ATMA DARSHAN
At the Ultimate

ATMA NIRVRITI
Freedom and Felicity in the Self

SRI ATMANANDA
— Sri Krishna Menon —

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I had no idea that this small book should have a preface. But I had to write these few lines at the insistent desire of some friends who thought that something in the nature of a preface would help spiritual aspirants to understand the text better.

The expressions Atma, Ishwara, and Brahman appear to have been used in the ancient works sometimes practically as synonyms, and at other times with quite different meanings. To the discerning eye it will be clear that these expressions have different shades of meaning. In the Mahavakya,* Tat Tvam Asi — "That Thou Art" — the literal meaning of Tvam — "Thou" — is Jiva or the individual soul, whereas its indicatory meaning is the Kutastha or the individual soul viewed as separated from its seeming appendages such as the body, mind, etc. The literal meaning of Tat — "That" — is Ishwara or God, whereas its indicatory meaning is Brahman or the Absolute.

In meditating upon the formula Aham Brahma Asmi — "I am Brahman" — the aspirant puts aside the literal meaning of the words and adopts their indicatory meaning. The object of the meditation is that the idea of minuteness that is often superimposed upon one's real being, i.e., Kutastha, should be overcome by the contemplation of the idea of one's being the great Brahman, and that the idea that Brahman is something outside oneself should be overcome by the contemplation of the idea of the Brahman being one's own self, that is the object, if one may say so, of ever-present immediate

*One of the four great aphoristic pronouncements of the Upanishads setting forth the identity of the individual soul and the Supreme Soul.
experience. Even after this is achieved, the idea of greatness associated with Brahman will remain. This idea of greatness, which is also a superimposition, should be overcome by the avoidance of other objects and the contemplation of the idea that one is pure consciousness itself, Pranamam Brahma. Only thus can the aspirant hope to attain the Absolute Reality. It is this Absolute Reality that has been referred to as Atma and as "I" in this book.

Of the two lines of thought, namely those of bringing the individual under the universal and the universal under the individual, it is the latter that has been adopted here. It is the experience of all that, when viewed carefully, everything that is not oneself can exist only as the object of oneself, who is the subject. The object is also seen to have an inseparable connection with oneself. There is no form without seeing; there is no sound without hearing. One views oneself as seeing and hearing, and thus takes the stand of the perceiver of these objects. In truth, seeing, hearing, etc., are themselves objects. When they are viewed as such, one's stand is in pure consciousness which is the perceiver. The idea of perceiver will also disappear there.

Whenever the stand taken by the perceiver changes, the perceived also changes accordingly. Therefore by the analysis of the one, the truth regarding the other can also be arrived at. This mode of approach is itself a broad one, including in it several particular modes as discussed in this work, each of which is a way of revealing Reality. To the superficial eye, these different ways of approach may appear to be contradictory to one another. But there will be no contradiction if one carefully looks into the question.

The text which follows is my own free translation from the original Malayalam, written in verse form, and divided into sections according to the ideas. Naturally the force of the original is lost in translation.

Each of the sections, 6 to 20, deals with a particular way of approach. Of these, sections 6 and 13 are related to each other. It is through the witness aspect depicted in section 6 that one reaches the witness aspect depicted in section 13, whereupon the witness aspect itself will drop away. Even the witness aspect is only a means, because even in that aspect there is superimposition. To reach Reality, this superimposition should also disappear. Neither the great Masters nor the Vedantic works insist that the different Prakriyas or modes of approach represent absolute truth. On the other hand, according to them, they are several means towards the same end, namely that of attaining Reality:

यथा यथा अविरुद्धं भूतपूर्वः प्रत्येकायम्।
सा सत्व प्रक्रिया सत्यी हेवा सा आलम्यशेषस्य।

That path alone, by following which a man becomes grounded in the knowledge of the real "I-Principle," is the right path for him. There is no one single path which suits all alike.
This is what Sureshwaracharya, the great disciple of Shankara says. No attempt need be made to reconcile the different Prakriyas with one another. To do so may even be an obstacle in the path of the aspirant. There may be no difficulty if one can carefully discern the point of view underlying each Prakriya. If this is not possible, one need only hold fast to the Prakriya which appeals to one.

