Hence, even though thery appear to be three separate entities, jIva, jagat, and Ishwara, it is only the jagat that is a problem, and not the individual (jIva) or the Infinite Consciousness (Ishwara). To realize our full potential as the Infinite Consciousness, we must understand the nature of the world and how it keeps us in bondage. When all traces of worldly attachments and egoic tendencies cease and Self alone IS, the jIva will no longer be in bondage. All effort must be spent in addressing the problem of the world. Hence, Shankara starts the very first verse of the hymn with the word visvam (universe).

Does the world really exist? Or does it not? If we insist that that the world is real, all we will be doing is accepting the problem, but not solving it. To solve the problem, we must prove that the world is only an appearance and not real.

Even if we prove that the world does not exist, we may wonder if it will make any difference to our experience, since we will continue to see it. It is ridiculous to deny the world that we experience every minute of our lives. Experience is the greatest proof of the existence of anything.

So we now face a dilemma. If we say that the world does not exist, it is self-deception because we are experiencing it every minute. If we say that the world does exist, we will only be restating the problem, not solving it. Shankara skillfully resolves this dilemma using the analogy of a mirror. If we put a tall mirror in front of a city, the entire city will appear in the mirror. Is the city appearing in the mirror real? Does it really exist? Since the city is clearly visible to us in the mirror, we cannot help but admit that it does exist. But did the city actually enter the mirror? Can something so large as a city completely enter a small mirror? The city in the mirror appears only as long as the mirror is present, and disappears the moment the mirror is removed. It is only a reflection that we see in the mirror, not the original object itself. The object is outside the mirror. It is not dependent on the mirror in any way for its existence. The object can stand on its own, whether or not the mirror is present. Therefore, the object is real, but the reflection is unreal.

The world that we perceive is like the reflection in the mirror. It is unreal. The world appears like a reflection in our mirror-like Pure Consciousness. The world we perceive externally is only a reflection of the original substance, which is Consciousness. The reflection is visible but false. The substance is not visible, but Real.

An objection may be raised at this point. In the example of the mirror, we stated that the city outside the mirror is real, and its reflection inside the mirror is false. But now we are saying, in the case of the world we perceive, that what is internal (Consciousness) is Real, and what is perceived outside (world) is unreal. Is the analogy of the mirror inappropriate since it does not fully explain the relationship of Consciousness to the world we perceive, we may wonder. An analogy is used to compare and illustrate only some aspects of a situation, and not all aspects. It is enough if it serves the specific purpose that it is intended for, and not much more. Shankara is illustrating only one point through the analogy of the mirror – that the original image is real and the reflected image is false. The analogy, however, is not expected to explain the concepts of external objects and internal images. To illustrate these concepts, Shankara uses yet another analogy – the analogy of a dream.

Let us say we had a dream when we are asleep at night, and in the dream we saw a beautiful city. Where did this city come from? Where is it located? Is it inside us or outside us? In the dream, it appeared as though it is outside us, but in reality it is not outside us because, when we wake up in the morning, we don’t see it anywhere. Even though the city appeared to be outside us, it did not exist outside. It appeared inside us. Therefore, the city in the dream is unreal, although we saw it.

Similarly, whatever is present in our Consciousness is real, and whatever appears outside is only its reflection (AbhAsa), therefore, unreal. We perceive objects only when they appear within the sphere of our Consciousness. If an object is outside the sphere of our Consciousness, or, in other words, if our Consciousness does not extend to it, we will not know that the object exists. If a thing is not “known” to Consciousness, the thing has no existence. Knowledge, Awareness, or Consciousness is the proof of the existence of anything. Therefore, although the entire world is present inside our Consciousness, we see it as though it is outside us, just like the objects we see in a dream. Dream objects appear outside us because we are asleep. The world appears outside us when we are awake because of the illusory power of mAya or avidya. avidya means ignorance, lack of Self-Knowledge. Ignorance of our real nature (Self) is present in our dream and waking states. When we sleep, completely oblivious of our body-mind, a world appears from inside us in a dream. Similarly, in the waking state, we live our lives completely oblivious of our true nature, which is Pure Consciousness. This is mAya. It is due to mAya, that the world that lies un-manifested in Consciousness, appears as the external world. It is the attachment and involvement with the illusory world that keeps us in bondage.

To free ourselves from this bondage, we must find the source of the problem and get rid of it. As discussed earlier, ignorance is the source of the problem. The antidote for ignorance is Knowledge. Attaining that Knowledge is prabhOda, which means Awakening and Intelligence. Both of these meanings are applicable here. It is only after we wake up from sleep that we realize that what we saw was a dream. In this context, prabhOda means “awake.” In the larger context of our lives, prabhOda means “intelligence” or “knowledge” (sAkshAth kuruthe prabhOda samaye). When Knowledge of the Self arises, we realize that the Self alone Is without another (swAtmAnamevA advayam), that the ‘Self’ is pure Awareness, the feeling that “I AM.” The awareness that “I AM” was always present, even before the dawn of Knowledge. But this awareness was not pure. It was not advayam (non-dual) - the experience that there is nothing other than the Self (Self alone IS). Before the dawn of Knowledge, there is the notion of the “other,” which includes every object that the world contains, animate and inanimate. This object-view of the world not only limits our Consciousness, but also perpetuates false notions, such as “I am a limited individual (jIva)” and “there is a Creator (Ishwara) who is superior and separate from me.” These false notions are due to mAya. The moment we realize that this external world is unreal, we will be free of mAya. When mAya disappears, the world also disappears. As the individual Consciousness transcends the world and expands into the Universal Consciousness, the world loses its separateness and dissolves into the Self without a trace. The jagat is no longer a problem.

When jagat dissolves into Consciousness, and there are no limiting adjuncts, such as body, mind, and external objects, Self freely expands. The notion of a separate self disappears. Since this expansive Self is the Supreme Self Itself, the notion of a Ishwara, the Creator, disappears. Instead of appearing as three separate entities, the jIva, jagat, and Ishwara merge into the One Indivisible Infinite Consciousness, which is experienced as our very own nature. This is the experience of the Universal Self. The Lord Dakshinamurti symbolizes the Universal Self (paramAtma). The word daskhina means Knowledge or Intelligence (jnAna shakti), and the word vAma means, the power to act or create (kriya-shakti). Intelligence is the very nature of the Universal Self. Creation is Its expansion (vibhUti). Since the creative power is intrinsic to the Universal Self, Dakshinamurti is a complete and perfect union of the jnAna and kriya shakti-s. The disciple who attains the perfection of His teacher is also revered as Dakshinamurti. Hence, the teacher and the disciple who attain perfection through the teaching are both brahman. Although Shankara says he bows to the three, in essence he bows to the One.

# Verse 2

**बीजस्याऽन्तरिवाङ्कुरो जगदिदं प्राङ्गनिर्विकल्पं पुनः
मायाकल्पितदेशकालकलना वैचित्र्यचित्रीकृतम् ।
मायावीव विजृम्भयत्यपि महायोगीव यः स्वेच्छया
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥2॥**

When the world dissolves and everything appears as the Self, would the world be completely absent? Even if the world ceases to exist externally, wouldn’t the world continue to exist inside us? On one hand Shankara says the world is inside (antargatam) us, and on the other hand he says the Self is non-dual, that It is One without another. How can the Self be non-dual, if we continue to perceive the world inside us? What does the word “inside” (antargatam) really mean? When a thing is “inside” another thing, can the thing be the same as the other thing that contains it? For example, if a book is inside a box, can the book become the box? Similarly, if the world is inside us, it cannot become the Self. When there are two entities, it is duality. How can it be non-duality?

Shankara answers these questions using the analogy of a seedling. He says the world is inside the Self, just like a seedling inside a seed. The seedling manifests outside as a plant. Before it manifests externally, it is inside the seed. Only because it is already present inside the seed, it could appear outside. Nothing can appear suddenly out of nowhere. If it did not appear previously, it is only because it was hidden inside its source. Therefore, only that which is already present inside can manifest externally. This is in line with our common experience.

Another question now arises - how can a thing that is inside something be the same as the thing that contains it? The seedling analogy answers this question. The seedling came out of the seed. Before it came out, it was hidden inside the seed. What was the nature of that seedling when it was inside the seed? Would it be the same as the seed or different from it? If we break open the seed and examine it, we will only see a single, undifferentiated substance, which is the seed itself. There is no duality inside the seed.

Similarly, there is no duality in Consciousness (prAgnya). Before manifestation, this world of animate and inanimate objects is present, un-manifested and undifferentiated, in Consciousness. When we say the world is inside Consciousness, we are not suggesting a dependent relationship between them because Consciousness is a single undivided substance. If Consciousness is one homogenous substance, how can we say the world is inside It? Since we, in ignorance, incorrectly apprehend a world outside our Consciousness, to correct our misapprehension, Shankara first provisionally says that the world is inside us, but, later, to make sure we do not assume that there are two separate entities, he says that they are inside us as a single undifferentiated substance, that is Consciousness.

Just like the seed that manifests as a sprout, undifferentiated Consciousness manifests externally as the world. Because of the inherent power of the seed to sprout, the seed itself manifests externally as a seedling. This power or energy is formless, so it is undifferentiated from the seed. Power and the Powerful are not two separate entities. This is the operating principle we see all around us. The seed and its energy are a single entity. It is this energy that transforms the seed into a seedling and displays it externally. In reality, it is not a transformation. It is only an appearance, an illusion that the seed has transformed into a seedling. Whether it is a sprout, a plant, or a tree, wherever we touch and feel it, we will only touch and feel the attributes of the seed and nothing else. Therefore, it is the seed itself that appears as a sprout, plant, etc. only because of its inherent ability to manifest itself in various forms.

Similarly, AtmA or the Self is undifferentiated, pure Consciousness. Like the seed, Atma also has an intrinsic power. Because the seed and other worldly objects have a form, their power is limited. But Consciousness is formless. It permeates the entire world. Since It is Infinite, Its power is also Infinite. Additionally, unlike the seed which is insentient, Consciousness is sentient. The Vedantins refer to the power of Consciousness as mAya - that which measures and limits everything. mAya measures the Infinite Consciousness and presents it as though finite. Consciousness is not different from Its power of mAya. The power belongs to It. Hence, It is Consciousness Itself, by wielding Its own power, manifests the world of names and forms.

