

Kena Upaniṣad v 2.4 Pratibodha viditam matam

Unfoldment by *Svāminī Ātmaprakāśānanda*

Pratibodha viditam matam

Matam, the view, the vision. This is the vision.

Bodha, experience, cognition, knowledge, understanding, emotion; thought modification

Prati, in every

Pratibodha, in every cognition or experience or thought; through every cognition, experience, etc

Vidita, recognised, known, understood

This is the vision: Brahman is recognised/known/understood through every cognition.

The previous *śloka* tells us (deals with) who does or does not know *Brahman*, Reality, *Ātmā*, Self. This *śloka* tells us *how* Reality is known.

Every thought, cognition, knowledge is a manifestation of *Brahman*, Pure Knowledge, Consciousness. Consciousness-*Brahman* is recognised only as ‘manifest consciousness’ for which each and every *vṛtti* is the instrument of manifestation. Consciousness is recognised as the illuminator of every *vṛtti*. The illuminator of all the *vṛtti*-s, being one and the same consciousness, is said to be available invariably in all the variable cognitions. The invariable aspect of cognition is consciousness, the variable aspect is thought.

Brahman, limitless reality, is imperceptible, unobjectifiable, unknowable. So how is it possible to know *Brahman* at all without involving the process of knowing? The *Upaniṣad* gives an answer that *Brahman* is knowable, not as an object, but as the very *svarūpam* (intrinsic nature) of the knower, the subject, in one’s own mind. Even though *Brahman* is all-pervasive it is available for recognition only in the mind as consciousness – in other words, consciousness, although all-pervasive, is not recognisable anywhere other than in the mind.

How consciousness is recognisable is explained thus:

Pratibodha viditam matam – (*bodham bodham prati viditam*).

The word '*bodhaḥ*' means 'thought modification' (*vritti*) or 'thought arising in the mind'. Experience, cognition, knowledge, understanding or emotion are various thoughts that shine in the presence of consciousness. Any cognition or experience is thus a combination of consciousness and thought. Thoughts rise and fall yet consciousness remains without arrival and departure. Consciousness cannot become an experience or cognition by itself; so too, thought cannot become a cognition or an experience independently of consciousness. Experience or cognition implies the presence of two factors: consciousness and thought.

Although consciousness is self-effulgent and not dependent on thought for its existence, it is still dependent on thought for its manifestation. Thought, on the other hand, being an inert material product, is dependent on consciousness for its illumination and, thereby, for its own existence. All thoughts are inert: they do not know themselves and do not know other thoughts. Therefore, thoughts cannot be knowledge. Heat and brilliance are not the intrinsic nature of a cold, black, iron ball but, by association with fire, the iron ball gains heat and brilliance. So too, simply by association with consciousness thoughts gain sentience. Just as the heated iron ball can burn, so too the thoughts associated with consciousness can illumine. Consciousness is invariably present in every variable thought. Also 'I am' is invariably present in every variable experience.

When thoughts are not there, consciousness remains without having the status of being the illuminator, without being manifest. Without the illuminator status, without being manifest, consciousness is non-accessible, non-recognisable and non-transactable. Consciousness, being non-accessible or non-recognisable is *as good as* non-existent. But it is not non-existent! The same consciousness, in the presence of thoughts – i.e. manifested by thoughts – becomes recognisable. Hence, the same consciousness in the presence of thoughts gets the name reflected or manifested consciousness, *cidābhāsaḥ*. If we understand consciousness properly as 'manifested by the mind' it is *cit*; understood as 'an attribute of the mind', it is *cidābhāsaḥ*. Without thoughts it is *cit*, pure consciousness. *Cidābhāsaḥ* is recognisable; *cit* is non-recognisable. Therefore, to arrive at *cit* we need to cognitively 'filter' or cognitively 'drop' the thoughts obtaining in every experience.

Here it is to be noted that thought need not be – and cannot be – dropped physically. Any effort to 'put thoughts to sleep' in order to recognise consciousness will be futile because consciousness cannot be recognised if it is not manifested by thoughts, i.e. if thoughts are not

there. Our aim being recognition of consciousness, we should use thoughts to arrive at consciousness by *intellectually* ‘removing’ the thoughts obtaining in every experience.

Non-experienceable consciousness is in every experience. Every experience *is* consciousness; every cognition *is* consciousness. Hence, it is said that that which is invariably present (never arriving or departing) in all the variable arriving-departing thoughts, as manifest consciousness, is nothing but pure consciousness, *cit*.

Just as every opaque object is an object of illumination of light, so also every thought is an object of knowledge or illumination of consciousness. Here, knowing is the very nature – not an action – of consciousness. In the mere presence of consciousness thoughts are illumined.

Consciousness is, thoughts come.

Thoughts shine, consciousness is.

Thoughts go, consciousness is.

Therefore consciousness is invariably present in the variable thoughts. It is also clear that there is no way of recognising or arriving at consciousness other than in the presence of thoughts.

The ‘*aham vṛttih*’ in the ‘I’ cognition – without which ‘*idam vṛttih*’ in the ‘this’ cognition (the cognition of anything) is not possible – itself shines in the presence of consciousness. Even the *aham vṛttih* is an object of consciousness, the ‘I’. Hence, the presence and absence of *aham vṛttih* in waking and sleep respectively is experienced. Such recognition of consciousness as the innermost essence of every thought (*aham* or *idam*) is said to be the clear vision of the non-dual *Brahman* as the self, the ‘I’.