In section 6, memory is accepted in its ordinary sense, and by that means the witness aspect is made clear. In section 19, memory is established to be non-existent. These two processes may at first blush appear to contradict each other. The contradiction will resolve itself when we remember that what is done in section 6 is a consideration of the witness principle, whereas the subject-matter of chapter 19 is a consideration of the principle of memory. In the same way, objects are in some places held to be consciousness, whereas in other places objects are said to point towards consciousness. The explanation lies in the fact that the context of the former is the consideration of the nature of objects, but that of the latter is the consideration of the nature of consciousness.

Similarly, whenever such apparent contradictions present themselves, a little thought will show that there is really no contradiction. The method of analysing the concept of the objective world and thus establishing that it is nothing but consciousness is accepted in this work equally with another method which would establish that as a matter of fact there is no world at all, and thus help one to take one's firm stand in consciousness. It is this latter method that has been discussed in sections 19 and 20. The two methods should be viewed from their own respective standpoints.

The witness aspect already referred to in a general way has to be made a little clearer. At first sight one may doubt whether the witness referred to in section 6 is not, like the jiva, a functioning entity. But a little reflection will show that the witness has no function. When attention is directed towards consciousness which is the witness, it is not possible to direct attention towards the witnessed. Nor is the witnessed present in that consciousness. Therefore it is in the functionless consciousness that thought merges.

It is from this experience that the higher witness aspect dealt with in section 13, verse II, follows. The gist of this verse is that the witness's knowledge, unlike the mind's, is unattended by change and effort. The sun shines in its own glory. Light is the sun's very nature or being, not its function. Nor has it any idea to illuminate objects. But living beings perceive objects by the light of the sun. This makes them superimpose objects by the light of the sun. This makes them superimpose the function of illuminating objects. In the same way thoughts and objects reveal themselves in consciousness. When the function of revealing is superimposed upon consciousness, it becomes the witness. As a matter of fact, consciousness shines of itself. Light or revelation is its very nature, not its function or property. It is this truth
that is set forth in the above verses. When one attains to that higher witness aspect, one will come to realise that it is pure consciousness without even a tinge of witnesshood.

It is to guard against the confusion between different levels of thought or standpoints that the different stages of enlightenment have been shown in section 4. Until one reaches the highest stage of pure consciousness, there cannot but be various superimpositions upon Reality. Stage by stage these superimpositions will fall away, one after another. Pure consciousness is mere experience. It can be perceived in the beginning only through objects.

अहस्ये द्वयते राहुयुजीवतेवरुणु यथा।
तथा सुभवमात्रामा द्वयते।सत्त्वा विलोकयते॥

The invisible Rahu* is perceived through the eclipsed moon. In the same way the Atma who is mere experience is perceived through objects.

In this way one can only perceive the Atma, who is pure consciousness, step by step, and thus overcome the idea of the objective world.

In section 7, verse 1, it is shown that the Atma is the awareness of sound and other objects. When the idea of the objects falls away gradually, and attention is more and more fixed upon the awareness, it will be seen that it is Reality which pervades everything. In course of time, it will appear to be the Absolute. Here also it is shown that the experience of Reality is by stages.

* The earth’s shadow is ranked in Hindu astrology as a planet, called Rahu—the Dragon’s Head.

Often we hear people discussing spiritual truth from the objective standpoint, and resting content with theoretical or mental knowledge. This is the result of pursuing dry and fruitless lines of thinking. An aspirant has nothing to gain from mere appreciative or depreciatory discussion of the truths set forth in philosophical works. The idea of the Adharyas was only that each should follow some line of spiritual thought which would help him to attain realisation. This is clear from the words of Sri Sureshwaracharya already quoted. The present book is meant for those earnest aspirants who, not being satisfied with theoretical knowledge, want to pursue the path of realisation.
Atma-Darshan

1. Advaita.

Jivas, like waves in the sea, come into being, rise and fall, fight against each other and die.