Space, time, and matter are the three dimensions of creation that modern day scientists acknowledge as well. These are the foundation stones of the entire appearance of creation. mAya first manifests space. When space moves, it is time. Time manifests as matter. Space is formless but does not move. Time moves but is formless. Matter has a form but does not move. mAya creates these apparent divisions in Consciousness. Like the combination of the seven basic colors to create various shades of colors, or the combination of the seven notes to create different melodies, these three dimensions of mAya combine together mysteriously to present the magical world we perceive!

Unlike the inert power of the seed to sprout, shakti or mAya, as the pure, un-differentiated, intrinsic power of Consciousness, is sentient (Conscious Power). As the intrinsic power of Consciousness, which is Intelligence itself, It is Self-aware. It is aware of Its own expansion and manifestation because Consciousness and Its creative power are not different. It is the un-differentiated power of Consciousness Itself that appears as the manifested world.

According to logicians, the attributes of the cause must appear in the effect. The world is the effect. Consciousness is the cause. mAya shakti is the power that manifests the world out of Consciousness. Although we refer to them as three (Consciousness, power of mAya, and the manifested world), they are not separate entities. The cause (Consciousness) itself manifests as the effect (world) through Its own creative power. The basic substance that the seed is made up of pervades the entire tree. Similarly, Consciousness Itself enters the creation and pervades it. From the viewpoint of the Absolute Reality, this means the entire creation is Consciousness alone, and the names and forms we perceive are only an appearance. A lie!

To illustrate this truth, Shankara provides two examples. The first is the example of a magician who hypnotizes people with his magical tricks. For instance, he creates a lovely city with celestial beings. Mesmerized by his magic, people watch his manifestations in wonder as though they are real. When the magician stops performing and withdraws his magical creations, nothing remains. He stands alone by himself. What happened to all the magical objects he displayed earlier? They were just illusions he created with his magical powers. Not real. His creations require the magician, his magical powers, and the objects he manifests. When he withdraws his creations, only he and his power remain. Since his power is invisible and intrinsic to him, it is not different from him. Hence, only he remains.

Shankara gives another example, that of the great yogis of the past. A yogi’s magical powers are far greater than that of the magician. Ancient Indian mythologies, are full of stories that describe the magnificent powers of great sages and gods in the past. In Ramayana, for instance, Sage Bharadwaja is said to have manifested a delicious festive meal for King Bharata and his army. In Mahabharata it is said that, when King Vishwamitra and his army arrived tired and hungry to sage Vashista’s hermitage, the sage received his guests with great respect and instantly served them a sumptuous meal with the help of his wish-fulling sacred cow (kAmadhenu). The king Vishwamitra, who later became Sage Vishwamitra, used his power of austerity to manifest a heaven in space! There are many such stories of different yogis at different times who displayed such great powers. Such yogis exist today as well, although we rarely see them.

How could these yogis demonstrate such great magical powers? What materials did they use? They did not require any external materials. They used their own inherent shakti (power or energy) freely to create. All they needed was an intention. Mere intention was enough to convert their knowledge (jnAnam) into action (kriyA). Hence, they manifested objects and situations according to people’s wishes. This power of the yogis is not like the inert power of the seed. It is “Conscious power,” so these yogis could manifest by mere intention. Inert objects, such as the seed, do not have such an intrinsic power. They depend on the universal all-pervading Conscious energy to transform into anything, from a seed into a seedling, etc. The shakti of these inert objects, therefore, is limited, while the shakti of enlightened yogis is the Supreme Consciousness Itself, so It is unlimited.

Based on the extraordinary powers demonstrated by yogis, we can imagine the Infinite power of the Supreme Consciousness. Since It is Complete and Perfect, Its power (mAya) is also Complete and Perfect. The world is the effect produced by the un-manifested mAya shakti (cause) of the Supreme Consciousness. Since shakti is the intrinsic nature of Consciousness, it is not different from Consciousness.

Therefore, in reality, there is no world that is separate from Consciousness. The world we perceive is only an appearance of the creative-power (mAya) that is intrinsic to Consciousness. Hence, the world is not different or separate from the power that manifested it. There is no difference between the ‘power’ and the ‘powerful’ (Consciousness). Together they are the One Supreme Undifferentiated Consciousness.

# Verse 3

**यस्यैव स्फुरणं सदात्मकमसत्कल्पार्थकं भासते
साक्षात्तत्त्वमसीति वेदवचसा यो बोधयत्याश्रितान् ।
यत्साक्षात्करणाद्भवेन्न पुनरावृत्तिर्भवाम्भोनिधौ
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥3॥**

Non-dual Consciousness is the cause for the effect which is this entire world. The operating principle is that the attributes of a cause pervade the effect. Hence, an effect cannot be different from the cause. So the world is not different from Consciousness.

The “I AM” Awareness is the Self, which is Pure Undifferentiated Consciousness. The Vedantic term for that spark of Awareness is sphuraNa. Existence is sat (Being) and the Awareness of Existence, the feeling that “I AM,” is cit. There can be no sat without cit, and no cit without sat. Unless I exist, I cannot be aware that “I Am”. Unless I am Aware, I cannot exist. They are in essence One. While sat IS, cit is aware of It. That means, sat is cit, and cit is sat. Hence, Shankar uses a single phrase sadAtmakam (Existence-Consciousness) to emphasize the Oneness of the two aspects of Consciousness.

To what does this I AM Awareness (sadAtmakam, Existence-Consciousness), belong? It belongs to that which can cognize its own existence. Only Atma (sentience), not anAtma (insentience), can cognize existence. Atma is Self-Aware.

How can we say that the world is anAtma, that it is not Self-aware? Only a conscious being can cognize the existence of the world. The world itself cannot proclaim its existence. It is only Awareness (through the instrument called mind) that cognizes everything, the external world of objects and the internal world of thoughts and feelings. Everything that is “known” to Consciousness is an “object” to Consciousness. Everything that is an object to Consciousness is anAtma

It is only the “I AM” Awareness that is real because it is present at all times everywhere. If It is present at some times and absent at other times, who is to cognize its absence? Cognition is possible only to Consciousness. One cannot deny one’s own existence. The very fact that I think and am aware of my thoughts means I exist Hence, the “I AM” Awareness, which is ever present, is the only Reality.

The world is anAtma. It has no cognition or awareness of its own existence. It is not visible to itself, but it is visible to conscious beings like us. Anything that is perceived is not the Self. Self is formless Consciousness. It cannot be perceived like an object. Can Awareness be aware of Itself? Just like two lamps cannot illuminate each other, Consciousness cannot be aware of Itself because It is Awareness itself! The “I AM” Awareness is not visible. If it is visible, it is anAtma, not Atma. Our body, life-force, mind, and the world are all visible to us. Hence, they are anAtma (not-Self).

anAtma is unreal because it has no existence of its own. We don’t need anyone or anything to validate our own existence. Consciousness is our intrinsic nature. Consciousness cognizes all objects. We say the world exists because we are aware first of our own existence, and then of the existence of the world.

Cause comes first, followed by the effect. Since the I-Am Awareness is the source or cause for this entire world, the attributes of the cause must appear in the effect. Existence (satta) and Consciousness (sphuraNa) are the attributes of the Self. When our Awareness (sphuraNa) expands and permeates the moving and unmoving objects (asat kalpArtagam bhasate) of the world, we became aware of their existence. If our Awareness did no expand to them, they would not appear to us. Strictly speaking, the world is not even an appearance! It is our own Consciousness appearing as the mind, sense organs, names and forms.

Hence the world does not exist on its own. The “Existence” of the Self is the “Existence” of the world. It has no definite form. Just like a pot that does not exist as a pot, but exists as clay, this world exists as Existence-Consciousness. Once we understand this, we will realize that Self (Consciousness) alone IS, without another.

Once we have a firm conviction that the Self alone Is, the external world will lose its separate identity. Along with the world, the upAdhi-s or adjuncts, such as the body, mind, thoughts, and life force, also will lose their separateness. It is these upAdhi-s that perpetuate the feeling of a separate self (jIva). When Consciousness expands and these adjuncts lose their separate existence, the feeling of a separate self also drops. Just like there can be no two spaces, there can be no two Consciousnesses. When there are no limiting adjuncts, the individual Consciousness, as though, soars and becomes One with the Universal Consciousness. The separate self merges with Ishwara, the Universal Self.

Although the jIva is Ishwara Itself, because of our total identification with the body-mind organism, we consider ourselves as separate selves (jIva Atma). We limit our Consciousness to our body-mind. The moment we realize that these body-mind adjuncts (upAdhi-s) are not separate from the Infinite Consciousness, the right Knowledge of the Self rises. When that Knowledge arises, the upAdhi-s lose their separateness. Hence, there is no longer any difference between the individual self and the Universal Self. Together, they are experienced as the One Undifferentiated Supreme Consciousness.

Consciousness is immediate and ever present. Since It is our innermost reality, it is called prathyak Atma. Because we wrongly attribute Consciousness to our limited body-mind, we imagine that there is another larger, superior entity called Ishwara somewhere. This misconception disappears soon as we stop identifying with the body-mind.

Although Self is the Supreme Consciousness, we do not experience It as such because of beginning-less ignorance. As seekers, our effort is only in getting rid of ignorance. The moment we attain Knowledge, we automatically experience our true nature as the Supreme Consciousness. As though a veil has been lifted, the all-pervasive Supreme Consciousness reveals Itself to us. The triad - the individual, the world, and the Creator, that once appeared as separate entities, now dissolve and are experienced as the One Infinite Consciousness. The cycle of birth and death gets broken. We no longer return to samsAra because there is no longer a separate world to return to! When the jIva and the jagat cease to exist as separate entities and everything merges into Pure Consciousness, we experience the great truth declared by the Upanishad (mahAvAkya) - tat twam asi (You are That).

The mahAvAkya, tat twam asi, is an instructional statement. The mahAvAkya, aham brahmAsmi is an experiential statement. An instruction precedes an experience. Only a True teacher (sadguru) can provide such an instruction. Such a teacher is no other than the Supreme Consciousness Itself, which is revered in the form of the Lord Dakshinamurti. He is the Guru of all gurus. Sitting under the banyan tree surrounded by great sages like Vashista, his hand folded in a chinmudra, the Lord is the ultimate instructor of tat twam asi. This instruction is the basis of the teacher-disciple tradition. Guru is parabrahma, Supreme Consciousness. He who is established in Pure Consciousness and revered as a teacher is brahman, the Supreme Consciousness Itself.

