

Aparokṣa Anubhūti

A summary, dictated by *Swāminī Ātmaprakāśānanda*

Aparokṣa anubhūti means recognition of the self as consciousness, the all-pervasive reality, appearing in the form of the universe.

First Topic

The first of the 144 verses is a prayer and an introduction, this is followed by a further ten verses in which *Śaṅkara* talks about the qualifications required for self-knowledge (identical to those found in *Tattva Bodha*): *viveka* - discriminative knowledge; *vairāgya* – dispassion; *śamādi ṣaṭkasampatti* – the six-fold virtues beginning with *śama*; and *mumukṣutvam* – the urge for freedom, being aware of and committed to one’s end being *mokṣa*, without which that end is impossible.

Thereafter, *Śaṅkara* discusses the means of accomplishing these qualifications:

1. Performance of duties as ordained by *śruti* (*svadharma anuśthāna*, strict adherence to one’s own duties).
2. Being religious – devotion to the Lord. This devotion should be understood in the context of *Vedānta* study, where it is called *Īśvara bhakti*.

Second Topic

Later, from v12-16, *vicāra* (enquiry and analysis) is briefly presented.¹ There, *Śaṅkara* mentions that the study of *Vedānta* involves three things:

1. *Jīva vicāra* – analysis of the individual
2. *Jagat vicāra* – analysis of the world
3. *Īśvara vicāra* – enquiry into the creator, the Lord

Understanding the nature of these three and their interconnectedness is *vedānta adhyayanam* [study of the Upaniṣads]. These three are discussed because ignorance of them is the cause of *saṃsāra*, the so-called problems of the present life. Hence, clear ascertained knowledge of these three factors is the only means of freedom from limitations. *Śāstram* declares: “*Brahma satyam, jagat mithyā, jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ*”: *Brahman* is the only non-dual reality, the universe is ‘as though’ and the individual self is non-different from that non-dual reality, *Brahman*. It is this wisdom of the *Upaniṣad-s* that alone liberates.

Through *jīva-jagat-Īśvara vicāra* (enquiry into the individual, the universe and the Lord) it is shown that *jīva- jagat-Īśvara svarūpa aikyam* (the oneness of the *svarūpam* – intrinsic nature – of the individual, the universe and the Lord) forms the subject matter of the *Upaniṣad-s*.

¹ Saṃkṣepatayā vicāra viśaye kathanam

Third Topic

The third topic is discussed from v17-40. In these verses, *ātmā vicāra* (enquiry into the Self) or *jīva svarūpa vicāra* (enquiry into the intrinsic nature of the individual) is presented.

The individual is said to consist of two aspects: *ātmā* and *anātmā*. Here, the problem is that we are confused about *ātmā* and *anātmā*, so we take one for the other. And, through erroneous superimposition, we even take the attributes of *anātmā* to be those of *ātmā*. This confusion needs to be sorted out. In order to do so, the first thing we need is *ātmā-anātmā viveka*, discriminative knowledge of self and non-self.

Anātmā consists of three factors known as *śarīra trayam* [threefold bodies]: *sthūla śarīram* (gross body), *sukṣma śarīram* (subtle body, or mind) and *kāraṇa śarīram* (causal body). *Ātmā* is distinct and different from all three.

The difference between *ātmā* and *anātmā* is based on their totally different natures. *Śaṅkara* says they are as different as light and darkness [*tamo prakāśayoḥ*]:

1. *Ātmā*, pure consciousness, is of the nature of knowledge; *anātmā* is inert material or the inert matter principle
2. *Ātmā* is available for recognition as the witnessing entity, ever the experiencer, *dr̥k svarūpaḥ*; *anātmā* is ever the *dr̥śyam*, the illumined or experienced.
3. *Ātmā* is attribute-less, *nirguṇaḥ*. *Anātmā* is *saguṇaḥ*, endowed with properties, attributes.
4. *Ātmā* is *nirvikāra*, not subject to change or modifications in the form of birth, growth, decay, death, etc, whereas *anātmā* is *savikāra*, subject to constant change. So, changelessness is the nature of *ātmā* – change is the unchangeable nature of *anātmā*.
5. *Ātmā* is *nirvikalpa*, indivisible, part-less; *anātmā* – divisible.
6. *Ātmā* is *anantaḥ*, not subject to limitation; *anātmā* – subject to all possible limitations, *antavān*.

The natures of *ātmā* and *anātmā* are thus diagonally opposed, yet one is taken for the other!

