

The Illumination of One's Own Self

Ādi Śaṅkarācārya

Below is a technically precise English translation of the Sanskrit text known as “स्वात्मप्रकाशिका (Svātma-prakāśikā),” traditionally attributed to Śrī Śaṅkarabhagavatpāda (Ādi Śaṅkarācārya). This rendering aims to be faithful to the Advaita Vedānta perspective. Any slight variations in phrasing are intended solely to clarify meaning in English. All errors or shortcomings remain the translator's responsibility.

1.
Ignorance, which is one with Consciousness, is the cause of the universe.
There is but one Mind as the Witness, thus knowing the triad of worlds.
2.
Through an intellect endowed with discernment, I know myself to be the nondual Self.
Nevertheless, bondage, liberation, and such dealings are still perceived.
3.
Even though the universe is a mere appearance, it always shines as though real.
Bound by this net of doubt—“I am thus ensnared”—cut through that doubt!
4.
Hearing the disciple's words, the Guru clearly replies:
“There is no ignorance, no intellect, no universe, nor is there any witnessing faculty.”
5.
Fragrances, liberation, and all else are accomplished in You, the nondual Truth.
When you say “it appears,” the entire universe becomes the very form of Brahman,
Existence itself.
6.
Just as the rope's existence alone underlies the illusory snake, so only Brahman's
existence remains.
Though it appears as the substrate for the universe, in reality that universe does not exist
apart from It.
7.
Just as sugar pervades sugarcane, so you, in the wondrous form of Brahman,
pervade the three worlds.
- 8.

All the water in a mirage is indeed just desert.
Likewise, upon proper inquiry, this threefold universe is nothing but pure Consciousness.

9.

From Brahmā down to the tiniest insect, all living beings are imagined within You.
Like bubbles and waves in the ocean, they are mere modifications.

10.

Just as the ocean does not wish to become a wave,
so you, being of the nature of Supreme Bliss, have no desire for sense-based joys.

11.

As sugar, pervading crushed cane, does not crave sweetness,
so you, pervading the universe as Complete Bliss, do not crave that bliss externally.

12.

Just as one who is wealthy has no longing for poverty,
so you, immersed in Brahman-bliss, cannot harbor desire for sense-objects.

13.

Seeing poison and then nectar, the wise person discards the poison.
Likewise, upon beholding your own Self, you reverently abandon the non-Self.

14.

The sun that illumines a pot is not destroyed when the pot is destroyed.
Likewise, the Witness that illumines the body is not destroyed when the body perishes.

15.

The entire universe is formless, pure, and of the nature of Existence-Consciousness.
In the absence of duality, from what and how could I, who am Full, ever fear?

16.

From Brahmā down to all else, the entire universe is imagined in your bliss.
It merges into you alone—tell me, how could you yourself ever dissolve?

17.

Truly, there is no universe, no collection of elements,
no senses, no group of vital airs, no body;
no intellect, no mind-stuff, no mind, no doer—
Brahman alone is real, of the form of the Supreme Self.

18.

Know all to be happiness, for great sorrow is destroyed;
and know all to be real, for falsehood is dissolved.
Everything is of the form of Consciousness, endowed with inherent luminosity;
therefore it is unbroken, the form of the Supreme Self.

19.

Consciousness alone is the body; Consciousness alone are the worlds;
Consciousness alone are the elements; Consciousness alone the senses.
The doer is Consciousness; the inner faculty is Consciousness;
Consciousness alone is true, the nature of the highest Reality.

20.

For me there is no bondage, no liberation, no scripture, no teacher.
All is but the play of māyā. I transcend māyā, and I am nondual.

21.

The wise one may rule a kingdom or roam fearlessly for alms—
he remains unstained by faults, pure like a lotus leaf in water.

22.

Virtuous and sinful acts in a dream do not persist upon waking.
So too, in my awakened state, virtuous or sinful deeds do not affect me, O Lord.

23.

Let the body perform actions, let speech prattle in vain;
let the intellect imagine ruling a kingdom—what harm befalls me, who am Full?

24.

Let the vital airs move by their own nature, let the mind be assailed by desires—
how could suffering befall me, who am filled with the nectar of Bliss?

25.

Immersed in the ocean of Bliss, the embodied sense is no longer visible.
Like salt dissolved in water, it merges there and disappears.

26.

The senses, mind, vital airs, and ego—together discarding their inert association—
become immersed in me, the ocean of Consciousness.

27.

Directly I know the Self, with ignorance having fled.
My sense of doership has now vanished; there remains no duty anywhere.

28.

In the ocean of Consciousness-bliss, the froth of mind is dissolved;
the wave of mental fluctuations is calmed.
Motionless, perfectly full, the ocean of peace remains.
How could suffering exist for me, who am always the One?

29.

I am of the nature of Bliss, indivisible Awareness;
I am the Supreme, dense with consciousness and radiance.
Just as clouds do not touch the sky,
so worldly sorrows do not touch me.

30.

Bones, flesh, waste, entrails, skin, hair—these define the gross body that subsists on food.
Therefore, I am the pure mass of Consciousness.

31.

All these attributes inhere in the gross body, not in me, who am separate from that grossness.
I am not the subtle (līṅga) body, which is inert. I am the nondual essence of Consciousness.