Striking against the seashore, waves recede, tired and worn out, seeking rest and peace. Likewise Jivas seek the Supreme in various ways.

Waves have their birth, life and death in the sea itself, Jivas in the Lord.

Waves are nothing but water. So is the sea. Likewise the Jiva and the Lord are nothing other than Sat, Chit, and Ananda.

When waves realise that the sea is their common support, all fight ceases.

Much is not gained thereby. This is not the final word. Work lies ahead to remove the sense of separateness.

When water is realised, wave and sea vanish. What appeared as two is thus realised as one.

Water can be reached straightway from wave by following the direct path. If the way through sea is taken, much more time is needed.
2. Quest regarding the Cause of the World—meaningless.

I No question can be there regarding the time, place and cause of the origin of this world, for these themselves form parts of the world.

II The question seeks to have an explanation of the whole in terms of its part. This can never be a logical question.

III The question as to who superimposes doership upon oneself is also not a proper question. The very act of superimposition presupposes a doer. Therefore this question also is illogical.


I Consciousness going out towards objects is mind. That which turns towards the Self is pure Satva.

II It is the opinion of the wise that the mind is avidya, and pure Satva, vidya. Vidya alone is the means of liberation.

III The path of avidya leads to bondage. So the aspirant must take to the path of vidya for liberation.

IV For eternal peace, persistent striving is necessary till enlightenment.

4. Different stages of illumination.

He whose mind is captivated by the beauty of a figure sculptured in a piece of rock, forgets even the fact of the rock being its background.

When he rises above this captivation and looks at the figure, he sees the background, rock, which supports the figure.

When the rock thus receives attention, rock is seen also in the figure, and later on the figure is seen as nothing other than rock.

Enlightenment of truth also comes in this manner. Consciousness becomes dimmed chiefly through one's captivation and abiding interest in external objects.

When one outgrows this interest and looks at the objects it will be found that they rise and abide in Consciousness alone.

When Consciousness thus begins to receive due attention, it becomes revealed in the objects as well, and they themselves will in due course become transformed into Consciousness.

It is the realisation of oneself and the entire world as one Consciousness that is known as realisation of Truth.
5. Deep Sleep, Nirvikalpa Samadhi and Natural State.

I It is in Consciousness that objects rise. Therefore when they disappear what remains over is this Consciousness and not nothingness.

II If this truth takes deep root in thought, deep sleep—giving up its character of veiling the Reality—becomes transformed into nirvikalpa samadhi.

III When objects are also realised as nothing other than Consciousness, one comes back to one's true nature which is changeless and above all states including samadhi.


I Only what has been perceived before can come up in memory. The embodied “I” who perceived, did or enjoyed anything, also comes up in memory at times. From this it follows that the embodied “I” was witnessed by another “I Principle” at the time of this perception, action, or enjoyment.

II It is this witnessing “I” that is the real “I.” Fixing attention there and establishing oneself in it, one becomes freed from bondage.

7. The “I” as the Light of Consciousness.

The light in the perception of sense objects is the changeless Atma, the One without a second which abides infilling all.

To see It as It is, the objects must be separated from It or else they must be made to point towards It.

The “I” must be removed from body to Atma. Freedom from bondage, peace and happiness will flow from it.

8. Pure Consciousness.

Atma is that changeless, one rasa, into which thoughts and feelings merge. To see it, enter it and establish it as the “I,” removes all delusions and brings in lasting peace.


One does not need to be told, for one knows it clearly that the “I” does not change.

The “I” persists in all the states. It is there when there is thought. It is there when there is no thought.

If so, what other evidence is needed to show that it cannot be doer or enjoyer, which means change?
IV At the time a thing is being done, there is no thought or feeling that one is doing it. This is further proof that one is not a doer.

V Claiming to have done a thing after the doing cannot make one a doer.

VI The intense feeling that one is neither doer nor enjoyer removes all bondage and one's real nature comes to light thereby.