Śaṅkara asks how the observer or knower (*dr̥k*) can take himself to be the known or observed. The seer of the dress is different from the seen dress [*paṭa dr̥ṣṭā paṭāt binnaḥ*]; the observer of the dog is different from the observed dog; the knower of the body is different from the body, the knower of the mind is different from the mind, the knower of *prāṇas* is different from the *prāṇa*, etc.

Therefore, ‘I’, the knower, the witness of all of them am not the known *sthūla śarīram*, *sukṣma śarīram* and *kāraṇa śarīram* (gross, subtle and causal bodies). This understanding of ‘I’ being the knower, and everything else (including all thoughts) being objects of knowledge other than ‘I’ – ‘I’, the knower, thereby being distinct from everything else, the known – is called *ātmā-anātmā viveka* (discriminative knowledge of Self and not-self).

However, as our identification with the physical body is so strong, *Aparokṣa Anubhūti* focuses more on *ātmā sthūla śarīra viveka* (discriminative knowledge of Self and the physical body). The physical body is elaborately analysed; the subtle body discussed in only one verse; the causal body not brought into the picture at all! But other *prakaraṇa grantha-s* (preliminary texts) make it clear that *ātmā* is distinct from all three bodies. With this, the topic of *ātmā-anātmā viveka* is concluded.

Fourth Topic

From the 41st – 89th verses *Śaṅkara* elaborately discusses *anātmā* being *mithyā*. What is the need for this? The importance of discussing the *mithyātvam* of *anātmā* should be noted. Discriminative knowledge of *ātmā* and *anātmā* must result in understanding them to be two different things: consciousness and inert matter respectively. At this point it is natural to conclude that the truth of the world is two-fold: consciousness and matter – effortlessly, we will end up in *dvaita*, duality (*dvaita dṛṣṭi*)!

However, the *Upaniṣad-s* are very keen that we should not get stuck at this conclusion because, in their vision, as long as there is duality (*dvaita bhāvanā*), so long will there be bondage or *samsāra*. That sense of duality will ensure that one is kept endlessly in *samsāra*!

Dvaitādhi bhayam bhavati – fear is due to the perception of duality.

The *Upaniṣad-s* declare that *advaitam*, the non-duality of the reality, is the ultimate, absolute fact. We should not argue against the facts revealed by the *Upaniṣad-s*, instead we need to arrive at this vision. Hence, two have to be reduced to one, which means, for these two, consciousness and *anātmā*, one is to be ‘devoured’ by the other. Here the question may come, which should ‘gulp’ which? If matter is the ‘devourer’ of consciousness, matter becomes the ultimate truth and consciousness becomes a phenomenon involved in matter, a product of matter.

This view, seeing consciousness as an evanescent phenomenon of matter and matter as absolute reality, is the view of materialists. If, however, as materialists contend, matter is the fundamental reality from which the universe evolves, and matter remains while consciousness comes and goes, materialists are also *advaitins*!

For the *Sāṅkhya* philosopher, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, *consciousness and matter* are two coexistent eternal principles, and so duality will also be there.

Mokṣaḥ is dependent on *advaita dṛṣṭi*, knowing (seeing) non-duality.

Consciousness being the devourer of matter has to be understood: knowing that consciousness is *satyam* and matter *mithyā* is spiritual knowledge. This ‘devouring’ should therefore be understood to be cognitive resolution, the cognitive falsification of matter as dependent (*mithyā*): gold is the devourer of gold ornaments, water of waves, clay of clay pots, etc.

Śaṅkara supports this *Upaniṣad-ic* vision or fact by quoting: *śruti*, *yukti* and *anubhāva* – *Upaniṣad-s*, reasoning and experience. The greatest of these supports are

the *Upaniṣad-s* because the *mithyātvam* of *anātmā* is based on *Upaniṣad-ic* teaching; neither pure logic nor mere scientific experiment can establish it.

What are those *Upaniṣad-ic* revelations in support of this fact of *anātmā* being *mithyā*?