Further, analysing the nature of consciousness, knowing the mind to be an inert material product, we also understand that the knower, the illuminator of all minds, is one and the same consciousness.

These are the words revealing the nature of consciousness used by *Śaṅkara* in his commentary:

The illuminator of thoughts, *sarva-pratyaya-darśī*

Non-arriving, non-departing, consciousness/Reality/Self which is of the nature of seeing/knowing/illuminating, *upajanana-apāya-varjita-drk-svarupaḥ*

Unchanging or eternal, *nitya*

Pure, untouched (by thoughts), *viśuddha-svarūpaḥ*

Indescribably attributeless, *nir-viśeṣaḥ*

Generally, we arrive at an object through the description of its attributes, whereas in contrast we arrive at consciousness and then analyse and understand its attributelessness and indescribability. This consciousness, due to its attributelessness / differencelessness / indivisibility, is all-pervasive like space obtaining in different objects that exist in space such as a pot, mountain, cave, etc.

There is no knower at all other than consciousness. As consciousness alone is the illuminator for minds, it is consciousness that is also indirectly illuminating the external world (through the minds). Consciousness directly illumines the mind and indirectly illumines the external world *through* the mind. Therefore it is said in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*: “The seer of the seer, knower of the knower, the thinker of the thought, etc” (Br. III.iv.2). The absolute illuminator is consciousness, even though consciousness is not the illuminator from its own standpoint.

Here ends Śāṅkara’s own commentary on *pratibodha viditam matam*. After giving his vision of this phrase, Śāṅkara presents two different interpretations of it (by those who accept the authority of *śruti*) and refutes them by revealing their flaws.

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Refutation of *Bhartr-prapañcaḥ*’s interpretation of *pratibodha viditam matam*

Bhartr-prapañcaḥ, a *jñāna-karma saṃucaya vādī* (one whose argument is that the synthesis of knowledge and action becomes the means of *mokṣa*) asserts that knowledge is an action. *Ātmā*, he claims, is the one who is involved in that act of knowing. This *ātmā* is imperceptible. Therefore, he says, *ātmā* is only inferable through the clue of the act of knowing. Every time knowledge arises we infer *ātmā* through that knowledge – whatever is not perceptible by the senses has to be inferred. *Bhartr-prapañcaḥ*’s example is the invisible

wind that is inferred through the act of moving seen in the branches of a tree. The movement of branches is an action done by the invisible factor called wind.

Here, because knowing is an action of which we are aware (I know this or that, etc), the body, being inert, cannot be the knower; the mind, being inert, cannot be the knower; the senses, being inert, cannot be the knower. Therefore, *Bharṭṛ-prapañcaḥ* maintains, there must be something else involved in the act of knowing, a ‘something’ we call *ātmā*. So *ātmā* has to be inferred. Through every knowing you have to infer *ātmā*: this is his interpretation of *pratibodha veditam matam*.

What corollaries do we derive from *Bharṭṛ-prapañcaḥ*’s view?

1. *Ātmā* is an insentient substance with the power of knowing, and is not consciousness itself.
2. Knowledge rises and falls. Consciousness is produced by *ātmā* every time there is an act of knowing. When not producing consciousness, *ātmā* is non-inferable, *an-anumeyah*, remaining a mere substance, *dravyam*, which means it is insentient, *nirviśeṣah*, i.e. *ātmā* becomes subject to change every time knowledge changes.
3. Anything subject to modifications, *vikryātmakah*, has parts, *āvayavaḥ*. Anything that changes is also time-bound, *anityah*. Anything that changes, is with parts and is time-bound, is said to be endowed with the impurities of *punya* and *pāpa (aśuddhaḥ)*.

If we view *ātmā* as *Bharṭṛ-prapañcaḥ* does we cannot avoid *ātmā* having these defects, which are negated by *śāstram*. In other words, he contradicts *śāstram*. His interpretation of *śruti* is, therefore, not acceptable.

Refutation of the interpretation of *pratibodha veditam matam* by *Kaṇāda*

Kāṇāda is the *nyāya vaiśeṣika* systemⁱ propounded by *Kaṇāda*. It says: *ātmā manaḥ saṃyoga jaḥ bodha* – consciousness, *bodha*, is a product that is born of, *jaḥ*, the association, *saṃyoga*, of *ātmā* and the mind, *manaḥ*. In contrast, *Advaita Vedānta* says that *ātmā* is unborn and consciousness itself.

According to *tarka śāstram*ⁱⁱ there are three classifications of measurement, *parimāṇa*. The smallest is denoted by *aṇuḥ*, the biggest by the term *vibhu* and the intermediary by *madyama*.

In *tarka*, anything should be introduced in terms of its *parimāṇa*. The mind is *anu-parimāṇa*, *ātmā* is *vibhu-parimāṇa*, and this *anu-parimāṇah* mind and *vibhu-parimāṇa ātmā*, both of which are inert, combine to produce consciousness. This newly born consciousness joins *ātmā*, becoming an attribute of it. This means *ātmā* takes the help of the mind to produce consciousness, but the consciousness produced is not shared: consciousness joins only *ātmā*, and thereby *ātmā* alone becomes conscious and (hence) the ‘knower’.

According to *Kāṇāda*, *ātmā* is an inert substance that temporarily becomes conscious due to its association with consciousness born of mind-*ātmā* combination. Here, knowing is not an action of *ātmā* (as stated by *Bharṭṛ-prapañcaḥ*) but an attribute that joins *ātmā*. If knowing is a temporary attribute and not an action, *ātmā* undergoes no change – *ātmā* will continue to be a changeless, inert entity like the pot associated with a colour.¹ Because in the *Kāṇāda* view consciousness is only an attribute of *ātmā*, not an action done by *ātmā* (as per *Bharṭṛ-prapañcaḥ*’s view) *ātmā* escapes the flaw of being subject to change.