# Verse 4

**नानाच्छिद्रघटोदरस्थितमहादीपप्रभा भास्वरं
ज्ञानं यस्य तु चक्षुरादिकरणद्वारा वहिः स्पन्दते ।
जानामीति तमेव भान्तमनुभात्येतत्समस्तं जगत्
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥4॥**

In the previous verses, Shankara established that the individual consciousness in our body is the same as the all-pervading Universal Consciousness. This is the truth declared by the mahAvAkya tat twam asi. Only because the substance called Consciousness, referred to as ‘you’ (twam) in the mahavAkya, is already present in our body, we are able to say It is the same as “That” (tat) Universal Consciousness. It is only with the help of the gross and the visible, through inference, that we can grasp the subtle and the invisible. Otherwise, our search would be baseless, like trying to find a snake that has left the ground.

All we see is the body made up of the five elements - earth, fire, water, wind, and space. Like the body, the sense organs are also made up of matter. The lifeforce (prANa), which helps the sense organs function together, is made up of the moving element called life-force (prANa). It enters the body and, in the form of in-breath and out-breath, stays in close contact with the sense organs, making sure they do not fall apart. That is why prANa is called sUtra (string). Like a thread that strings together multiple beads, prANa strings together the five senses and their operations. Like the beads and the string that are made up of matter, the senses strung together by the lifeforce are made of matter.

While the nature of prANa is movement, the nature of mind is thought-generation. Thoughts are also movement. prANa moves, but it is not conscious. The mind moves but it is conscious. Although the mind is conscious, it is not pure Consciousness. It is a false appearance of Consciousness. It is like an iron rod that becomes hot when it is placed in the fire for a long time. If we touch the iron rod, it will burn our skin, just like fire. However, iron by nature is cool. It does not have the capacity to burn anything. Because of its association with fire, it absorbs the heat from the fire and acquires the ability to burn like fire. Hence, it is not exactly the iron rod that burns. It is the fire that is burning through the instrument called iron.

Similarly, Consciousness is not an attribute of the mind. Even though the mind generates thoughts endlessly, it is inert. The scripture says that the mind is a product of the food we eat. Food is of the nature of the earth element. The subtlest form of food becomes the mind and appears as thoughts. Hence, everything, from the body to the mind, is made of the gross element earth. There is nothing other than the gross in the body.

There is no individual or separate Consciousness (jIva caitanya) as we imagine. The “I AM” awareness that we have is Consciousness. Couldn’t the mind that thinks “I see,” “I act,” etc., also think “I AM?” After all, isn’t it the mind alone that thinks? Isn’t the thought and feeling that “I AM” also an activity of the mind? If mind is also matter, then like the senses and other gross entities, wouldn’t it also eventually dissolve into the five elements? When mind dissolves, and all thoughts come to an end, wouldn’t the thought “I AM” also come to an end? If nothing remains upon the death of the body, where would that feeling of “I AM” be located? Even if we say there is Consciousness, isn’t that also only a thought in the mind? Thoughts do not transcend the mind. Such questions and doubts plague us. Shankara addresses these questions now. He proves that there is a Self, a Consciousness, that is separate from the mind.

From the body to the mind, everything is made of inert matter. Because body and mind are insentient and not self-aware, there must be something, a witnessing presence, that is aware of them. What is that witnessing entity?

It is easier to perceive the body and lifeforce as objects, but harder to perceive the mind also as an object. We assume it is the mind that perceives everything. Mind is a stream of thought- modifications. A thought is a movement (vritti), a function of the mind. Before the movement of the thought, there is stillness, Pure Consciousness. There is no movement in Consciousness (acalam). It is like an illumined screen on which objects appear. The illumined screen and the image of the object together appear as a vritti, a thought modification. That vritti is the mind.

The images that appear on the screen are the names and forms of physical objects. When objects are removed, the screen appears empty as a screen. It is no longer the mind. It is what the Vedantins call the Self/Atma or Consciousness. Atma, therefore, is distinct from the mind. It (AtmA) is Pure Consciousness in the form of illumination. It is due to the illumination supplied by Consciousness that the insentient mind appears as a sentient entity. It (mind) is like the iron rod in the analogy we discussed earlier. Just like the iron rod, which by nature is cool, becomes hot when it comes in contact with fire, so too the mind, which is originally insentient, appears sentient because of its contact with Consciousness.

Therefore the Self is separate from the mind and lifeforce. Because It is sentient, It is Self-aware. Although the mind appears to be sentient, it borrows its sentience from Consciousness. While Consciousness is like a tranquil ocean, the mind is like a wave that rises from the ocean. Thoughts are like waves. When there is movement, there is a wave. When there is no movement, there is only water. Similarly, when Consciousness moves, it is the mind, and when it does not move it is Atma/Self. Although Consciousness appears to be in the body, it is not associated with it. It is like a lamp placed in a pot with many holes. The light from the lamp flows out through these holes and illumines the pot, the holes, and the objects around it.

Just because the lamp is inside the pot, the pot does not become the lamp. The lamp and the pot are separate from each other. They are of different nature. The pot is of the nature of earth and the lamp is of the nature of fire. Whether the lamp is inside the pot or outside it, it can stand by itself as a lamp. Although the lamp might appear inside the pot for the time-being, the pot is only an upAdhi (adjunct). It does not hold the lamp in bondage. Moreover, the pot and everything around it are illumined by the lamp. They shine in the light of the lamp. The only relationship that they have between them is that of the illumined and the illumination. Without illumination, none of the objects would appear. They depend on the lamp’s illumination to become visible. But the lamp itself does not depend on them. Whether or not the upAdhi-s are present, the lamp shines on its own and makes other objects shine it its presence.

Just like the lamp, Consciousness ‘entered’ the pot called the body. It did not actually “enter” the body. It only appears to have entered, just like an image in a mirror. Shining in its own effulgence, Consciousness flows out through the upAdhi-s, the eyes, ears, and other sense organs. The sense organs are like the holes in the pot. Consciousness flows out through the sense organs and illumines the moving and unmoving objects of the world around us. If it were not for the light of Consciousness, the world would not appear to us. We would not even be aware of our own body, mind, and senses. We are aware of our internal world (thoughts, emotions, etc.) and the external world only because Consciousness pervades everything. The light of Consciousness is not like the light of the lamp. Although separate from the pot, neither the lamp nor its light are sentient. They are both made up of gross elements. The lamp is not aware of its own effulgence or the fact that it is illumining the pot, etc. It is not Self-Aware. If it was Self-Aware, the lamp would be sentient. Therefore, although we refer to it as “light,” the light of Consciousness is not like the light of the lamp. It is a light that is aware of everything. It is neither subjective nor objective. Even if the lamp is absent, the pot and objects around it continue to remain. However, if the light of Consciousness is absent, the world ceases to exist. Consciousness is both imminent and transcendent. Only because of Consciousness, the Universe in its micro and macro forms appears to us. Without Consciousness, there would be no evidence that the universe exists.

For a thing to exist, there must be something that proves its existence. Either the thing itself is aware of its existence, or something else is aware of its existence. Without something or someone cognizing its existence, no “thing” can exist on its own. Whether the thing itself is aware of its own existence or something else is aware of its existence, it is only in Awareness that the thing appears. Consciousness is the Witness, the proof of the existence of anything. For an object to exist, it must be “known” to Consciousness. The world and our body/mind are objects of knowledge to Consciousness. Therefore, only when Consciousness cognizes objects, we become aware of them. Hence, Existence means Knowability, and Knowability is the proof of Existence. Consciousness is the only proof of the existence of the world. We don’t need to search for a proof to prove the existence of Consciousness. Since Its very nature is awareness, Consciousness is Self-evident. Since it is Self-evident, It is also Self-existent. Unlike the pot and the lamp, It does not depend on anything for its existence.

Since it is Self-evident, Consciousness is the only Real substance. Everything else that depends on It for its existence is unreal. If a thing comes into existence only when another thing is present, and ceases to exist when the other thing is absent, then the two cannot be different from each other. They must be of the same intrinsic nature, just like gold and gold ornaments. Even when we are seeing bracelets and necklaces, we are only seeing gold. If we remove gold from the ornaments, the ornaments cease to exist.

Similarly, Atma permeates everything. Just like the necklaces, bracelets, and other forms that gold appears in, Self or Consciousness appears in multiple forms, such as the body, mind, rivers, mountains, and other animate and inanimate objects. These are nothing but the forms of Pure Consciousness. Although Consciousness appears to be inside the body, It pervades everything inside and outside the body. Consciousness alone Is. ‘I ‘shine as Awareness, and in my effulgence everything shines. Consciousness is not “in” the body, It IS the body. Therefore, Consciousness alone is Real and the forms it appears in are unreal.

# Verse 5

**देहं प्राणमपीन्द्रियाण्यपि चलां बुद्धिं च शून्यं विदुः
स्त्रीबालान्धजडोपमास्त्वहमिति भ्रान्ता भृशं वादिनः ।
मायाशक्तिविलासकल्पितमहाव्यामोहसंहारिणे
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥5॥**

With the help of good reasoning and examples, we have so far established that Self alone Is Real. But this conclusion seems to contradicts our own experience as well as that of common folks and brilliant scientists. From the materialists (carvAka-s) to the mAdhyamika buddhists (shUnya vAda-s or emptiness theorists), everyone has enquired into the nature of Reality, and each of them has come up with different conclusion and doctrine.

Some consider this body as Atma. Some consider the lifeforce or prANa as Atma. Others consider the sense organs as Atma. Those who consider the body, life-force, and sense organs as Atma are the cArvAka-s or materialists They don’t associate Consciousness with Atma. They think Self is an attribute of the body, mind, and sense organs. According to them, when the five elements combine and permutate in different proportions in the mind-body system, a certain energy gets released. That energy according to them is Consciousness. It is like the intoxicated feeling one experiences upon drinking the fermented juice of the palm tree mixed together with molasses. Such an experience is the result of the combination of different things. Each thing by itself does not produce such an effect.

Similarly, according to the materialists, the combination and permutations of the five elements in the different gross and subtle layers of our mind-body produces a Conscious-energy in our body. This is only incidental, a result of the coming together of the body, mind, and senses. The moment these entities separate and leave, the energy they generated also dissipates and leaves. This is the death experience. Therefore, materialists theorize that Consciousness is a by-product of the mind-body organism, that it is not independent or separate from it.