1. *Sarvātmā bhāvaḥ – ātmā* is all; all that is here is *ātmā*. *Aham idam sarvam – I*, the Self, am all this. Everything else is *anātmā*. This vision of the Self being the Self of everything [*ātmaiva idam sarvam*] implies that there is no *anātmā* at all – *anātmā* is only an appearance of *ātmā* – just as recognising ‘clay alone is there’ implies that all pots are clay.
2. *Dvaita pratiṣedhaḥ* – negation of duality. The *Upaniṣad-s* emphatically state that there are not two things – *neha nānāsti kiñcana* (there is not even a little of duality here)². Notice that the *Upaniṣad* uses only the present tense, which means there is no duality in the past, there is no duality in the present and there will be no duality in the future. This implies that the knower-known duality is *mithyā*. But a seeming duality is experienced because the observer himself is making a seeming duality of himself and the world. The waker falls asleep and he himself makes a seeming division of the dream experiencer and the dream world in which there is enjoyment and suffering. Later, on waking, he ‘gulps’ the entire dream into himself. This is the second *śruti* support used by *Śaṅkara* in terms of negation of duality.
3. *Dvaita nindā* – criticism of duality. That which is falsehood is criticised and fact is appreciated. *Mṛthyoḥ saḥ mṛtyum āpnoti, yah iha nānā iva paśyati* – One who sees the plurality, one who sees the duality, such a person keeps on shuttling from death to death (ever remaining in *samsāra*). Duality keeps one bound forever. “Fear is there for one for whom there is even the slightest difference.”³
4. *Dvaitam avidyā janyam* – duality is a product of ignorance. The *Upaniṣad* here states that if you still think duality is real, it indicates your ignorance. Ignorance is the cause for duality as with the perception of a rope-snake, shell-silver, etc. The *Upaniṣad* is saying that whatever is born of ignorance is *mithyā*. *Anyo’sau anyosmi na sa veda* – (“this other (god) is different; I am different” Br. U) whoever sees a difference (between himself and the Lord) does not know. The *Upaniṣad* says such a person is like an animal [*yatā paśuḥ*]. This statement indicates that *dvaitam* will resolve in knowledge. In ignorance one cannot help seeing *dvaitam* – it cannot exist in knowledge.

If we say that in knowledge there is *advaitam* it doesn’t mean that once knowledge of the non-dual reality is attained all perceptual duality vanishes. In knowledge, perception of duality is not denied, but its reality is negated. To know the non-duality of the clay we need not destroy the pots. We can have many pots, but in our cognition it must be appreciated that all is clay. Similarly, a wise person, having the vision of non-dual reality will see differences between the observer and the observed, will

² Br Up 4.4.19

³ “Yedā hyevaīṣa etasmin-ud-aram-antaram kurute, atha tasya bhayam bhavti” (Tai II.vii. 1)

remain with the observed world (existing in the form of five different objects of perception) but in knowledge, in his cognition, there is only *caitanyam*.

The physicist can easily have the vision of non-dual energy even though he sees plurality all the time. Similarly, the wise person has non-dual consciousness (vision) in and through plurality. However, the scientist will not like to give his gold ring in exchange for a silver one. Gold is relatively more valuable to him than silver, even though he knows that all metals are one energy. So also, duality is not something that does not exist at all for a wise person, but it is definitely not absolutely real – non-duality alone is absolutely real.

Advaitam pāramārthikam satyam, dvaitam vyavahārikam satyam – non-duality is absolutely real; duality is empirically real. Hence, duality being the product or effect of ignorance also proves that duality is *mithyā*.

The above four factors in *śruti*'s vision – *sarvātmā bhāvaḥ, dvaita pratiṣedhaḥ, dvaita nindā, dvaitam avidyā janyam* – serve as a support to establish the *mithyā* status of duality. Having supported the *Upaniṣad-ic* vision by means of *śruti*, *Śaṅkara* now presents *yukti*, reasoning, which is not really independent as it is based on *śruti*.

The *Upaniṣad* reveals that the cause (*kāraṇa*) of *anātmā*, the universe, is *ātmā*. The universe is the effect, *kārya*. The simple reasoning here is that the effect cannot exist separately from the cause: the pot cannot exist without the clay, the ornament without the gold. Similarly, the universe cannot exist independently of *ātmā*, consciousness.⁴

Everything has come into existence from *ātmā-Brahma*. Hence, the cause of the universe is Brahman – the universe is the effect. So the world cannot exist independently of *ātmā-Brahma-caitanyam*.

Ātmā being independent of the world for its existence – the world's existence being dependent on *ātmā* – the world is *mithyā*, not countable as a second thing. *Ātmā* is the only reality.

(Here ends the section on *yukti*, reasoning)

Next, *Śaṅkara* uses *anubhāva* to confirm or reinforce the vision of the *mithyā* status of the universe, of its being *anātmā*.

Dream is *mithyā* because it is only available to the dreamer within the dream state. Similarly, waking state experience is available only to the waker. Each state of experience is real only from the standpoint of the particular given experiencer. A dream cough or other illness cannot be cured by waking-state medicine. Dream illness needs dream medicine. Neither can dream medicine cure a waking-state disease. Hence, *jāgrat avasthā* or *svapna avasthā* are only relatively or empirically real. Each is mutually exclusive.