10. False Identification of the Self and the Means to rise above it.

I Jiva is a combination of body and Atma appearing as one. When they are separated, Jiva as such cannot subsist any longer.

II Are not body, prana, and all mind-modifications, percepts? Consciousness, the Self, is their perceiver.

III Those who, forgetting this, identify Self with body, mind, etc. live in bondage.

IV Those who by wise discrimination rise above this wrong identification, become liberated and rest in peace in their true nature.

The thought that one is the body, gross or subtle, is the cause of all bondage. If the thought is that one is Consciousness, and that thought is deep and strong, one becomes freed from all bondage at once.

VI The seer as such can never be the seen, and the seen as such can never be the seer. If this truth goes deep into one's heart, the mistaken identification with body ceases.

VII It can be seen in life's activities that the characteristics of the one are often superimposed upon the other. Special care must be taken to avoid this.

VIII When reality is attributed to things in the objective world, remember that you are then an embodied being, in other words there is then identification of one's Self with the body.

IX Always bear in mind that such changes as birth, growth, decay and destruction, are the characteristics of matter, an object of Consciousness.

X It must be clearly understood that Consciousness is different from its object and that, while objects vary, Consciousness remains constant.
XI Consciousness is the light of Atma while objects are directly linked with body. When one's body-connection is severed, the connection with external objects is severed also.

XII Strictly viewed there can be no connection between Atma and body. How can there be any connection between things wholly different in nature and make?

XIII Atma is the only Reality. Body is quite unreal. From this fact too it follows that there can hardly be any connection between them.

XIV It is clear then that their connection is but fancy. It drops away when Truth is known and kept alive.

XV The desire not to die has its deep root in Atma, which is deathless.

XVI If this desire becomes bound up with the objective it is superimposition of the characteristic of Atma on non-Atma. How can objects that are by definition time-limited, be made to transcend time?

XVII Atma is Happiness itself. It is on account of this that in every being there is desire for happiness. When it is supposed to come from objects, there is superimposition of the characteristic of the one upon the other.

The desire for freedom too has its root in Atma which is the only unconditioned existence.

Attraction, repulsion, fear, sorrow, restlessness, sense of dependence, untruthfulness, laziness, passivity and such-like spring from body-connection.

Steadiness, love, happiness, peace, courage, sense of freedom, truthfulness, sense of existence, alertness, knowledge—these belong to the realm of Atma.

Everything that emphasises personality must be understood to have its origin in body-connection.

That which helps one to expand beyond body-limits, must be seen to have emanated from Atma. Characteristics must be distinguished in this manner and seen in their respective domains.

If this is done then and there, it blocks the way to the superimposition of the characteristics of the one upon the other.

If all possibility of superimposition is thus removed one comes to one's natural state in which it is realised that the entire objective world is also nothing other than Consciousness.
If words are taken merely as helps to rise above all thoughts, it is perfectly in order.

If Reality is conceived of as beyond all thoughts, and contemplation directed accordingly, words may help to lead one to a stage where all thoughts cease and Reality is experienced.

Doubt may arise whether it is possible to contemplate anything beyond all thoughts. It is possible. The difficulty is only apparent.

It is true that only an object of perception can be directly contemplated. The "I" is always perceiver and never an object of perception.

As it is not an object of perception, direct contemplation of the "I" is out of the question. None the less, because it is experienced as one's Being, it is possible to contemplate it indirectly.

Can it not be contemplated as the residue left after the removal of everything objective from the apparent "I"?

This contemplative thought itself will automatically come to a standstill in the end, and in that stillness will be seen shining one's true nature.
What is beyond all thoughts may be indirectly contemplated in other ways as well. They will also take one to one’s true nature.

Always bear in mind that such words as Consciousness or Knowledge, Being or Happiness, all point to the “I”.

Hold on to one thought to dispel other thoughts. Let that thought be such as points to one’s being.

Think of one’s being as that into which all thoughts merge, then the one thought taken hold of gives up its form and merges into Being.