Śaṅkara, however, finds five flaws in the idea that consciousness is a product of the meeting of *ātmā* and mind:

1. It contradicts *śruti* by reducing *ātmā* to an inert substance.
2. It contradicts reason because partless *ātmā* and partless mind can never meet.
3. It contradicts reason because permanent consciousness arising from the meeting of permanent *ātmā* and permanent mind denies the possibility of sleep.
4. It contradicts reason because permanence of contact means that knowledge and memory can never be sequential.
5. It contradicts *śruti* by postulating actual contact between *ātmā* and mind.

Below we examine these in more detail.

1. *Ātmā can never be inert.* The flaw in the *Kāṇāda* view is it reduces *ātmā* to an inert, insentient substance, which contradicts *śruti* statements such as “*Vijñānam ānandam brahma*” (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka*). “*Satyam jñānam anantam brahma.*” (*Taittirīya*). It is thus opposed to scripture, *śruti virodha*.

¹ “*Rāga samavāyī ghaṭa iva dravyamātraḥ ātmā avikriyātmakaḥ bhavati.*”

Having pointed out that the *Vaiśeṣika*'s view contradicts *śruti*'s view, now *Śaṅkara* shows it also being contradictory to reasoning, *yukti virodha*.

2. *Partless ātmā and partless mind can never meet*: Two materials can combine only if they have parts, *avayavam*. One thing with parts, *sa-avayavam*, can be connected to another *sa-avayavam*: one part can connect only with another part, not the whole. For example, only one given part of the body 'contacts' a given part of a dress, and vice-versa. (The sleeve of a dress can make contact only with an arm, and not with a leg or the trunk). Here the dress is *sa-avayavam* and the body is *sa-avayavam*. So one part, *avayavam*, can contact only one other given or particular *avayavam*.² If, however, one or both materials does not have parts, *niravayavaḥ*, connection or contact or combination is impossible, e.g. the body (made up of parts) cannot combine with space, which is partless. *Ātman* is without parts, *niravayavaḥ*. *Manah* is also *niravayavaḥ*. Therefore, the combination of partless *ātmā* and partless mind is impossible – and thus the *Kāṇāda* view is refuted using their own *nyāya vaiśeṣika* law of combination!³

3. *The contact between permanent ātmā and permanent mind denies sleep*: Now *Śaṅkara* points out a hypothetical condition, *abhyupetya vādaḥ*: suppose we *do* assume that mind and *ātmā* manage to be in contact, then *ātmā*, being all-pervasive and eternal, will be in permanent contact, *nitya saṃyoga*, with permanent mind – whether the mind is functional or not. There are two consequences:

1. Consciousness, being a product of the combination, will be permanently there. Consciousness being permanently there means that there will be a permanent absence of sleep, *suṣupti abhāva*, which experience shows is not the case.
2. According to the *Vaiśeṣika*-s sleep is the absence of consciousness. But since *ātmā* and mind are never not in contact (*ātmā mānasaḥ saṃyujate*) there will never be a time when consciousness is not there. Hence, sleep will be impossible.

4. *The flaw in the Kāṇāda 'memory view'*. According to the *Vaiśeṣika* theory of direct perception, *pratyakṣa jñānam*, knowledge rises when *ātmā* contacts the mind, the mind

² *Sāvayava dravyam sāvayava dravyena sambadhyate* – One material thing with parts can be contacted by another material thing with parts.

³ *Sāvayavaḥ dravyayoh eva sambandhaḥ bhavati* – Connection is possible only when two materials have parts.

contacts the senses, and the senses the sense objects. When mind comes into contact with sense objects through the senses the perceptual knowledge that arises creates mental impressions, *saṃskāra-s* or *vāsanā-s*. Thus, the mind is always endowed with innumerable *vāsanā-s* (*saṃskāra sahitam*). When the *vāsanā*-endowed mind comes into contact with *ātmā*, memory is generated. According to *Kāṇāda*, direct knowledge, *pratyakṣa jñānam*, and memory or remembered knowledge, *smṛiti jñānam*, are sequential, never simultaneous. However, *Śaṅkara* points out that in order for there to be sequentiality there needs to be a gap between the rising of knowledge and the laying down of memory. Since *ātmā* and mind are permanently associated there never is a gap. No gap, no memory. This is a flaw.

5. *The flaw in the idea that ātmā touches mind.* Now *Śaṅkara* presents one more *śruti virodha*. Both *śruti* and *Gītā* say that *ātmā* is all-accommodative and at the same time untouched, *asaṅgaḥ*, just as the waker is untouched by the people and objects of the dream state or as opaque objects are not in actual contact with light⁴. Therefore, due to *ātmā-asaṅgaḥ*, the combination of mind and *ātmā* is not possible. According to *advaita darśanam*, the non-dual vision of reality, the association or connection of *ātmā* with anything in the world is only apparent, not actual. Though connection is not actually possible it appears that we connect. This, however, is ‘seeming to be’ connected or associated like the unique ‘connection’ of mirage water ‘found’ on dry sand. Mirage water is always over the sand, while the latter remains untouched by wetness. Similarly, although the waker is a higher order of reality and dreams a lower order, dreams are taken to be real while happening. Non-combination is also confirmed by logic: items with dissimilar features e.g. oil and water, cannot combine. Mind has *dr̥ṣyatvam*, the status of being an object; *bhautikatvam*, the status of being elemental; *saguṇatvam*, the status of having attributes; and *savikāratvam*, the nature of changeability. *Ātmā* is the diagonal opposite of all these: it is not a part, product or property of anything. *Ātmā* is *adr̥ṣyatvam*, ever the subject (seer), completely distinct from matter; it is *abhautikatvam*, not composed of elements; it is *nirguṇatvam*, without qualities; and *nirvikāratvam*, unchanging. *Ātmā* and *anātmā* are of diagonally opposite nature, *atulya jāṭīyatvāt*. Therefore, *ātmā* and mind are opposed to each other and cannot combine.