Then there are the Buddhists of four types. The mind-only (vijyAna vAda-s) Buddhists and the Madhyamika Buddhists are clever. The mind-only Buddhists posit that the intellect/mind is the Atma. They don’t pause to think how the mind that takes birth and dies every moment (as thoughts) can be the Atma. The Madhyamika Buddhists, also known as the Emptiness-theorists, on the other hand, argue that there is no mind, intellect or Atma anywhere, either inside us or outside us. Like space, there is only emptiness..

Although the proponents of all these doctrines appear as intellectuals and scientists, they are worse than the common folks who also believe the same. None of them have a proper understanding of Atma, so they grasp whatever they can and call it Atma. Not only are they confused, they also confuse others with their wrong understanding. Their vision and knowledge is partial because they only sees particulars, and not the Universal. For Knowledge to be True, it must be complete. If it is partial, it cannot be called Knowledge.

To qualify as a scientist or an expert, one’s knowledge must be complete. It cannot be like the limited knowledge of a women, child, or a blind man who have limited exposure and experience with the world. Just like these people who have limited knowledge, even the so-called intellectuals and scientists are confused. They don’t see things for what they really are. The one and only real substance that IS, is Pure Consciousness. Formless, like space, It permeates everything. The names and forms that we perceive objectively are also only Consciousness in Reality. Like gold and ornaments, Consciousness and the forms it appears in are not different from each other.

But that is not how we perceive names and forms. We divide the formless Consciousness into parts and see names and forms, such as spouse, children, homes, businesses, pain, pleasure, etc. Everything that we perceive is a form of Consciousness, but Consciousness is none of those forms. Forms are many, but Consciousness is One. Forms are fragments (divisible), but Consciousness is whole (undivided). Forms can be categorized into different classes and types. But Consciousness is a single homogeneous substance.

An Infinite and formless substance cannot be broken up and divided into fragments. Doing so would be like a few blind men describing an elephant. Each of them touches and feels a part of the elephant and comes to a different conclusion. Those who felt its trunk thought the elephant is a pestle, those who felt its tail thought it is a rope, those who felt its ears thought it is a sieve, and those who felt its legs thought it is a pillar.

Each came to a different conclusion about the form of the one and same elephant. Where did these many forms come from? The blind men mistook the parts for the whole. They were not capable of seeing the parts as a whole. If they could, they would have realized that there is only one thing, not many. Because they were seeing only parts, the one thing appeared as many. Similarly, the one substance Atma appears to us in multiple forms. We only see the forms in which It appears to us, but fail to see the formless Atma that pervades every form. Names and forms are the “parts” of the Atma. However, unlike the parts of the elephant that do not make up the entire elephant, Atma can appear into its entirety in the multitude of names and forms. Unlike the elephant which has a form, Atma is formless Consciousness. It is indivisible. Because we see names and forms only, we reduce the formless Atma to the forms we perceive. These forms are a manifestation of mAya, the creative power of Consciousness. So, they are not different from Consciousness. Forms must dissolve in order to perceive the formless Consciousness. Unfortunately, instead of dissolving the forms into Atma, we reduce Atma to these forms which have no separate existence of their own.

Our conception of the world is worse than the conception of the blind men about the elephant. Instead of mistaking one object for another object as the blind men did, we mistake the entire creation, the not-Self (anAtma), for Atma. Shankara calls this the greatest misconception (mahA vyAmOham). This misconception has haunted us for life times. Shankara says we are deluded by the play of mAya. The intrinsic creative power of Consciousness has the capacity to make Consciousness Itself appear limited. Consciousness is Infinite and cannot be restrained, but due to the veiling power of mAya, It appears as though finite, just like the mighty sun that appears to be blocked by a cloud. The cloud cannot and does not block the sun, but it appears as though it does.

Due to the veiling power of mAya, Pure Consciousness Itself appears fragmented into time, space, and the world of myriad moving and unmoving forms. It is our great misfortune that we see finite forms instead of the Absolute Reality. The veil of ignorance must be removed for us to experience the Absolute Reality.

Who can remove the veil? Is it Ishwara (creator) or ourselves (jIva-s)? Only Ishwara can do so. If we were capable of doing so ourselves, we would have done so long ago, and not feel trapped in samsAra. Ishwara should remove the veil and the misconception. He is omnipotent, that is why He is known as Ishwara, the Controller. Although He holds us in bondage through His mAya power, He is also compassionate, and capable of releasing us from bondage. He has the power to uplift us from samsAra as well as push us deeper into samsAra. “Pushing down” is to keep us trapped in the cycle of birth and death. “Uplifting” is to equip us with Self-Knowledge so that we can break the cycle of birth and death. This is the meaning of the line in the 3rd verse, sAkshAth tat twam asi.

The Lord Dakshinamurti, described as sitting under the banyan tree, silently transmitting Self-Knowledge to his disciples, is Consciousness Itself. Every great teacher of Self-Knowledge is the Lord Himself. Guru is brahman. When disciples receive the Knowledge of the Self from an enlightened teacher and contemplate deeply on the teaching, they themselves become established in brahman, just like their teacher. Only Knowledge received from an eminent teacher can liberate a disciple. It is sheer grace that we are also able to receive such Knowledge Our duty is to contemplate on that Knowledge and directly experience It. Our own sincere efforts, together with the grace of the Guru, will help remove the thick veil of darkness or ignorance that has enveloped us for life times. Once the veil is removed, we will immediately experience our true Self as Pure Consciousness. From then on, we will only see Atma everywhere, without a trace of anAtma,.

# Verse 6

**राहुग्रस्तदिवाकरेन्दुसदृशो मायासमाच्छादनात्
सन्मात्रः करणोपसंहरणतो योऽभूत्सुषुप्तः पुमान् ।
प्रागस्वाप्समिति प्रबोधसमये यः प्रत्यभिज्ञायते
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥6॥**

Why should the individual make the effort to get rid of anAtma? Can’t anAtma disappear by itself, just as it does in deep sleep? During waking and dream states we have the feeling of ‘I’ and the object ‘I see.’ But in deep sleep we do not have that same feeling. We are not aware of either the external or the internal worlds. Even our thoughts disappear in deep sleep. Atma alone Is. If Atma alone Is in deep sleep, why are we not aware of It in deep sleep? If Atma is Consciousness Itself, shouldn’t it be aware of Itself even in deep sleep? Does Atma disappear along with the anAtma in deep sleep? These are the questions that Shankara addresses in this verse.

Even when the body, mind, and external world disappear in deep sleep and it appears as though there is nothing to be experienced, there is something. It is not the gross body or the subtle mind. It is the causal body, which is subtler than the mind. While the gross body and mind are dormant in deep sleep, the causal body is active and present like a thick curtain of darkness.

Since we perceive the gross body (annamaya kosha) and the mind (manomaya kosha), they are easy to grasp, but the causal body is harder to grasp since it is extremely subtle and invisible. A ‘body’ is not necessarily a collection of gross body parts only. Even the mind is referred to as the subtle body (manomaya kosha). Whatever shrouds the Infinite Consciousness and makes it appear finite is a body (sharIra). Just like the gross body and mind which cover the Infinite Consciousness and make It appear finite, so also does the causal body. The causal body is made up of vAsana-s, which are the deep tendencies and impressions in the mind. The mind is like a piece of cloth that has been used to wrap a small amount of the spice, asafetida. However hard we try to wash the cloth, we will not be able to get rid of the pungent smell of the spice. Tendencies are like the lingering smell of the spice in the cloth. Over life-times spent in the vicious cycle of birth and death, we have accumulated many deep tendencies and impressions that continue to haunt us life after life.

So strong and many are these tendencies that they persist as vAsana-s, even after thoughts and the world subside (as in deep sleep and death). Transactions with the world trigger thought-modifications (vritti-s), streams of persistent thoughts, which in turn create deep impressions that bind us in samsAra. It is these deep-rooted tendencies that are hard to get rid of that constitute mAya, avidyA, or nescience. Vedantists refer to these tendencies as the causal body because they are the reason for rebirth and the need for a gross body and mind through which they continue to manifest to satisfy deep desires. Since its very nature is avidyA or nescience, the causal body persists until one attains vidyA, Self-Knowledge. Attaining Self-Knowledge means realizing that everything that is perceived is the Self only. Just like the darkness that is dispelled upon sunrise, the moment the Knowledge of the Self rises in the individual, nescience is dispelled. This is liberation. Until we attain such Knowledge and liberation, we continue to suffer the consequences of the causal body.

It is such darkness or ignorance that overcomes us in deep sleep. Even though we are not aware of our body-mind and the external world in deep sleep, we do not experience real peace, which is our true nature, because our causal bodies continue to be active. Just like the effulgence of the sun and the moon that is temporarily eclipsed by the shadow of the earth, the ever-shining Consciousness(AtmA) is present, but temporarily hidden by ignorance in deep sleep.

Atma is Existence-Consciousness. Existence and Consciousness are not two different things. They are one and the same. Where Existence Is, Awareness Is. This is an irrevocable principle. It appears as though Awareness is absent in deep sleep because the sense organs and the mind that controls them are defunct. There is no instrument called the mind present to comprehend the ‘nothingness,’ the absence of objects/thoughts, in deep sleep. When the instrument of comprehension is not available, there is no consciousness of the presence or absence of objects. Hence, Consciousness appears as though absent in deep sleep.

A question may be raised here. If Consciousness is ever present and Self-Aware, why does It dependent on the mind and sense organs for Its existence? Due to habituated wrong thinking we assume it is only through our mind that we know we exist. We forget that our Self transcends the mind. We think that we exist because our minds exist, and that we cease to exist, if our minds cease to exist. However, the mind is “aware” of the “I AM” feeling hence, it knows intuitively that Awareness transcends the mind. Consciousness (Self) does not depend on anything for its existence. Because we lack this knowledge of the ever-present Self, we assume Self is also absent when the mind and sense organs are absent in deep sleep.

In deep sleep, there is no mind to cognize the Self although the Self is ever present, both as Existence and Consciousness. Even if the mind is absent, Consciousness is aware of Itself. Even in deep sleep, there is no gap in Its Awareness. It’s effulgence remains undiminished. The mind is only an instrument through which Consciousness manifests externally. Just because an image of an object appears in a mirror, we cannot assume that the mirror created the object. Whether or not its image appears in the mirror, the object can stand on its own. The mirror is only a projector, not the creator of the object. Similarly, mind is just a projecting instrument. Even if the mind is defunct, there is no problem. Consciousness continues to shine on Its own.