Just as we apply the word knowledge to denote also the function of knowing, we use the word happiness to denote the function of enjoying as well.

It is within the experience of all that knowledge and happiness dawn only when the respective functions of knowing and enjoying cease.

Thus, Knowledge and Happiness are one’s own Being. With this conviction, if thought is directed to either of these, that thought also gives up its form and merges.

Merger will never be into deep sleep, but into one’s own Being. All knots of the heart will be cut asunder by this means.

12. Experience.

In one’s experience—strictly so called—there is neither thought nor external object present. It is the state in which all alone one abides in one’s Self.

Objects of perception being believed to be the cause of experience, tempt the ignorant.

If strictly viewed, it can be seen that there is nothing like cause and effect. Even if they are conceded, effect will never exist independently of cause. It is admitted on all hands that the cause will be seen in the effect.

But no such cause appears in one’s experience. It follows then that experience has no cause.

If it has no cause why this hunt for objects? All that is needed is only the merger of thoughts.

Always contemplating the nature of experience itself, will bring about this merger.
VII The intense thought that one is neither doer nor enjoyer will also bring about the same result.

VIII If one can see that thought as such is really nonexistent or that it is nothing other than Consciousness, this is the best means.

13. Witness of Thoughts.

I Right analysis will show that it is the mind assuming the form of an object that is commonly spoken of as the illumination of the object (its perception or knowledge).

II Atma is the immutable Consciousness that, without effort or any change in Itself, perceives such modifications of the mind.

III A little thinking will show that this is the principle signified by the word “I.”

IV Abiding there, one sees nothing else; there is no body, mind, world, or sense-organs.

V Nothing came into existence nor is there indeed a thought that anything existed before or is existing now. The non-doer-Consciousness is always “enjoying” Itself.


Water, by contact with time and space which are entirely distinct and different from it, can produce a wave. There is no possibility of a world being formed in this way.

Nothing exists independently of Consciousness. How then is it possible for a different and independent something to come into contact with Consciousness to form a world?

Water by itself can never form a wave. Likewise Consciousness by itself can never form a world.

Therefore the world is not, has never been and is never going to be.

What is really existing is Consciousness alone. Consciousness is Happiness itself. The Atma signified by the word “I” is also That.

15. Nothing changes.

It is clear that one thing can never change into another without the destruction of its swarupa.

If its swarupa is destroyed can the thing remain over? Unless it remains over how can it be said that it has changed into another, since its identity is lost, and there is nothing to connect it with the new thing?
III Thus a thing can never undergo a change. There is neither birth nor death—are not both changes?

IV He who in like manner by a searching enquiry into the nature of things discovers this truth and abides in it, is the great soul who has gained his objective, known the one thing that has to be known and remains ever contented.


I I am that Consciousness that remains over after the removal of everything objective from Me.

II I have no body, vital energy (prana), perceptions, thoughts and desires; I am above attraction and repulsion, pleasure and pain, fear and delusion.

III I am pure Consciousness. Realising that every object wherever placed is asserting Me, I enjoy Myself everywhere and in everything.

17. The real “I”

I In the deep-sleep state and whenever any desire is accomplished, I alone shine as the undisturbed peace and happiness. I am the immost principle which is Sat-Chit-Ananda itself. I am That which transcends all.

Just before and just after every thought and feeling, I shine in My own glory by Myself. It is in Me that thoughts and feelings rise and set. I am their changeless Witness.

I am the Light of Consciousness in all thoughts and perceptions and the Light of Love in all feelings. I have no birth and death, nor grief and delusion. I transcend bondage and liberation.

The world which rises in and grows by thought is also thought itself. Thought is nothing but Consciousness and Consciousness is My Being. Therefore the whole world is Consciousness which is Myself. I am perfect and indivisible.

I have no mine-ness, attachment or egoism. I am eternal, non-doer, all purity, self-dependent and self-luminous. Attributeless, changeless and unconditioned, I am the abode of Love, stainless, the one without second and ever peaceful.