The conclusion is that, if *ātmā* and mind are not connectable (because of their opposite nature) consciousness cannot be a product of matter; consciousness is neither an action nor an

⁴ *Tamaḥ prakāśavat virudha svabhāva.*

attribute but an independent entity that is free from all attributes, specific features and totally unlike all material things. The following doubt might arise: when someone faints, has consciousness gone away? No. Consciousness does not come and go, but in a faint the brain has temporarily stopped manifesting consciousness and consciousness has temporarily become unavailable.

Śaṅkara, having refuted these schools of thought, mentions five features of *ātmā*:

1. *Ātmā* is not a part or property or product of any phenomenon (such as, for example, the body-mind-sense complex).
2. Pervading the body-mind-sense complex it makes it conscious, sentient.
3. *Ātmā* is not limited by the boundaries of the body.
4. Consciousness survives the destruction of the body.
5. Although after death it is no longer transactable or accessible, that should not be mistaken for its non-existence. Non-accessibility is due to non-availability of mind, the interacting medium.

Ātmā, the eternal, unbroken light of consciousness is *Brahman*, the limitless reality (*nitya alupta vijñāna svarūpa jyotiḥ ātmā brahma*). When a person understands that *ātmā* is the eternal witness that illumines the arriving and departing thoughts in the mind, his understanding is correct. This person understands that the thought process happening in the mind is not in *ātmā* but only in the mind.

Thought processes continuously take place like the rising and falling of waves in the ocean. The Sun above illumines the entire ocean as well as the rising and falling waves. Mind is like the ocean; consciousness is like the Sun. *Ātmā* is said to be the knower of all knowledge, *sarva bodha bodhṛtvam*, which is the same as the illuminator of all thought, *sarva vritti prakāśakatvam* – knowing is illumining. Here, illumination is not an action, it is the nature of consciousness. Just as nothing is done on the part of the Sun to illumine the waves and ocean – illumining occurs naturally, effortlessly, by its mere presence – similarly nothing happens on the part of *ātmā* to cause the rising and falling of thoughts.

When you properly understand the changeless *ātmā* being the illuminator of the changing thoughts, then what is revealed by *pratibodha viditam matam* has become your vision.

Śaṅkara concludes, saying, this is the appropriate interpretation: all others are defective.

Buddhists' view refuted

Having refuted the *āstikas*, those who accept the *Veda-s* as *prāmaṇa*, Śaṅkara now refutes the *nāstikas*, the atheists (specifically the Buddhists) who do not accept the *Veda-s* as a *pramāṇam*.

There are four sub-divisions of Buddhism representing four views, *matam-s*

1. *Vaibhāṣika matam*
2. *Sautrāntika matam*
3. *Yogācāra matam*
4. *Mādhyamika matam*.

On the principle that one does not need to defeat every boxer to be supreme (one just needs to knock out the champion) Śaṅkara devotes his attention to the refutation of the most prominent of the four schools of Buddhism of his time, the *Yogācāra matam*, as this is the one closest to *Advaita Vedānta*.

The fundamental doctrine of the *Yogācāra* school, also known as the 'consciousness-only' school, is that all phenomenal existence is fabricated by consciousness. Consciousness, in making distinctions between self and other, becomes, in their view, the subject that treats everything else as an object. Consciousness itself is real. It exists, they say, as a series or stream of successive momentary 'awarenesses' of events, each immediately replaced by a fresh consciousness in the next moment. Consciousness has no substantiality ...and is dependent on the consciousness of the preceding instant.⁵

According to the *Yogācāra* view, the experienced universe is 'as-though' real (*mithyā*) and consciousness is absolutely real (*satyam*). Although this is close to the view of *Vedānta*, there is a problem: *Yogācāra* contends that consciousness can be proved only when consciousness itself knows consciousness. This necessitates the observer, consciousness, being observed by consciousness itself – and through the observation consciousness is proved, i.e. consciousness

⁵ <http://online.sfsu.edu/~rone/Buddhism/Yogacara/basicideas.htm>

is both subject and object. This is the *Yogācāra* theory of consciousness: consciousness is known by consciousness itself.

Śaṅkara points out four flaws in this view. It implies that:

1. The subject and object are identical (whereas the difference between subject and object is a fundamental law).
2. Consciousness is momentary (whereas in fact it is continuous).
3. Consciousness is absent (whereas in fact it is ever-present).
4. *Ātmā* initiates action (whereas *ātmā* is of the nature of actionlessness).

These refutations are now examined in more detail.

1. The defect of taking subject and object to be the same:

The *Yogācāra* view states that consciousness is only known by consciousness, i.e. consciousness is the subject and consciousness is the object. Subject and object are identical according to this view.