If Consciousness is totally absent in deep sleep, we would not be aware of It on waking up. It is not possible to remember something suddenly without having experienced it previously. Cognition and experience precede memory – this is common experience.

On waking up, we remember our experience of having slept peacefully the night before. We wake up and tell people that we slept peacefully. If we were not aware of the peace we experienced in deep sleep, how would we remember it on waking up? Having experienced something, we recollect it. Therefore, even in deep sleep, Self is aware. If there is a break in the Self, in our Consciousness, we would cease to exist in deep asleep and suddenly come back into existence on waking up. As Krishna said in Bhagavad Gita, na asto vidyate bhavo, na bhavo vidyate satah. That which exists does not cease to exist, and that which does not exist, does not come into existence. What IS does not disappear suddenly.

Consciousness is the “I AM” awareness. It is our essential nature, so it can never be absent. If It is present sometimes and absent at other times, it cannot be our essential nature. If Consciousness is absent, we will be absent as well. Consciousness must be present to cognize its absence! Saying “Consciousness is absent” is as ridiculous as saying “I have no tongue.”

Therefore, the Self/Atma is present in the waking, dream, and deep-sleep states as Existence and Consciousness. Only because the instrument called mind is temporarily defunct, we think Atma is absent in deep sleep. However, if Atma is absent in deep sleep, we would have no recollection (prathyabhigna), after waking up, of having slept soundly. Unless there is cognition of something, there can be no recognition, recollection, or memory of it.

When we meet someone after a long time, we recognize them only because of our past experience with them, even though we have lost touch with them in between. Even though we did not experience them directly during the gap, they were present and experiencing themselves all the time. That is why, we were able to recognize them again later when we see them. As the scripture puts it, “so yam devaduttaha.” “This is that same Devadatta that I saw in the past.” We are able to recognize something based on our past experience because there is no difference between the thing of the past and the thing of the present. They are one and the same. The difference is only in time and place, not in the thing itself.

We must apply the same logic to our deep sleep experience. It is the same Self, Consciousness, that was present before we went to sleep that is also present after we wake up. In the middle, during deep sleep, Consciousness appears to be temporarily absent (anupalabde), not annihilated, because the mind that cognizes the presence and absence of objects is absent. If Self is completely annihilated in deep sleep, we would have no memory or recognition of ourselves after we wake up. When “I” go to sleep, it is the same “I” that wakes up. No one else wakes up in my place. Therefore, it is clear that in the waking, dream, and deep sleep states, Self, is no way diminished. It shines without a break.

When it appears as though the Self is absent at times, like the sun during eclipse, we must remember that the Self is the “I AM” awareness that is ever present. This recollection of that ever shining awareness of the Self is pratyabhigna. This in essence is the meaning of the sixth verse.

# Verse 7

**बाल्यादिष्वपि जाग्रदादिषु तथा सर्वास्ववस्थास्वपि
व्यावृत्तास्वनुवर्तमानमहमित्यन्तः स्फुरन्तं सदा ।
स्वात्मानं प्रकटीकरोति भजतां यो मुद्रयाभद्रया
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥7॥**

Pratyabhigna is an excellent tool for reminding ourselves of our ever-present Self as Infinite Consciousness. As long as there is an opportunity to recognize a thing from past experience, we can postulate that that thing really exists. If there is no such opportunity, we can assume that the thing does not really exist. According to this principle, the one substance that is always present in both Atma and anAtma (Self and not-Self) is Consciousness. The world (not-Self) appears in the waking states but disappears in deep sleep. For a thing to really exist, it must exist at all times. Since, we do not experience the world at all times in all states, it is unreal. But we continue to see the world as though it is real, but fail to see the ever-present Self, which is our very nature. Our vision is superficial. We do not delve deep and enquire into the nature of Reality. Only when our vision is deep and expansive we will be able to separate the Real from the unreal. pratyabhigna is an excellent tool that can help us in this regard.

Shankara now explains how to enquire into the nature of Reality. Youth takes over childhood. Old age takes over youth and death takes over old age. Change is constant. The waking state changes to dream state, the dream state changes to deep sleep state, and the deep sleep state changes back to waking state. Our experience in the waking state changes minute to minute. We are happy one minute and sad the next. We are brave one minute and cowardly the next. From the minute we are born, we experience many different emotions and situations through our entire life,. Nothing is stable. Emotions, feelings, situations come and go. This is called vyAvritti, discontinuity.

The opposite of vyAvritti (discontinuity) is anuvritti (continuity). Even while childhood, youth, and life situations change endlessly, there is a constant factor that is ever-present and shining. It is Consciousness, the continuous awareness or feeling that “I Am.” Since this feeling of “me-ness” persists at all times, it gives scope for pratyabhignya.

When new situations appear, old situations disappear. When youth appears, there is no trace of childhood. There is no continuity or scope for pratyabhignya in the ever-changing world. Although it appears as though there is continuity, if we enquire deeply, we will understand the effervescent nature of the world. We don’t need the scripture to tell us that. Situations and events from the past appear as dreams to us in the present. Dreams are illusory, not real.

What is Real? Whatever gives opportunity for pratyabhigna is Real. That is Consciousness, this feeling of “I Am” that persists through all changes in the world, body, and mind. While states change (vyAvritti), Consciousness remains changeless (anuvritti). We are aware of its unchanging nature in every changing situation. Childhood has gone, and youth has arrived. But I am. Youth has gone and old age has arrived, but I still am. Old age has gone and death has arrived, but I remain. It is the same “I” that experienced youth that has experienced old age, and is now experiencing death. Through all these changes, my real nature as Consciousness remains. This constant awareness is pratyabighna. Since I am always aware of my Self through all states, my Self can never undergo any harm.

A question arises at this point. Does the Self die when the body and mind die? Is there an opportunity for pratyabhigna at the time of death? Since the I-AM Awareness is ever-present, It must be present even at the time of death. If not, who is to experience death? There must be something present to experience death. Death cannot experience itself. All experience is only to Consciousness. It is Consciousness Itself that has experienced childhood, youth, and old age. It must be Consciousness Itself that also experiences the death of the body. Wherever there is experience, Consciousness must be present. If Consciousness is present, that means the Self is present. Therefore, Self cannot be destroyed. As the scripture declares, the Self is avinAsi, indestructible.

Self is Atma, which is our real nature. It is the me-ness, the “I AM” awareness that is ever present. While others may not cognize our ‘me-ness’, we can cognize It because it is our very nature. Yet we do not really do so! Even if it appears as though we do, we are only cognizing the false sense of the self, and not the Real Self. If we truly grasped the Real Self, we would stop seeing the not-Self. When we clearly see the rope, we will stop seeing a snake in its place. If we continue to see the snake, instead of the rope, that means we have not seen the rope clearly. Similarly, once we have completely realized the true nature of the Self, we will stop seeing the not-Self/anAtma. But in the waking state, along with the feeling of “me-ness,” we also have the feeling of “mine” since we see and transact with the world. Therefore, the awareness of “I Am” that we have in the waking state is not the Real Consciousness because it is not the objectless Pure Awareness.

This false sense of self, however, is useful in helping us recognize the Real Self. It is like the shadow of a pigeon on the ground that helps us locate the real pigeon in the sky. The shadow is not the pigeon. It is a false appearance of the real pigeon. However, it helps us locate the real pigeon in the sky. Once we grasp the real pigeon, we are no longer interested in its shadow. The shadow has served its purpose as a pointer to the real object. Similarly, this feeling of I-AM that we usually experience is like the shadow of the pigeon. It is not the real Self or Consciousness. It is only the ego, which is a shadow of the Real Self. Since it is the ego that transacts with the not-Self/world, we assume it is the real self, although it is very limited. Hence, Vedantists refer to it as anAtma or not-self. As long as we assume we are the body, mind, and sense organs and take on doer-ship, we are identifying with the active self (ego), not the passive witnessing Self. To remain as Pure Awareness, there can be no feeling of “mine.” The not-self (world) must dissolve into the Self, in order to experience everything as One Infinite Consciousness.

To experience the Self as Pure Consciousness, one must practice sravaNa (listen) and manana (contemplate) continuously. We need an eminent teacher to help us in our practice. When the great sayings of the Upanishads, such as tat tvam asi, are taught by an enlightened teacher and the disciples contemplate on the teaching, they too will experience the Self, just like their teacher. When that happens, the knowledge of the Infinite that has been lying dormant in the disciple up until now will suddenly awaken and blossom. Great teachers (Acarya-s) appear on earth from time to time to reveal this profound Knowledge to sincere seekers who are devoted to the Truth. The Lord Dakshinamurti, the foremost of all such teachers, reveals the Truth in silence using a jnAna mudra.

A mudra is an external gesture, a symbol, that points to an internal truth. The symbol must be used to grasp the internal Truth. Otherwise, the symbol will remain a symbol, and the truth that it is pointing to will be lost. Once the truth is grasped, the symbol can be discarded. kechari, bhUchari, and other yogic mudras are all such symbols. However, these mudras are not considered “safe” from the Advaitic point of view because they offer prosperity (prEyas), not Peace (srEyas). srEyas is mOksha or freedom from samsAra. The jnAna mudra indicates srEyas because it points to Knowledge. It is also called the cinmudra – the joining of the thumb with the index finger of the right hand. The index finger represents the individual who enters the world and identifies with it. The three fingers next to the index finger represent the three attributes or guNa-s - rajas, tamas, and satva – that the body, mind, and the world are made up of. As long as we are totally identified with the guNa-s, we will have no awareness of the Self. To get a firm grasp on the Self, we must distance ourselves from the guNa-s. The thumb represents the Supreme Self or Consciousness. The thumb joined with the index finger symbolizes the union of the individual self with the Supreme Self. When the individual self merges with the Supreme Self, the not-Self (world) loses its separate identity. Everything is then experienced as one’s own Indivisible, Infinite Self. This in essence is the meaning of the seventh verse.

# Verse 8

**विश्वं पश्यति कार्यकारणतया स्वस्वामिसम्बन्धतः
शिष्याचार्यतया तथैव पितृपुत्राद्यात्मना भेदतः ।
स्वप्ने जाग्रति वा य एष पुरुषो मायापरिभ्रामितः
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥8॥**

While it is possible to experience our own true Self, it is not a common occurrence. If it was a common occurrence, then whoever has been hearing the teaching for a long time would have experienced the Self by now. But that is not the case. The reason it is not so easy is realize the true nature of the Self is due to the power of mAya. Shankara reminds us about this power of mAyA. mAya has two types of powers: Contraction or veiling power, and distraction or projecting power. With its veiling power, mAya limits the Infinite Self, and makes it appear finite. With its projecting power, mAya projects an unreal world that appears as though separate from the Self. Therefore, we suffer in two ways as a result of mAya:. Not only does the not-Self appear everywhere, it also inflicts misery on us in the form of natural disasters, sickness, etc.