⁴ **Kāraṇa karya prakṛya:** “*Tasmādvā etasmādātmana ākāśa sambhūtaḥ ākāśādvāyuhḥ vāyoragniḥ agnerāpaḥ adbhyaḥ pṛthivī pṛthivyā ośadhayaḥ ośadhībhyo 'nnam annātpuruṣaḥ*” – From that Brahman indeed, which is this Self, was produced space. From space emerged air. From air, fire was born. From fire, water was created. From water, earth sprang up. From earth were born herbs. From herbs came food. From food, man. *Taitt. 2.1.1*

We do not say the world is not there at all, but we say the world has only relative or empirical reality: it is not permanent. This order of reality is termed *mithyā*. *Ātmā*, consciousness, on the other hand is not exclusive but all-inclusive. It exists in all three states of experience, everywhere, always. It alone is absolutely real, *satyam*. What is subjectively real, as interpreted by one's own senses, is not absolute. That reality which is non-interpreted, which obtains without the intervention of senses or instruments, is absolute. Self-consciousness, the independent perception, itself implies the absoluteness of the Self. To know 'I am' the senses need not perceive, mind need not think. Therefore it is *ātmā*, 'I' the consciousness, which is there without the interpretation or intervention of sense organs – which is there even before their operation – that is the Absolute (*paraḥ ātmā or param brahma*). That which is the Absolute is *the Reality*. Anything other than the Absolute, the Reality, is *mithyā*, the relative, which has no independent existence.

Hence it is 'I' the consciousness, the *cit*, as the Absolute, as the Reality, which is the existence, the *sat*, of everything *mithyā*. *Cit* alone is *sat*; *sat* is nothing but *cit*. This *sat-cit* is known as *ātmā*, the Self of every living being, the truth of everything, living and non-living. Hence, *ātmā* alone is absolute; the *anātmā* universe is *mithyā*.

Thus, the *satyatvam*, the absoluteness of *ātmā*, and the *mithyātvam*, the 'as thoughness' of *anātmā* is revealed clearly in this text with the support of *śruti*'s vision, *yukti* and *anubhāva*.

Śaṅkara then gives a number of appropriate examples of illusory perception in order to show that there is error in perception, thus illustrating that it is not impossible for *ātmā*, 'I' the consciousness, to be distortedly perceived as *anātmā*: the non-rising sun seems to rise; the rotating earth appears stationary; sky and water seem blue. All these mistakes are not impossible, but are possible because of wrong conclusions from our perceptions.

Fifth Topic

Freedom while living, being the benefit of knowledge (*jñāna phalam*), is the topic discussed in verses 90-99 inclusive.

There is nothing other than 'I', the consciousness. There is no body, mind or world. All these do not exist independently of 'I', the observer consciousness. Hence, 'I', the consciousness, alone am.

This vision of the oneness or secondlessness or non-duality of 'I', the consciousness, the reality, is said to be *kaivalyam* or *jīvanmukti*. Even though *jīvanmukti* can be defined in a number of ways, such as freedom from the hold of desire, anger, likes and dislikes, greed, etc, or freedom from many psychosomatic problems in the form of fear, loneliness, etc, affecting physical health, still *Śaṅkara* defines *jīvanmukti* as freedom from the bondage of *karma* – all the *sañcita*, *prārabdha*, *āgāmi karma-s*.

Śaṅkara in this context conveys a unique point: a wise person is free from **all** *karma-s* – *sañcitam*, *āgāmi* **and** *prārabdha*. Generally, it is said that a wise person is free from *sañcitam* and *āgāmi*, but has to exhaust his/her *prārabdha*. This disparity is because both views are correct. The correctness depends upon the way we see the *jñāni*. If we

see the *jñāni* as a body, from that standpoint the *jñāni* has *prārabdha*. If we see the same *jñāni* as *ātmā*, then, as *ātmā*, the consciousness, he has no body, no first birth or rebirth, no present birth or future birth. The *jñāni* does not have identity with the gross, subtle and causal bodies. The self is pure consciousness, which is free from doership, enjoyership, *punya-pāpa-s* and birth and death. Hence, from the *ātmā* standpoint, i.e. seeing *ātmā* as consciousness, the *jñāni* is free from *prārabdha karma*. For the purpose of communicating to simple, ordinary people who can relate to a *jñāni* only as a body, we accept that a *jñāni* has to exhaust *prārabdha*.