The fundamental law of the relationship between subject and object, however, is that subject and object can never be identical. The revealer can never be the revealed; the observer can never be the observed; the eyes can see everything but cannot see themselves; consciousness can never be both observer and observed. The concept of self-knowability, *sva samvedyatā vādaḥ*, violates this fundamental law. This is the defect of non-identical subject and object being taken as identical, *karṣṇa-karma-virodha-doṣaḥ*.

The exception to this rule is when a thing has several parts, *sāvayava vastu*. The body, for example, has several parts, so if the hand touches the head we say, ‘I touch myself’: the subject (body) touched the object (body). Even here, however, the hand that can touch any other part of the body cannot touch itself. Equally, due to the partlessness of consciousness, *niravayava-caitanyam*, it’s not possible for consciousness to observe itself. Self-knowability, *sva samvedyatā*, therefore, cannot be correct.

Even though it does not accept the authority of *Vedānta śāstram*, the *Yogācāra* objection can be that there are many *Vedānta* statements that indicate *ātmā* knowing itself: ‘*Ātmānam ātmanā vetthi*’ may you know your Self by your Self; or ‘*Paśyati ātmānam ātmani*’ one sees

the Self by the Self; or ‘*Svayam eva ātmānam ātmanā vettha tvam puruṣottama*’ O Supreme Person, you should know the Self by your Self alone. (BhG 10.15).

Śaṅkara’s refutation of this point is elaborate. Through statements like the above it might appear that *Vedānta* itself suffers from the defect of not acknowledging the opposition between subject and object, *kartr-karma-virodha-doṣaḥ*. But there is no such flaw. Why not? *Vedānta* recognises *ātmā* from two perspectives according to different standpoints: consciousness without *upādhi-s*⁶ (*nirupādhika-ātmā*), and consciousness with *upādhi-s* (*sopādhika ātmā*).

Statements such as ‘May you know the *ātmā* by the *ātmā*’ cannot be referring to pure consciousness, *nirupādhika-ātmā*, by the term *ātmā* because the process of observation is an action and, due to its nature of actionlessness, *akrīyatvam*, it is not possible for *ātmā* to know itself directly through a process of observation.

This problem, however, does not exist if the term *ātmā* refers to consciousness with *upādhi-s*, i.e. during the transactional state, when *ātmā* is associated with the *upādhi-s* in the form of either five layers of personality or the three bodies: gross, subtle and causal.⁷ The *ātmā* endowed with *upādhi-s* is a mixture of Self and not-Self. Thus two inseparable aspects constitute the *ātmā* with *upādhi-s*: the consciousness part (*caitanya-aṃśaḥ*) and the inert, mental part (*jaḍa-aṃśaḥ*) – one part is the knower and the other part the known. Due to their inseparable intimacy with *ātmā*, the *upādhi-s* are taken as *ātmā* – i.e. there is ‘I’ sense in the gross and subtle bodies.

From the perspective of the mind, *buddhi upādhi*, *ātmā* is divided in two: the witness, *sākṣī*, and the witnessed, *sākṣyam*. Only then is it possible to use the expression, ‘May you know your Self by your Self’. ‘I’ is there without thought, *vṛtti*. ‘I am’ means there is a thought. ‘I’

⁶ *Upādhīyate asmin iti upādhi*: That which lends its qualities / that by which qualities are lent is *upādhi*. That which casts its properties upon something that is inseparably close to it is *upādhi*. *Upādhi* is commonly translated as ‘limiting adjunct’, e.g. colourless crystal takes on the colour of the red hibiscus flower near it. Flower is the *upādhi* for the crystal. Pot is the *upādhi* for ‘pot-space’ (which, by being enclosed, appears different from general space). Body/mind/sense is the *upādhi* for *ātmā*. The universe is the *upādhi* for *Īśvara*. Any name and form is an *upādhi* for consciousness.

⁷ *Pañca koṣa*, the five layers of personality, is a more elaborate description of the threefold body: gross, subtle and causal. The *koṣa* made of food = gross body; the *koṣas* made of *prāṇas*, mind and intellect = subtle body; the *koṣa* made of happiness = causal body.

is pure consciousness; ‘I am’ is manifest consciousness. Consciousness manifest through the ‘I am’ thought is *ahankāra*. When, in the wake of knowledge, a person declares, ‘I am *Brahman*’ (*Aham Brahmāsmi*) it is the mind part that recognises Brahman, i.e. the thought is of That which is indivisible in form, *akhaṇḍa-akāra vṛtti*. The mind, through the thought ‘I am *Brahma*’, ‘knows’ consciousness.

The consciousness aspect too, the Witness, knows the mind aspect – ‘I can observe my thoughts’. To claim ‘I am consciousness’ I require the mind. And to know mind as an object requires the Witness, *sākṣī caitanyam*. With the help of mind, ‘I’ knows the Witness; with the help of the Witness, the mind is known. Mind alone can never know itself; equally, pure consciousness can never know itself.⁸ Thus from the point of view of *ātmā* with *upādhi-s* alone we can accept ‘I’ knowing itself, but from the perspective of pure consciousness there is no question of *ātmā* knowing itself through the process of perception: for pure consciousness there is no self-knowability or knowledge of the world.⁹

2. Flaw in the implication that consciousness is momentary:

Since any direct observation exists only for a moment, every observation is momentary. The statement *pratibodha viditam matam* is therefore understood by *Yogācāra* Buddhists to be speaking of momentary consciousness that is self-revealing through a series of observations. The concept of self-knowability, *sva samvedyatā vādaḥ*, is thus also linked to the concept of momentary consciousness, *kṣaṇika vijñāna vādaḥ*. According to this concept one can never talk about the continuity of anything – not even of the individual. Continuity is merely an erroneous perception.