18. Thoughts and Objects.

The attribution of reality to things which rise in I thoughts is the cause of all bondage.
II Form can exist only as the object of seeing and never independently of it. This rule applies alike to all sense-objects.

III Objects have themselves no connection with each other—their connection is always with thought alone.

IV An object cannot exist even for a moment unless cognised by thought. When thought changes, the object changes also.

V Thus they are inseparable and therefore one. The truth is that One thing is kept divided by mere words.

VI Therefore even to hold that a thing rises in thought is mere delusion. There is thought only and the content of thought is Consciousness.

VII If this truth is always kept alive thought will soon vanish and Consciousness reign. Then comes liberation from all bondage.

19. Two aspects of Consciousness.

I Samvit (Consciousness) has two aspects: conditioned and unconditioned. It is the former that illumines objects of Consciousness. The latter is pure Consciousness.

Sense-objects such as sound, touch, smell, etc., are mere thought-forms. Therefore, correctly speaking, thoughts alone are the objects of consciousness.

He who by careful analysis and discrimination is unable to reach the unconditioned aspect, may well abide in the conditioned. He will reach the unconditioned in due course if he does not remain contented in the conditioned.

Observing carefully, one can see every thought rise and set in pure Consciousness alone.

What is not Consciousness is all thought-form. Pure Consciousness can never bear witness to it.

It is no argument to say that memory—itself a thought-form—stands changeless watching all thoughts in succession.

It is common experience that when there are other thoughts, memory is not there with them. How then can memory call up past thoughts?

If memory cannot do it, it is no memory at all. Memory is therefore a meaningless word.

It cannot but be admitted that it is always memory that calls up past thoughts.
X If memory is non-existent, it follows that other thoughts are non-existent also, there being no witness to prove their existence.

XI Therefore it can be clearly understood that what appeared to be conditioned is also pure unconditioned Consciousness.

20. The Seer and the Seen.

I If one looks through the gross organ eye, gross forms alone appear. The same relation exists between other gross organs and their objects.

II Leaving the physical organs, if one looks through the subtle organ called mind, subtle forms appear.

III Looking through the attributeless pure Consciousness, one sees Consciousness only and nothing else.

IV This experience proves that the objective world will always appear in perfect tune with the stand taken up by the subject.

V Therefore it is not the objective world which presents obstacles to one's spiritual progress, but the false stand one has taken up.

VI If this is given up, spiritual enlightenment follows. To give up the stand, courage and one-pointed attention and heart's devotion are absolutely necessary.

A critical examination of the objective world will also bring about the same result.

To arrive at the conclusion that this solid-seeming world is a mere thought does not solve the whole problem. It cannot give entire satisfaction, for the thought-world remains.

The examination did not give satisfaction because it was conducted from the level of the buddhi which was left unexplained.

Buddhi is also something perceived. Is not oneself (Consciousness) the real Perceiver? To examine thoughts one has to take one's stand in perceiving Consciousness.

When it is seen that the content of thought is nothing but Consciousness, thought vanishes and Consciousness remains.

Consciousness when mistakenly supposed to be conditioned by time, appears as thought. Really it is not so conditioned.

Is not time itself a thought? How then can the rise of a thought be attributed to the conditioning of Consciousness by time?
Therefore, strictly speaking, there is no thought. There is only Consciousness. The idea of time is a mere superimposition by delusion.

Only one who, right through, maintains a disinterested witness's standpoint and examines things calmly with a critical and never-faltering eye, can realise this absolute Truth.

In the waking state one becomes aware that dream-objects were unreal.

If a man seen in dream was unreal, his mind must be equally unreal.

His thoughts, seeing, hearing, etc., will likewise be unreal.

In the same manner the subject in the dream-state, who is also a product of the dream, cannot but be unreal.

The body in the dream-state is different from the body in the waking-state. When the former is all-active the latter is lying in a passive state.

The thoughts and perceptions of the subject in the dream cannot likewise be the thoughts and perceptions of the waking subject.

The thoughts and perceptions of the former are unreal, being the product of the dream.

The question then arises: Who had the dream? To this, the correct answer is that no one had it and that there has never been a dream-state.