It is, therefore, these veiling and projecting powers of mAya that bind us in samsAra. Although, as individuals, we are aware of ourselves, our awareness is not complete or perfect. It is limited and contaminated because it is identified with the adjuncts (body, mind, and sense organs), and not the Pure Self. Hence, in our conventional understanding, the self we know is the false self (separate self). It is this limited self only that we experience throughout our life. We experience the three states (awake, dream, deep sleep), one after the other, endlessly. In the waking state, we are very aware of our self, we have the feeling that “ I Am.” In the dream state, that feeling is very vague. In deep sleep, it is completely gone. What is the use of such awareness, if it is present sometimes and not at other times? And, even when it is present in the waking and dream state, if it is not the awareness of the Real Self?

Therefore, we fail to experience the Real Self in all three changing states. We are not able to free ourselves from the bondage of the not-Self. The contracting power of mAya reigns over the deep sleep, while the projecting power of mAya reigns over the waking and dream states. Shankara refers to these different powers in the sixth and eight verses. In the sixth verse, he referred to the veiling power of mAya (AcAdana) in deep sleep state. In the eighth verse, he refers to the projecting power of mAya (paribrAmitah) in the waking and dream states.

When the veiling power of mAya operates, Infinite Consciousness appears as a limited individual, a separate self with a distorted vision. It is like a child, spun around by two hands, who sees the world around him upside-down. Under the spell of the projecting power of mAya, the our vision gets distorted. In the waking and dream states, we see a world of objects, instead of the substratum, Consciousness, on which they appear.

Not only do we enjoy this magical world and the pleasures and pains it offers, we are also curious about it. In order to learn about the true nature of the world and the Self, we need an eminent teacher, an AcArya, who has attained that Knowledge and is capable of transmitting it to others. A true disciple is the one who is capable of grasping the Knowledge “as is” from an AcArya. It is this teacher-disciple tradition that keeps the lamp of Self Knowledge lit and shining without a break. Since it helps seekers in their search for truth, the teacher-disciple tradition is of utmost importance.

All relationships can be summed up as cause-effect relationships. In the father-son relationship, he who is a son with reference to his father, is himself a father with reference to his son. The cause is not different from the effect.

This entire creation is like a magical production. It is through the creative power or shakti of the magician (Supreme Self) that the world of moving and unmoving objects is projected. Hence, the Supreme Self is the source of the creation (world). In the dream and waking states, we perceive a world of objects. We perceive the objects (effect) as different from the source or cause. This is due to a dualistic vision that fails to see the commonality, which is the cause that permeates the effect (world). It is the Supreme Self, Consciousness, Itself that appears as the world. When we forget the non-dual nature of our Self, we start seeing multiplicity, instead of unity. We perceive the world as “mine” and ourselves as its owners. We assume a “me and mine” relationship with the world and get deeply entrenched in it. We attribute a cause and effect relationship to the Lord and His creation, and assume a me-mine relationship with the world.

It is this me-mine relationship we have with the world that leads to bondage (samsAra). The vision that sees duality fails to grasp the underlying unity that is Consciousness. It does not have the non-dual understanding that it is the cause itself that is appearing as the effect. This misapprehension is due to the power of mAya, the Supreme Power of the Supreme Self.

# Verse 9

**भूरम्भांस्यनलोऽनिलोऽम्बरमहर्नाथो हिमांशु पुमान्
इत्याभाति चराचरात्मकमिदं यस्यैव मूर्त्यष्टकम्
नान्यत् किञ्चन विद्यते विमृशतां यस्मात्परस्माद्विभोः
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥9॥**

Therefore, all misapprehensions are due to mAya. But this is only a diagnosis of the disease, not a cure. Every disease has a corresponding cure. If we keep talking about the disease without talking about a cure, it is a waste of time. The problem will remain a problem. We have established so far that samsAra (the cycle of birth and death) is the problem and mAya is the source of the problem.

Shankara is providing a solution to the problem in this verse. The first step in solving a problem is to understand the context in which the problem occurs. The second step is to take the necessary measures to solve the problem. The final step is to solve the problem. The problem will then transform into a solution.

The snake-rope example is a good analogy to explain this situation. On a twilight evening, let us say, we see something that appears like a snake and are frightened. It is actually a rope, not a snake, but we didn’t know that initially. The rope appeared as a snake, and frightened us. That means the cause (rope) itself appeared as the effect (snake). We have to investigate the cause to clearly understand the source of the problem and find solution. If we flash a light and investigate, we will see a rope, not a snake. Seeing the rope is identifying the cause. This is the second stage in solving the problem. Once we have the knowledge of the rope, what we thought was a snake earlier, now appears as a rope. The form of the snake disappears into the rope. This is the third stage – the solution to the problem. The rope appearing as a snake was the problem. The rope appearing as a rope is the solution.

Since it is the rope itself (kAranNa/cause) that appeared as a snake (kriya/manifestation), the moment we perceive the rope, the snake dissolves into the rope. But, not all effects in the world dissolve so smoothly into the cause. For instance, let us take the example of gold and ornaments made of gold. Gold is the cause and the ornaments are the effects. The moment we see the gold, like the snake in the rope analogy, the ornaments must dissolve into the gold. But that is not the case. Even if we perceive the gold, the ornaments continue to appear. We continue to see the forms of necklaces, rings, etc. along with the gold. We need to make the additional effort of melting the ornaments for the forms to disappear into the gold.

It is in such circumstances that Shankara asks us to apply the power of pratyabhigna (recognition). When we look deep into the effect, we will realize that it is the cause or substance itself that is appearing as the effect or form. It is this recognition of the common and constant factor in every form that is called pratyabhigna. Although we call it an ‘effect,’ the truth is, there is no separate entity as such because it is the cause itself that is appearing as the effect. Shankara refers to the effect as samsthAnam or formation. A block of ice floating on water is a formation of water. When we see any formation of water, even without melting it, we will recognize immediately that it is a formation of water. Water itself can appear in a solid or a liquid form. The liquid form is its intrinsic nature. The solid form is its expansion or appearance (vibhUti). An “effect” is the expansion of the source, the core substance.

Therefore, an effect is nothing but the cause itself. It appears as an effect because the cause manifests in a form, instead of remaining in its intrinsic formless nature. The form or the effect veils or hides the original nature of the cause. Not only does the form make it difficult for us to see or recognize the real substance, it also creates the illusion that the form itself is real! As a result, our vision gets trapped in the illusion of the form, and fails to penetrate into the substance that pervades the form. If our vision is capable of penetrating to the substance, we would recognize the truth that the form is not different from the substance. But this is not our experience.

How can we make it our experience? Since the effect (world) has emerged from the cause, which is our very intrinsic nature (Self), the effect is not different from the cause. Whenever we perceive the effect, we must remember the cause. This recollection of our original nature is pratyabhigna. pratyabhigna is the only sAdhana (practice) required in Advaita. There is no other effort required, since there is nothing new to attain. There is also no need to associate the Self with any object in order to see It. It is Self-evident (svatah siddham). Consciousness is its very form. Whatever form we imagine, it is only Consciousness appearing in that form. Hence, no ritualistic actions are necessary for non-dual realization. Such actions are considered useless by Self-realized sages. Knowledge of the Self and a vision of the Absolute Truth are the only things required.

We already have a vision that is capable of seeing the Absolute Truth. But it has become limited to seeing worldly objects, such as wife, children, possessions, etc. It is engaged constantly in seeing one object or the other. Therefore, we feel like we are in bondage. To be free of this feeling of bondage, we must divert our attention/vision to the Consciousness that permeates every object in the world. When our attention is focused on the common substance that permeates all objects, since objects are only an appearance of Consciousness, the objects will lose their separateness and merge into Consciousness. Since Consciousness is the very nature of the Self, cause and effect that appeared as separate entities earlier, are now experienced as a single substance, that is the Self.

The function of pratyabhigna is to engender that experience of the Self. The first step in the process is to perceive the effect objectively. The next step is to use pratyabhigna to recognize the cause that produced the effect. The final step is to see the cause itself as the effect. As Advaita practitioners, we must continue this practice relentlessly, until the object world completely melts away, and what remains is Pure Consciousness alone.

Shankara is elucidating on this practice now –“bhUr ambhAmsyaanalo’nilo ambaram ahrnAtho himAmsuh pumAn.” bhU means earth, ambasI means water, anala means fire, aniIla means wind, and ambara means space. These refer to the five elements. Shankara adds three more to the list – ahranAda himAmsu, and puman. In the conventional sense, aharnAtho refers to the sun, himamsu refers to moon, and pumAn refers to man or the landlord. These are the literal meanings or primary interpretations of the words and the sentence. However, such an interpretation is not appropriate in this context because, conventionally, the sun, moon, and the human body are included in the five elements. So why did Shankara call out the sun, moon, and human body separately?

We must go beyond the primary meaning of this sentence (vAcyArdham) to grasp the real intent of Shankara. Metaphorically, the three entities (sun, moon, man) correspond to the mind, intellect, and ego. This explanation corresponds to the Chapter 7, verse 4 in Bhagavad Gita, where Sage Vyasa describes the six-fold creation (nature) of Ishwara, and explicitly mentions mind, intellect, and ego along with the five elements.

It is this same concept that Shankara describes in verse 9 using symbolic terms.

While the five elements denote the external world, the remaining three entities (mind, intellect, and ego) denote the internal world of the human being. Together these eight entities are called ashta murti-s. This entire creation is only a manifestation of these eight entities. We perceive them inside us as thoughts and feelings and outside us as names and forms, and suffer. This is the crux of the problem we face.

Shankara now provides a solution to the problem. He says, the myriad forms we perceive externally are the manifestations of the formless Consciousness. By saying so, he integrates the not-Self into the Self. When we hear those words, our vision which has been focused on the object world, now expands to focus on Consciousness, the source from which the world manifests. Up until now, our eyes have been perceiving only the effect, and not the cause. By reminding us about the cause that is hidden in the effect, Shankara brings the cause to the forefront. When our attention is drawn to the cause, Supreme Consciousness flashes in our mind along with the world that our senses perceive.