To illustrate this, *Yogācāra* gives the example of bathing in *Ganga*. On the surface it looks as though one is bathing in the one river, but *Ganga* is constantly flowing and so at each moment the water is different: the old *Ganga* isn’t there at all, it has gone. Similarly, if we

⁸ This is illustrated through the analogy of light. In the absence of an illumined object, the status of illuminator is not possible for light. Without the light, the illuminator is not possible. Without the illuminator, the illumined is not possible.

⁹ There are three states when consciousness is ‘pure’, i.e. unattached to thought: **deluge** (*mahā pralaya*) when everything resolves, consciousness alone is there, nothing is remembered; **death** (*pralaya*) when mind is resolved, as in deep sleep, the difference being that we wake in a different body and ‘I was not there before birth’ is known; **sleep** (*laya*) when ‘I’ is there without the knowledge ‘I am’, i.e. awareness is there without self-awareness. This is known only when waking and not during sleep.

look at a ‘continuous flame’ we discover that it too is not continuous, it is dying every moment and is not the flame of a moment ago. *Yogācāra* argues that if there was continuous presence of the flame there would be continuous presence of oil in the lamp, the oil would not get depleted. But we notice that the oil does get depleted. The first flame, generated by the first drop of oil, comes and goes and is replaced by the second flame that uses the second drop of oil, and so on ‘til the oil is depleted. Continuity of the flame is just a delusion.

Śāṅkara argues that if consciousness can be proved only by the observation of consciousness, then, since any observation exists only for a moment, consciousness must come and go. In any one moment, the existence or otherwise of consciousness cannot be proved by the consciousness that existed in the previous moment because direct knowledge is possible only for what is present! Accordingly, past and future can never be seen, they can only be inferred: the consciousness of Moment 1 can never know the consciousness of Moment 2. And the consciousness of Moment 2 can be proved only by itself, which means the consciousness of Moment 1 must by then have gone. Similarly with the third moment, etc. Therefore, one can never prove the existence of either past or future consciousness because perception is involved, and perception, occurring as it does only in the present, cannot prove that which is in the past or future. This concept of consciousness contradicts the view of the eternality of consciousness, i.e. that it is beginningless, endless and changeless. Therefore the *Yogācāra* Buddhist interpretation of *pratibodha viditam matam* suffers from the defect of implying that *ātmā* is *anitya*. In so doing it contradicts such statements of scripture as ‘*Nitya vibhum sarvagatam*’ (eternal, omnipotent, all pervasive - Mu. Up) etc, that assert the imperishability and permanence of *ātmā*. Apart from the flaw of contradicting scripture (which the *Yogācāra* Buddhists do not accept as an authority in any case), this concept of momentary consciousness throws up another defect...

3. Flaw in the implication that consciousness is absent:

The corollary of the view of the momentary nature of consciousness is that consciousness is absent between every moment i.e. between one moment and the next there is nothing: Moment1 – nothing – Moment 2 – nothing –Moment 3 – nothing, etc. Logic tells us that something cannot come from nothing. But the nature of momentariness is that it has a beginning and an end. As there is no way of knowing what, if anything, exists before ‘Moment 2’, we can only assume that there is nothing. If it is argued that there is something

else between moments, then consciousness cannot be the single fundamental cause of the universe, which contradicts *Yogācāra*'s own concept of 'only consciousness'.

4. Flaw in the implication that consciousness is active:

The other corollary of the *Yogācāra* view is that, as the process of observation is an action, and *ātmā*-consciousness is the observer, *ātmā*-consciousness becomes an actor. *Vedānta*, however, declares consciousness to be of the nature of actionlessness. For there to be action there needs to be space, time and will – all of which are material in nature. *Ātmā*-consciousness, being the ultimate cause, is there before the manifest material universe and thus cannot be an actor.

In conclusion: before self-recognition, when I claimed, 'I am a conscious being', the body-mind-sense complex *upādhi-s* and their attributes were included in the expression 'I am'. During knowledge I use the mind *upādhi*, but the expression 'I am' does not include the body-mind-sense complex *upādhi-s* and their attributes. Self-knowledge is nothing but cognitively dropping the limitations falsely superimposed on the already evident 'I am': we are never going to gain new knowledge of the Self.

There is a general misunderstanding of the expression 'self-revealing *ātmā*'. Some think that when all thoughts are removed 'I' exists as pure consciousness i.e. consciousness is self-revealing: 'I will know myself in that moment and I can realise '*Aham Brahmāsmi*'. This understanding that 'self-realisation' is an event in time that takes place in an extraordinary state after all thinking has been removed is wrong. There is no knower-known division in consciousness, so such an even in time cannot take place.

When mind is absent, no knowledge of Self or non-Self is possible. Self-knowledge requires the mind – not consciousness alone. Hence, by keeping the mind and making the best use of it (i.e. without making efforts to 'transcend the mind') self-knowledge is accomplished through mind backed by consciousness. In self-knowledge we do not know anything new: consciousness is always self-evident and need not know itself as an event in a particular moment in time.

In this way, *Yogācāra*, the ‘champion’ objector to the *Advaita Vedānta* interpretation of *pratibodha viditam matam* is defeated.

The *Kenopaniṣad* verse continues with a description of the benefit of knowledge.

Amṛtatvam hi vindate, he attains immortality

Amṛtatvam, immortality = being free, *a-maraṇa-bhāvaḥ* = freedom from limitation, *mokṣa*.