The world of the waking-state also, if examined in like manner, will be found to be non-existent. Then one regains one's true nature and becomes permanently established as pure Consciousness.
# GLOSSARY

Approximate meaning of Sanskrit terms, arranged in the order in which they first appear in the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atma</td>
<td>The real Self</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atma</td>
<td>Literally, perception of the Real Self. In the context, it means Self-realisation. It may also mean the means of Self-realisation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Darshan</td>
<td>Non-dualism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advaita</td>
<td>Individual soul; or apparent “I”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jiva</td>
<td>Life absolute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat</td>
<td>Knowledge absolute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chit</td>
<td>Bliss absolute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ananda</td>
<td>Thought turning towards Atma (Self)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satva</td>
<td>Wrong knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avidya</td>
<td>Right knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nirvikalpa</td>
<td>The state in which mind becomes merged in Consciousness for a while and there is deep peace</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samadhi</td>
<td>Unbroken peace and harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasa</td>
<td>Vital energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prana</td>
<td>That which maintains the identity of a thing, the background of phenomenal attributes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swarupa</td>
<td>Consciousness</td>
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<td>Samvit</td>
<td>Intellect</td>
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THREE ARTICLES

"I"
"Witness"
"World"
Preace

There is not much to be said by way of prepare to this book. This has connection with "Atma Darshan", another work of mine published a few years ago. Some of the subjects dealt with in that book are made clearer in this and some others treated from different angles of vision. In many places this book goes beyond "Atma Darshan" and expounds Truth from a higher level. A study of this book will be of considerable help to those who have gained knowledge of Truth from "Atma Darshan", to make that knowledge steady and thereby obtain lasting peace.

Krishna Menon
A free rendering of the Malayalam poetical work of the same name by the Author Himself.
Atma-Nirvriti

1 Atma

It is mind that has thoughts and feelings, not I. I
Birth, growth, decay and death pertain to the
body and not to Me.

I am no body—I have no body. I am no mind— II
I have no mind. I am no doer, I am no enjoyer.
I am pure consciousness which knows no dissolution.

That which shines just before and after every III
thought and feeling is the “I.” That is objectless
consciousness; that is Atma.

It is that Atma again that shines as bliss in IV
deep sleep and also when a desired object is
attained.

The world shines because of My light: without V
Me, nothing is. I am the light in the perception
of the world.
2 A Fundamental Doubt about
Consciousness Removed

I He who says that consciousness is never experienced
without its object speaks from a superficial level.

II If he is asked the question, "Are you a conscious
being?" he will spontaneously give the answer
"Yes." This answer springs from the deepmost
level.

III Here he doesn't even silently refer to anything
as the object of that consciousness. This proves
that the consciousness he refers to is objectless
consciousness.

IV He who says, "I have consciousness," or "I am
conscious," is separating consciousness from
himself; this is surprising.

V What is not consciousness comes under the category
of the known. The "I" is always the knower and
can never be the known. Therefore consciousness
and the "I" are one and the same.

3 Seeing and Hearing

Unless there is seeing, there is no form. Form I
has no independent existence and is therefore the
seeing itself.

If form is itself seeing, how can one see a form? II
Therefore what is seen is not form but something
different.

Likewise objects of the other senses are also mere
sense perceptions.

Because hearing is itself sound, no one hears a
sound. This truth applies generally to all sense-
objects.

If therefore a searching enquiry is made to know V
what it is that is really perceived, it will be found
that it is the Absolute Reality itself.

If it is the Absolute Reality that is perceived, how VI
can the illusion of a world exist thereafter?
4 Knowledge always unconnected with Objects

I The knowledge of a thing does not prove the thing's existence. Is there not the knowledge of a serpent in a rope and the knowledge of objects in a dream?

II The knowledge of a thing does not show the thing's nature, but only shows knowledge.

III He is great who sees light (consciousness) alone in the manifestation of all objects.

IV Whether the objects are present or absent, he who has seen pure consciousness stands in it always.