Sixth Topic

From verse 100 to 144 (the end of the text) *nididhyāsanam* (contemplation) is discussed. It is the only *sādhnam* (practice or means) for *jñāna niṣṭhā*, the ascertained vision of the self being *Brahman*, which alone is *mokṣa*. This means that *śravanam* and *mananam* on their own – without *nididhyāsanam* – will be ineffective for the majority of seekers, however much has been done.

Śravanam will result in the removal of ignorance, *ajñānam*. *Mananam* alone resolves intellectual obstructions in the form of doubts, thereby making knowledge clear and doubt-free. However, even clear, doubt-free knowledge can be helplessly forgotten due to emotional obstacles and habitual errors. Only *nididhyāsanam* can make this clear, doubt-free knowledge ascertained, unforgettable knowledge, a knowledge that can always be to hand in all situations to allow the luxury and freedom of objectivity, *jñāna niṣṭhā*.

Nididhyāsanam is sparing exclusive time for assimilation of *Vedānta* in terms of a clear vision of the ‘as though-ness’, the *mithyātvam*, of the body-mind-sense complex, and the ‘as though-ness’ of all things and relationships (husband, wife, children, assets, possessions, position, etc). Anything overlooked or not understood to be *mithyā* is a potential – and also unpredictable – threat, the unconquered enemy. That given thing will cause fear, anxiety, threat and sorrow.

Ascertainment of the vision of *ātmā*’s *satyatvam* and *anātmā*’s *mithyātvam* is *mokṣa*.

Here, because of habit-caused error, ascertainment of the vision of *anātmā* being *mithyā* requires much more time than the vision of *ātmā* being *satyam*. People who are more involved in worldly transactions, who have more responsibilities, face more problems in life and thus require more *nididhyāsanam*. More transactions require more *nididhyāsanam* especially with regard to the objects and people with whom we interact.

In verses 102-103, *Śaṅkara* presents *nididhyāsanam* as consisting of fifteen limbs, ***pañcadaśa aṅgāḥ***: *yamaḥ, niyamaḥ, tyāgaḥ, maunam, deśa, kāla, āsanam, mūlabandha, dehasāmyam, drksthitiḥ, prāṇāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇā, ātmādhyānam and samādhi*.

Here it is important to note that even though different terms are used indicating different limbs, the main focus of all of them is the vision of ‘I’, the Self, Brahman – *ātma-darśnam* or *Brahma-darśnam*.

After discussing the fifteen-limbed contemplation, Śaṅkara summarises the entire Vedānt-ic teaching in a few verses for the purpose of contemplation. For example:

*Kārye hi kāraṇam paśyetaścāt kārya visarjayeta
kāraṇatvam tato gacchedavaśiṣṭam bhavenmuniḥ*

One should see the cause in the effect,
thereafter dismiss the effect. Thereafter goes the causal status.
The sage becomes the non-resolvable remainder.

(One sees the effect first as the effect, then...)

One should arrive at the cause of the effect in the very effect.

(Later analyse the effect and thereby...)

resolve the effect in the very cause.

(Thereafter, the effect being resolved, the effect being not there)

The kāraṇatvan, the causal status, will also resolve.

(The effect and the causal status being resolved,

what remains non-resolvable is 'I', the consciousness)

The sage 'becomes' the mere 'I', the consciousness

(in terms of knowledge).

As a seeker, one can accept this world as it is, available for experience, then one can shift one's attention to the observer, consciousness, the cause of the universe. Thereafter, analysing the cause of the universe (*kāraṇa*), the universe as an effect (*kārya*) gets negated. That is *kāraṇa kārya vyatiriktam*. When the universe as an observed effect is negated, then one can remain as consciousness (without the observer status), distinct from the observer and the observed. One can see 'I', the consciousness, as being distinct from the knower and the known, cause and effect: *kāraṇa kārya vyatiriktam caitanyam aham*.

Śaṅkara calls this contemplation *Rāja Yogaḥ* (the king of yogas), one that requires a pure, steady, subtle mind. If people find it too subtle, they should start with *haṭha yoga*, which is a relatively grosser process involving the physical body. Just as people who cannot do *mānasa* (mental) *japa* are instructed to begin with *vācīkam* (oral) *japa*, so also here Śaṅkara instructs that those who are not qualified for *nididhyāsanam* to begin with *haṭha yoga*.

Finally, Śaṅkara ends saying that those who are not qualified for any discipline can protect themselves only by having *guru bhakti* and *daiva bhakti* – commitment to the *guru* and devotion to the Lord is the best thing for those people.