A person gains immortality by *Brahma jñānam*, the recognition of invariable consciousness in every variable cognition, *pratibodha viditam matam*.

Brahma jñānam = The knowledge that *Brahman* is *Ātman* (*Brahma-ātmā jñānam*) = The knowledge ‘I am *Brahman*’ (*aham Brahmāsmi iti jñānam*) = Self-abidance: i.e. abidance in the knowledge of the fact that I, the Self, am limitless consciousness, *Brahman* (*svātmani avasthānam*) = Absolute freedom from sorrow, *mokṣa*. This is the attainment of immortality.

The expression *aham Brahmāsmi* is only a ‘revised self-conclusion’, which means I do not look upon myself as a *jīva*, which means an acceptance of the limitation of the body-mind-sense complex without seeing these as ‘my limitations’. Even the term *jīvan-mukti* is no longer relevant for me. It is relevant for the *jīva* but, in the ascertained vision of myself being *Brahman*, ‘I’ is no longer a *jīva*. *Jīvan-mukti* is only relevant to the *jīva* after exhausting *prārabdha*. And *videha-mukti* is also no longer relevant. I, the Self, pure consciousness, cannot become free because it is already free. The words of scripture are for those who suffer from the wrong notion that ‘I am the *jīva*.’ Hence, the freedom that is relevant for me is limitless freedom, *nitya mukti* – I, the Self, am consciousness, which is ever free. This is abiding in oneself, *svātmani avasthānam*.

Vāsanā kṣaya (elimination of the mental impressions of past experiences) and *mano nāśa* (destruction of the mind) are not relevant: consciousness does not destroy anything. The removal of wrong knowledge, *viparīta-bhāvāna-nivṛttiḥ*, is achieved through right knowledge. The message here is that *mokṣa* is the knowledge that I am that *Brahman*, which is available in every piece of knowledge and does not require a special experience at a

particular point in time. (If *Brahman* could only be realised through a particular experience, *Brahman* would only be available through that experience and would thus be *anātmā*). Therefore, if my Self is recognised as *Brahman*, this knowledge becomes the cause, *hetu*, for immortality. *Brahman* known as any other thing i.e. anything other than myself, would not be the *amṛtatva-hetuḥ* because it would be *anātmā* (not-Self).

Knowing the immortality of some other thing called *Brahman* (i.e. of the *anātmā Brahman*) I cannot attain immortality. Why not? Because, if I have to reach/attain the immortal *Brahman*, reaching/attaining is the fruit of action. Such an immortality, being time-bound, is not expected by me. Hence one should know that *Brahman* alone is immortal and that that immortal *Brahman* is none other than myself. When I claim immortality as my very nature, that immortality will be eternal/permanent because it is my own unconditional nature. If immortality is caused by any external or extraneous condition it will be ‘conditioned’ immortality that will last only as long as the condition persists: once the condition goes, immortality will go. Only immortality claimed as my own nature will be immortal.

An objection might arise: If immortality is one’s own unconditioned nature, immortality must always be available. If immortality is always available it cannot become a goal, *sādhyam* / *lakṣya/parama-puruṣārtha*. If it isn’t a goal, there is no need for any means of accomplishment, *sādhana*. If there is no need for a *sādhana*, there is no need for the study of *Vedānta*!

Śaṅkara’s response: Even if immortality, *mokṣa*, cannot be the actual goal, it can be the seeming goal, *sādhyā-ābhāsa*. There is ignorance of what *mokṣa* is and this is due to ignorance of the Self, i.e. when anyone makes the erroneous conclusion, ‘I am a mortal being,’ that person disowns his or her real nature of immortality. This disowning of immortality is not intentional; it is a natural consequence of self-ignorance. As long as one has self-misconception, immortality becomes the goal. It is not because immortality has become the goal that *mokṣa* becomes a *sādhyam*, an end, but it does so because of one’s self-ignorance.

Just as the forgotten spectacles on one’s head, which are an already accomplished thing, *siddha vastu*, become a to-be-found object, *sādhyam*, so too *mokṣa* also becomes a *sādhyam* because the truth of one’s self is not remembered. When I do not know that my specs are on

my head, an already accomplished thing becomes an end to be achieved because the facts are disowned. The status of being an end to be achieved is superimposed on the already accomplished thing. Similarly, the status of being an end is superimposed on immortality.

When one touches one's own head and discovers that one hasn't been separated from the spectacles after all, the to-be-accomplished *sādhyam* becomes the accomplished *siddham*. When, through the elimination of ignorance, a person discovers immortality to be his or her true nature, the status of being a goal, *sādhyatvam*, is removed from *mokṣa: sādhyam* becomes *siddham*.

Ātmā appears to be mortal because of ignorance and the disowning of the already attained. Thereby there is wrong identity with the mortal body, *anātmatva pratipattiḥ*. When ignorance goes, immortality is 'as though' gained, *vindate*.

Ātmanā vindate vīryam: He attains strength through the Self.

The spiritual battle is visualised here, wherein the seeker has fought and conquered the most powerful enemy: mortality / the time-factor / *Yamaḥ*, the restrainer who brings an end to everything. For this the spiritual seeker needs tremendous strength. The wise person is the powerful person who is resolving the very time factor, *kāla tattvam*, which is the devourer of everything in this universe, including *Hiraṇyagarbha*.

The question may arise: from where does the spiritual seeker draw his or her strength?