32.

Hunger, thirst, blindness, deafness, desire, anger, and so on—
all reside in the subtle body. They do not pertain to me, the all-pervading One.

33.

Beginningless ignorance here is called the “causal body.”
But I am not that causal body; I am self-luminous and stainless.

34.

Inertia, pleasure, and delight belong to the causal body.
They do not apply to me, who am eternal and changeless in nature.

35.

“There is a supreme Lord separate from the individual soul; how can that be your claim?”
Such is the ignorant argument. Let us now inquire.

36.

When the substratum, the reflection of Consciousness, and the intellect—these three—
due to ignorance appear as one, that is then called the “individual soul.”

37.

The substratum by itself cannot be the soul, being changeless.
Nor can the reflection of Consciousness, being unreal, be the soul.

38.

Nor does the intellect alone have individuality, for it is inert.
Hence “the soul” is that triad: reflection, Witness, and intellect.

39.

One may call that triad plus the pure Self plus the reflection in māyā “the Supreme Lord.”
But since the reflection in māyā is unreal, none of these individually is the Lord.

40.

Due to fullness, changelessness, and purity, one speaks of “the Supreme Lord.”
But inert māyā cannot truly hold “lordship.”

41.

Therefore, this triad is false, and their implied “Lord” is not real.
Thus “soul” and “Lord” appear only from one’s own ignorance, not in ultimate reality.

42.

Like “pot-space” and “hall-space” imagined in the vast sky,
so “soul” and “Lord” are imagined in me, the sky of Consciousness.

43.

When māyā and its effects dissolve, neither “Lordship” nor “individual soul” remains.
Then I am pure Consciousness alone, the sky of Awareness, free of all limitations.

44.

I resort to the silent conviction:
“That pure, nondual, auspicious state—
the treasure of truth and consciousness, infinite,
free from all objects of perception and all affliction—
That I am always.”

45.

I resort to the silent conviction:
“That perfect, nondual, unbroken Consciousness,
free from any notion of world-diversity,
the matchless supreme Awareness—
That I am always.”

46.

I resort to the silent conviction:
“That which is free from birth and death, joy and sorrow,
beyond all caste, conduct, family, or lineage,
the cause of this universe, which is an appearance of Consciousness—
That I am always.”

47.

Just as an owl perceives darkness in broad daylight,
so to the deluded mind darkness appears in the self-luminous Supreme Bliss.

48.

As one with obstructed vision may think, “There is no sun,”
so the embodied being, veiled by ignorance, thinks, “There is no Brahman.”

49.

Just as nectar, distinct from poison, is untouched by poison's faults,
so I, distinct from inertness, remain untouched by its defects, even as I illumine them.

50.

Even a small lamp-flame dispels great darkness;
likewise, even a little knowledge dispels vast ignorance.

51.

Since I am of the nature of Consciousness, I have no inertness;
since I am real, I have no falsehood; since I am blissful, I have no sorrow.
Those three illusions appear only through ignorance.

52.

In all three times (past, present, future), the snake is never in the rope.
Likewise, there is neither ego nor body nor universe in me—I am nondual.

53.

The wise do not accept that darkness can belong to the sun.
Yet how the deluded mind supposes that darkness and its effects exist in me, the Witness!

54.

As cold water, in contact with fire, becomes hot,
so the intellect, identified with something else, seems to possess doership—yet in truth
there is no doership.

55.

Drops of water do not wet or purify the sky.
Likewise, I am not purified by even Gaṅgā water, for I am eternally pure.

56.

A tree does not attain satisfaction from the fruits it produces.
Similarly, though food and drink be superimposed in me, there is no satisfaction from
them.

57.

A thief imagined in a post does not negate the post's nature.
Likewise, the "individual soul" imagined in me cannot negate my true self.

58.

When ignorance and the intellect dissolve, the wise call that "sleep."
But in me, who has dissolved ignorance and its effects, how could sleep remain?

59.

When the intellect is fully active, that is called the waking state.
But I am devoid of change; there is no waking state in me.

60.

When the intellect roams among subtle channels, dreams arise.
But in me, free of all movement, no dream can exist.

61.

I am perpetually complete, eternal, and pure radiance.
With no extraneous impurity, what need have I for ritual bathing?

62.

Without place, where could one go? Without location, where could one stand?
In me, who am Full, place and position are imagined—I am nondual.

63.

When the movement of vital airs dries up, thirst arises indeed.
But how can that occur in me, who am Consciousness beyond drying?

64.

When the channels are afflicted by wind and fire, hunger arises.
But how could that affliction occur in me, who am pure Awareness?

65.

The slackening of bodily posture and the whitening of hair define old age.
Such does not exist in me, the indivisible, all-pervading Self.

66.

Youth is said to be the proud sense of enjoyment in playing with women.
But in me, the Supreme, Complete Bliss, there is no youth at all.

67.

Childhood, overshadowed by delusion, is perpetually the abode of sorrows, prone to anger.
That does not exist in me, the ocean of happiness.

68.

Thus, for those who are always immersed in the ocean of inquiry into Truth,
there is no doubt they gain direct realization of the highest nonduality.