We spent most of our life seeing names and forms, and not the source from which they appear. This is a deluded vision. The more we focus and engage with objects, the more we suffer under their pressure. Instead, we must view the objects in association with the Consciousness in which they appear. Since, in reality, it is Consciousness Itself that is appearing as all these forms, when our attention is on the underlying Consciousness, names and forms have less impact on us. Consciousness is a single Infinite and Formless substance, while the world is a collection of countless forms. When our vision is on the formless substance, forms dissolve into the formless substance. Mind becomes lighter and capable of glossing over names and forms, instead of getting weighed down by them. Free of names and forms, the mind will automatically break free of bondage. This is the second step in the practice – to focus on the cause, and not the effect.

The third and last step in the practice is to merge the effect (world) into the cause. As long as we see duality, we are in bondage. How can we attain liberation? Shankara says, “nanyat kincit vidya te vimursatAm yasmAt parasmAt vibhO” – those who investigate deeply will find no difference between the cause and the effect. They will see everything as the Supreme Self that is present everywhere, which is the spark of Awareness - “I Am” ( sadAtmakam, sphuraNa).

We must investigate deeply (vimarsha) into this Awareness. We must touch and feel it in every animate and inanimate object with our mind, just as we touch and feel an object with our hand. What is the common factor that present in every object? Existence and Consciousness (sattA and sphuraNa). Presence and Awareness (asti and bhAti). Being and Knowing. Every object we perceive in this world has these two common qualities, presence and awareness. The pot “Is” and “I Am Aware” of its presence. The painting “Is” and “I am aware” of its presence. Presence and Awareness is the essence of everything in this world. But, isn’t the world full of opposites, thin-fat, long-short, black-white, good-bad, positive-negative, etc., we wonder. When there are so many differences in objects, how can we say that every object contains only these two common attributes? It is true that objects have many forms, attributes, and differences. But, as Advaita practitioners, if we pay attention to just these two common qualities, which are the essence of every form we perceive, it is as good as paying attention to the rest of the attributes. We don’t have to look at every attribute separately because, whatever attribute we look at, it simply “is” (asti).

When we keenly examine anything in this world, we will see only the commonality (presence-awareness) in everything, and not particulars. When our focus is on the Universal, particulars dissolve into the Universal. Particulars originally manifested from the Universal. Hence, they are not different from the Universal. Therefore, when we perceive objects from the viewpoint of the Universal, they will appear as the Universal. When we view ornaments as gold, they will appear as gold. Similarly, from the viewpoint of the Universal, all moving and unmoving objects of the world are Presence-Awareness. When we investigate deeply into the effect (world) and the cause (Consciousness) and realize that there is only Existence-Consciousness, the effect merges into the cause. We stop seeing them as separate things. Even the very words “cause and effect” become meaningless, since they are both relative and interdependent concepts. If one is absent, the other is absent too. Together they are One in a homogenous vision. A “vision” is not different from the “visionary.” Hence, everything is experienced as the One Universal Self.

# Verse 10

**सर्वात्मत्वमिति स्फुटीकृतमिदं यस्मादमुष्मिन् स्तवे
तेनास्य श्रवणात्तदर्थमननाद्ध्यानाच्च संकीर्तनात् ।
सर्वात्मत्वमहाविभूतिसहितं स्यादीश्वरत्वं स्वतः
सिद्ध्येत्तत्पुनरष्टधा परिणतं चैश्वर्यमव्याहतम् ॥10॥**

This verse describes the nature of the Universal Self. In the last nine verses as well, Shankara has repeatedly conveyed the same message. In the first three verses, he established that the apparent world is unreal. In the next three verses, he established the non-difference between Ishwara (Creator), and the jIva (individual). In the seventh verse, he explained that that the Self alone is Real and the not-Self is unreal. In the eighth verse, he explained how we incorrectly associate Atma with anAtma, and how this association perpetuates the disease or the problem of samsAra. In the ninth verse, he provided a solution to free us from samsAra.

Shankara used the word vimrusatAm in the ninth verse. This is a gem of a word. Many secrets of sAdhana are hidden in it. Since it is hard for seekers to grasp the teaching if it is buried too deep, Shankara elaborates on it in this verse. He describes the process for attaining the fruit or the result of such a practice, which is sarvAtma bhAva, a state of being in identity with all; an unbroken seamless Oneness.

A sincere seeker must contemplate deeply on this teaching to attain such a state of Oneness. Shankara suggests a three-step practice: shravaNa, manana, and nidhidhyAsana. The first step, shravaNa, is to read the scripture or listen to an experienced teacher with devotion and commitment to learn the Truth. This includes understanding the meaning of each word (padArdha shravaNa]) in a sentence, and understanding a comprehensive meaning of the entire sentence (vAcyArdha shravaNa). For instance, in the great saying, tat twam asi (That Thou Art), the student must first understand the meaning of each word - tat, twam, and asi - and then string them all together to get a comprehensive meaning of the entire sentence. When we have such an understanding, we realize that the words tat and twam are pointing to the same thing - Consciousness. Such understanding dispels ignorance. Ignorance is the lack of knowledge that, while Ishwara and jIva are tightly bound to the world, Atma, pure Consciousness, permeates and transcends both of them.

In spite of having an intellectual understanding of the truth, we find it difficult to separate Atma (Self) from anAtma (world). We continue to fail to understand the relationship of the insentient world we see to the Consciousness that is our very nature. Are they one or are they two? To address those questions, just shravaNa is not enough. manana, deep contemplation and understanding are necessary. With the help of sound reasoning and examples, we must clearly understand that the effect (world) is not separate from the cause (Consciousness), although they appear as though they are different.

Intellectual knowledge of the Self must mature into a firm conviction. Without such conviction, knowledge will disappear the moment we step into the world. The Self will once again appear as Not-Self. This is viparyaya, misapprehension, when a thing appears in reverse, as something different from what it really is. That means, instead of the world appearing as Existence-Consciousness, it appears as names and forms. What is the use of manana if our conviction is so weak that it gets shaken at the least challenge? We would be like the elephant that rolls itself in dirt soon after it takes a dip in the river. To develop firm conviction that the Self Alone Is, manana must culminate in nididyAsana - deep, prolonged, uninterrupted reflection on the nature of the Self (Existence-Consciousness). Like the salt dissolved in water, Consciousness is present in everything. When salt dissolves in water, we cannot see it with our eyes or feel it with our hands. We can only taste it with our tongue. Similarly, when our vision is focused only on the common substance that permeates all particulars, we stop seeing the particulars.

The vision that is focused on particulars is a fragmented vision. The vision that is focused on the common substance that permeates all particulars is a homogenous vision. When our vision is continuously focused on the Self alone, like the uninterrupted flow of oil, it is called nididhyAsa. Whatever we see, hear, or think in this world, we must remind ourselves, “It is my Self alone, Pure Existence-Consciousness, that appears to me, the Seer, as though molded, folded, and solidified into these wonderous forms of the world.” If we train our minds to perceive everything as nothing other than the Self, gradually particulars will lose their specificity and dissolve into the Universal. Forms become blurred and everything that was earlier experienced as particulars are now experienced as the Universal Self. Since the vision is on the Universal and not on the particulars, there is no duality. There is no room for likes and dislikes, good and bad. All duality vanishes. There is no more samsAra (bondage); Only sAyujya, liberation. When we attain this state of being, there will be no difference between transcending (samAdhi) the world or transacting with it. Even when we transact with the world, we will feel that we have transcended it. We continue to experience samAdhi even while transacting with the world. Life becomes samAdhi. In the beginning, before our practice, we experienced life as eternal bondage, but now, at the end of our practice, we experience life as eternal liberation.

When everything is experienced as the Self (sarvAtma bhava), that experience is referred to as the experience of the Universal Self, the Bliss of brahman, and so on. The terms “everything” and “Universal” include the triad - jagat (world), jIva (individual), and Ishwara (Creator). It is the notion of jagat that engenders the notion of a jIva, and it is the notion of a jIva that engenders the notion of Ishwara. Therefore, if the notion of jagat disappears, the remaining two notions will also disappear. This disappearance of the world, the individual, and Ishwara of the Advaiti is not like the “nothingness” of the materialists nor the “emptiness” of the Buddhists. All though the three entities (jIva, jagat, Ishwara) are empty and has no separate existence of its own, as Consciousness, they are Real. When they dissolve in Atma, what remains is Atma alone. Shankara calls this sarvAtma bhava, where everything is experienced as the Universal Self.

The one who attains such a Unified Vision is the liberated one. He is a jIvanmukta. He is not yet a videhamukta because he still has a body. Complete liberation (videhamukta), even from the body, occurs when prArabdha karma is fully exhausted. Until then, the jIvanmukta continues to live. Instead of wasting his life on body-maintenance (food, bath, etc.), he dedicates his life for the upliftment of sincere seekers who have a burning desire for Self-Knowledge and liberation. The Self-Realized one transmits his knowledge and experience of the Self to others through his speech and writings. This is the meaning of the word samkIrtan in verse ten. Shankara lists samkIrtan as the fourth step in the practice, following sravaNa, manana, and nididhyAsana.

Such a realized being, a jIvanmukta, is a fully Accomplished One. Since he is completely identified with the Supreme Self, he has all the powers of the Supreme Self, the most important of them being expansiveness - the ability to see everything everywhere as an expansion (vibhUti) of his own Self. With a Self that is unrestrained and expansive, a jIvanmukta, like Ishwara, is capable of wielding his mAya shakti to fulfill any desire. He automatically gets the power of command over the different worlds and the beings in those worlds, just like Ishwara. He also acquires all the yogic powers- anima, garima, laguma, etc., like the ones Lord Hanuma demonstrated in Ramayana.

The jIvanmukta, however, does not display his powers for trivial reasons. Unlike a mediocre yogi who exhibits his powers to impress others, a jIvanmukta does not have a fickle mind. He has zero desire to exhibit his powers, since he perceives everything as the Supreme Self. When everything is brahman, and there is nobody or nothing inside or outside of brahman, who is there to exhibit and to whom? Only because a jIvanmukta does not have any desires, he is able to see everything as brahman. If he happens to display his powers occasionally, it is only in response to the particular needs of the people of his time based on their prArabdha karma, or to accomplish a particular task that is prompted by the Divine Will. He is simply a means through which things manifest. Even when his powers are operating, like the common people around him, he also simply stands and watches his performance like a spectator. Hence, he is known as a siddha purusha, the Accomplished One.