Many people have a doubt that the seeker can conquer death through simple self-knowledge. Self-knowledge, accomplished through *śravaṇam-mananam-nididhyāsanam*, appears to them to be too simple a process to defeat death. In a text called '*Naiśkarmya Siddhi*' Prasaṅkhyāna Vādī repeatedly argues that mere knowledge of the Self cannot give *mokṣa* and believes that understanding needs to be followed by hours of meditation practice for understanding to accomplish *mokṣa*.

Śaṅkara says that mere self-knowledge can conquer death. The *Upaniṣad* says that the strength for this is drawn from one's own Self, i.e. *ātmā* need not get strength from anything

else – not even the Lord – because by its very nature, being immortal, the Self can never be tainted by time. If time has afflicted *ātmā* one may have to drive it away, but time has not touched *ātmā* at all. Therefore, there is no question of subduing the time factor: one’s own nature, *ātmā svarūpa*, is one’s strength as a spiritual seeker. Just being yourself you are immortal: you do not have to conquer death because death has never captured you.

What, then, is the problem? The erroneous thinking that one is afflicted by time is the only problem. Hence, one does not require any extraneous resource, just the removal of this cover of ignorance.

The term *ātmanā* in the statement *ātmanā vindate vīryam* can be interpreted in two ways. *Śaṅkara* says that *ātmā* means that *sat-cit-ānanda ātmā*, existence-consciousness-fullness *ātmā*, is the source of strength. Another interpretation by *Amaradāsa*, in a text called *Maniprabhā Vyākhyānam*, is that *ātmā* means the ‘qualified mind’, i.e. ‘by *ātmā*’ means ‘by mind strengthened by the four-fold qualification of *viveka*, *vairāgya*, etc, i.e. by the *sādhana catuṣṭaya saṃpanna manasā*. *Amaradāsa*’s contention is that one draws strength by preparing the mind for knowledge, whereby one discovers the Self to be one’s own strength. *Śaṅkara* disputes this by saying that, by virtue of one’s very own nature, which is already one’s spiritual strength, a seeker naturally has strength.

The non-requirement of the Lord for the acquisition of strength may be disturbing for simple devotees. The concept of self-knowledge and *Vedānta* study are not popular because of the devotee’s habitual training: ‘I am a servant of the Lord’. The possibility of dropping God as a crutch is therefore a frightening prospect. As a *karma-yogi* or *jigñāsu-bhakta* or *artha-bhakta* one holds onto the Lord all the time. If I leave the Lord, what then is the source of strength and support? This is the lot of many miserable devotees who are frightened of the very thought of being independent of God.

The *Upaniṣad* answers: you do not need a crutch. The very search for a crutch is based on the mistaken assumption that one needs a crutch. Once you discover *ātmā* you discover thereby the strength as your Self (not in your gross or subtle bodies) and then know you do not need a crutch. The entire world is dependent on one crutch, the ‘I’, the limitless Reality, the *satyam-jñānam-anantam Brahma*, consciousness itself.

As long as it difficult to digest this fact, one needs to hold onto God and continue to attend classes. There is an intermediary period when I have to drop the crutch and learn to walk without it. I may fall a few times, but finally I discover the absolute strength of my own. There will come a time when one enters into *nididhyāsana sādhanam*, the practice of contemplation, when one learns to be without a crutch.

Hence it is said that the spiritual journey is one of shifting one's dependence from the world to God and from God to one's own self. 'This Self abides in its own glory' (*sa ātmā sve-mahimni pratiṣṭhitah.*) There is no other support: I, myself, am the support. If I wish to attain *mokṣa*, conquer mortality, subdue death, the strength has to manifest from my own *svarūpam* (*ātmā balameva mṛtyu nāśakam*).

Vidyaya vindate amṛtam: He attains immortality through knowledge.

Śaṅkara derives another lesson from this context: if we ignore our own strength and try to draw strength from any source other than Self, *anātmā* (including God), that strength will be inadequate for conquering *mṛtyu* (*samsāra*). No wealth, help, mantra, medicinal herbs, disciplines, purifying practices – including meditation practices, *dhanam*, *mahāyam*, *mantra*, *auśadī*, *tapah*, *yoga* – are adequate. Even self-knowledge is *anātmā*: Self, itself, is the strength and self-knowledge is that which helps one derive strength from the Self. Self-knowledge is the indirect means and Self is the direct means for immortality.

Immortality through knowledge implies resolution of the notion 'I am mortal'. Knowledge does not make one attain immortality, it helps one take ownership of immortality (which is already one's nature) and, thereby, helps one resolve the erroneous notion 'I am mortal'. Knowledge is the indirect means; Self is immortality itself. Therefore Self is the only source of strength and self-knowledge helps one derive that strength. Self is attained only for such a person of strong self-knowledge.

NOTES:

ⁱ According to the *Vaiśeṣika* school, all things that exist, that can be cognised and that can be named are *padārthas* (literal meaning: the meaning of a word), the objects of experience. All objects of experience can be classified into six categories, *dravya* (substance), *guṇa* (quality), *karma* (activity), *sāmānya* (generality), *viśeṣa* (particularity) and *samavāya* (inherence).

Later *Vaiśeṣikas* (*Śrīdhara*, *Udayana* and *Śivāditya*) added one more category *abhāva* (non-existence). The first three categories are defined as *artha* (which can be perceived) and they have real objective existence. The last three categories are defined as *budhyapekṣam* (product of intellectual discrimination) and they are logical categories. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaisheshika>)

ii *Tarka Śāstra* is a science of dialectics, logic and reasoning, and that art of debate that analyzes the nature and source of knowledge and its validity. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarka_sastra)