# Epilogue

Completing the Circle

The Hymn to Lord Dakshinamurti now comes to an end. The problem, the solution, and the outcome have been clearly explained by Shankara. The outcome (the direct experience of the Self) is not out of human reach because it is our very nature. It is present in the beginning (before birth), in the middle (while living), and in the end (after death). Unfortunately, we forget this truth and search for it elsewhere. It is like searching everywhere for the gold chain that it is hanging on our own neck the whole time. Wherever we search for it, we will not find it. Only when we feel our neck and discover the gold chain, we will realize that it has been with us all the time. Similar effort is required for us to realize that our very own Self is the Universal Self.

Caught up in the vicious cycle of samsAra, we have forgotten that the world we see is only an appearance of the Universal Self. We have unnecessarily made the world a complex problem. We now have to remember what we have forgotten. Shankara calls this pratyabhigna. A satguru, a true teacher, can facilitate such an experience of pratyabhigna in the student. Shankara is such a teacher. Having realized the Self, he has shared his Knowledge with truth-seekers like us who are thirsting for Self-Knowledge.

We completed circumambulating Lord Dakshinamurti, the Supreme Self who assumed a form to teach His disciples. We have started with the Self and have ended with the Self. That is why I titled my commentary as Dakshinamurti Pradakshina (circumambulation). He is the Guru and the Self around whom we circumambulate. After performing a Hindu ritual, the worshipper offers Atma pradakshina. He circumambulates around himself three times as an offering to the Self. This Self is not the body, life-force, senses, intellect, or ego. It is the innermost Self (prayagAtma), the Consciousness that is a silent witness to every action that the body-mind perform. It is that Self that we worship. It is the Supreme Self, which manifests as jIva, jagat, and Ishwara. The circumambulation of Dakshinamurti, therefore, is the circumambulation of our own Self, which is essentially the Universal Self. This experience of the Universal Self is the great fruit that Shankara promises us as a result of sincere practice in the form of shravaNa, manana, and nididhyAsana.

Sages compare samsAra to a tree, and mOksha (liberation) to its fruit. A tree grows from a seed and eventually puts out fruit. If we cut open the fruit, we will once again find the seed. Therefore, in the beginning, there is the seed, and in the end, there is the seed. In the middle, there is its expansion from seed to tree. Therefore, it is the same substance that appears in different forms in different stages. This hymn highlights this truth. It starts with the form of Dakshinamurti and ends with It. To be more precise, it starts with a form and ends with the formless. Whatever we perceive as names and forms are essentially the formless Consciousness. Forms are only Its appearance, a decoration. Like a king who continues to be a king, with or without a crown, Consciousness IS with or without a form.

In this hymn, Guru Dakshinamurti, the Supreme Consciousness, assumed a form to teach His disciples that He is the formless brahman. His teaching is in silence. His form is resplendent with Knowledge. His body shines, covered in sacred ash. A luminous crescent moon adorns His head. In one of His four hands, He holds a string of alphabets. In the other two, he holds the musical instrument veena and a book. His fourth hand is held in a in a jnAna mudra. Seated in the position of a teacher, with a pleasant and tranquil face, He teaches the disciples seated around Him. Clothed in an elephant skin, a huge serpent crawling on His body, the Lord sits majestically. May the Lord bestow His Grace on us at all times.

Not only is He Dakshinamurti (the Supreme Self), He is also Ishwara, the Controller. As Dakshinamurti, He is Omniscient. As Ishwara, He has His creation in His control. Since He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, He understands the suffering in the world, and shows us ways to transcend it. His beautiful countenance engenders such noble feelings in us. These are the feelings of a worshiper of a personal god. We can find such gods in any temple. We can manifest them in any form we desire.

Forms with attributes belong to the relative world, not to the formless Absolute Reality. Only the Absolute Reality can liberate us from the bondage of samsAra, not a relative reality that is limited by forms and attributes. As sincere seekers, we must strive to experience the formless, attribute-less Reality. That is the only way to break the bondage of samsAra. Forms and attributes are only an appearance of that formless creative power (mAya shakti) of brahman. They are symbols that point to the formless Reality.

According to mythology, Lord Shiva burned the demigod KAma to ashes and smeared those ashes on His body. There is a deep symbolism to this story. “kAma” means worldly desires. Such desires arise because we perceive the world as not-Self (anAtma), as separate from the Self, due to ignorance (avidyA). When Knowledge of the Self arises, desires and misconceptions about the world disappear. This is the symbolism of “burning of kAma” - the burning of desires, and the transformation of the individual into a desire-free person. When there is no desire, there is no action. Desire leads to action. When desire and action cease, what remains is pure Knowledge or Consciousness. The shining effulgence of Lord Dakshinamurti represents this Pure Consciousness. When all desires are burned to ashes with Self Knowledge, Self alone shines. Reality is ever serene. It is the intrinsic nature of the Supreme Self because It is Undifferentiated Infinite Consciousness. Individual Consciousness, however, is not free. What is the intrinsic nature of the Supreme Self is the goal that the limited-self strives to attain. Only with Self-Knowledge can the individual attain total liberation. Relentless practice is necessary to attain that fully liberated state of being. The effort is only in realizing that our Self is Pure Consciousness.

Lord Dakshinamurti is described as wearing crescent moon on his head. The moon represents the mind, thoughts, perceptions, and feelings that are triggered by the external world. The world is made up of the five basic elements, and the permutations and combinations of the these basic elements make up the fifteen attributes of the object world we perceive. There is a sixteenth one called sAdAkhya. While the fifteen attributes are transitory in nature, the sixteenth one is not transitory. It is the Supreme shakti of the Lord, the creative power that is inherent to the Supreme Self. The nature of the Lord or the Supreme Self is prakAsha (effulgence, the Self-shining light of Pure Awareness). The nature of His shakti is vimarsha (the reflective power of Awareness). When shakti is still and unchanging, It is permanent. When shakti keeps changing, manifesting forms, it is transient. It is called vritti, a thought-modifications of the mind. As long as the mind is trapped in vritti-s, it perpetuates the feeling of a separate self, a jIva. When the mind transcends thoughts and remains still, it experiences Itself as the Supreme Self. When all attributes dissolve, unchanging shakti alone remains, Infinite and Immutable. From the perspective of Ishwara, this is His shakti. From the perspective of the jIva, it is brahmAkAra vritti (the vritti of brahman).

What is the significance of the jnAna mudra, and the garland of letters the Lord holds in his hands? The mudra (thumb and index finger held together) symbolizes shakti, the intrinsic creative power of the Lord or Consciousness. The garland of letters also symbolize shakti. They indicate the movement of the undifferentiated para (Consciousness) into pasyanti, the manifested world. Prior to manifestation is the Self, Pure Consciousness (para). After manifestation, is the not-Self, the insentient world. Manifestation of Pure Consciousness into the not-Self is pasyanti. The garland of letters, from the first letter in the alphabets to the last letter, symbolizes the wheel of samsAra, the endless movement from para to pasyanti to para, from the Self to the non-Self, and back to the Self; from the unmanifested to the manifested and back to the un-manifested. The musical instrument, veena, symbolizes the third stage in the manifestation called madhyama. Veena symbolizes sound. Sound symbolizes expansion. While pasyanti is the slight movement in Consciousness, an intention to manifest, madhyama is the process or journey towards manifestation. Because it is at the mid-point between the intent to create and the creation itself, it is called madhyama (middle). When the divine sound energy expands, solidifies, and expresses Itself in myriad forms, it is called vaikhari. It is this vaikhari form of Consciousness that appears as this Universe. This is the fourth stage in which the un-manifested shakti manifests as the world. The book that the Lord holds in His hands represents this stage. In this manner, the four hands and the objects held in them represent the four stages in the process of the pure un-manifested shakti appearing as the world - para, pasyanti, madhyama, and vaikhari. The fact that the Lord holds these objects in His hands means He has them in His control. Consciousness wields its creative power at Its will. When the individual experiences the great truth, aham brahmAsmi, (I Am That), he too will have shakti in his control.

Such a realization is possible only when individual Consciousness is completely unified with the Supreme Consciousness. This is yoga. Such a yoga, complete union with shakti, is natural to Ishwara. It is not natural to us. If we continue to contemplate and meditate on that Supreme Consciousness without a break, if not this lifetime, in the next lifetime at least we will attain that state of Supreme Consciousness. This in essence is the teaching of the Lord Dakshinamurti.

Surrounded by Sages Vashista, Vamadeva, and others, seated in the position of a teacher, Lord Dakshinamurti offers the greatest teaching. He personifies the Truth that Consciousness alone is Real. Silently, through the jnAna mudra, He inspires us to experience this Truth for ourselves, and share It with other seekers.

Only then we experience Purity – Self uncontaminated by time, space, and objects projected by mAya. There is Peace only when we view these impurities caused by mAya as an appearance of the Self. While Peace is the very nature of Ishwara, it is a goal for seekers like us to strive for.

When we attain such Peace, like Ishwara, we too will transcend mAya shakti. The crawling serpent on the Lord Dakshinamurti’s body symbolizes kAla or time, which moves continuously. When the immovable Consciousness moves, it creates time. The snake also represents the goddess kAli, the inherent creative power of Ishwara. When shakti flows continuously, it solidifies and appears as the world. The elephant skin draped over the body of the Lord represents the world. The world, a projection of mAya, veils the Lord, who is Pure Consciousness. Since the Lord wields the power at His will, He has it in His control.

But this is not the case with individuals like us. We succumb to the power of mAya, instead of transcending it. We are caught up in samsAra (bondage), and struggle to break out of it. Only Ishwara can free us from this bondage. We must constantly remember His glory. He is the Lord Dakshinamurti, the formless Pure Consciousness.

As long as we are held captive by mAya, we will not be able to free ourselves from this disease called samsAra. Instead of abiding in our true nature as Infinite Consciousness, we suffer in bondage. To fully abide in our Self at all times, we must experience everything as the Self - sarvAtma bhAva. Such an experience of Oneness is samAdhi. We can experience such Oneness, only if we have complete faith in Dakshinamurti, the formless, Immutable, Infinite Consciousness, which is our very nature. Since we have distanced ourselves from our true Self for life times, we have become attached to mAya. We must now reverse the process - get attached to the Self and distance ourselves from mAya. We must enter the temple of Lord Dakshinamurti. That means we enter into the sarvaAtma bhAva (feeling of Oneness with everything) and abide in It firmly.