V This truly is his own abode. It is changeless, carefree, truth, all-harmony, peace, holy and most exalted.

5 The Background of the Objective World

Sound, form, touch, taste and smell can never exist by themselves. They always need a background to support them.

The background cannot be seen by the sense-organs. Names are usually given to it without its nature being known.

There is the scent and the beauty (form) of a flower. But who knows what a flower really is?

There is the same ignorance regarding the background of every sense-object.

The substratum of all is one and the same. Diversity is only of things perceived.

The substratum remains unperceived; therefore there is no diversity in it. That is existence, that is one's self; that is consciousness pure, beauty transcendent and the abode of peace.
The sage knows from the deepest conviction that he is consciousness and that he has attained what has to be attained.

Because consciousness never undergoes any change, he knows also that he is changeless.

Because of his deep-rooted conviction that he is consciousness, consciousness may sometimes become manifest before a perception.

But whether it becomes so manifest or not, because he has this deep-rooted conviction, he is for ever contented, free and happy.
I Knowledge objectified is thought. Then the “I” remains as the witness of thought.

II Without My being seen as the witness, thought is joined to Me and I am made the thinker by living beings.

III And subsequently, the thinker is made the physical perceiver and then the corresponding thought becomes a gross object.

IV Thus living beings make of Me the world, and ignoring Me, live in bondage.

V The illusion of the world which comes about by these successive superimpositions can be removed only by going back along the same path.

8 Beyond all Doubt

To attain the ultimate reality, one must go beyond both the existence and the non-existence of non-Atma.

NOTE:—By non-Atma is meant everything objective, including thoughts, feelings, perceptions and doings.
9 Knowledge is not the name of a Function

I All objects dissolve in knowledge. They are therefore none other than consciousness.

II A pot (when broken) dissolves into earth because it is of earth that it is made. It cannot dissolve into anything else.

III So the statement “I know the thing,” when properly examined, will be found to mean only that the thing has dissolved in knowledge.

IV Conceding that seeing and hearing are functions, it is only after the cessation of these functions that one can say one has known.

V Thus it can be clearly seen that knowledge is not the name given to a function.

VI It is therefore wrong to say “I know it,” because here knowing denotes a function. What ought properly to be said is, “It has become knowledge.”

VII When one’s mind is fully satisfied regarding the truth thus expounded, a complete change of attitude will ensue.

10 Peace and Knowledge

Since feelings rise and set in peace, their swarupa is peace.

Since thoughts rise and set in knowledge, their swarupa is knowledge.

Deep peace and pure knowledge are one and the same thing. Different names are given to it because it is looked at from different angles.
11 Thoughts and Myself

I How can thoughts which rise and set in Me, be other than Myself?

II When there is thought, I am seeing Myself; when there is no thought, I am remaining in My own glory.

12 The Non-existence of Objects

Before the seeing, there is no “seen” (drishyam*) and there is no “seen” after the seeing. There can be no doubt about it.

When this truth is clearly understood, it will be evident that there is no “seen” even at the time of the seeing. And then ceases all bondage.

* DRISHYAM is an object seen, with the accent not on the thing which has no existence by itself, but upon the seeing as a result of which the thing comes into existence.
13. The Non-existence of Thought

I Thought is subtle: it cannot come into contact with a gross object nor can it have any connection with it because they are in different planes.

II This being so, one can never think of a gross object, and to say one can, is wrong.

III The idea that subtle objects can take their rise in thought will also be found on careful examination to be untrue.

IV There is no doubt that a subtle object is itself a thought-form. One thought can never exist in another.

V A thought can therefore never have an object, gross or subtle. It cannot then be called a thought.

VI This objectless thought is one’s real domain, formless and changeless. It is this that is pointed to by the word “I.”

VII There was no bondage before, there is none now and there will not be any hereafter, since thought has no existence.

14 Past being Past, Where is Bondage?

A past action cannot come back again, nor can a past thought.

There is no thought in an action and no action in a thought; they have no connection with each other.

Though a thought may occur after an action, that thought cannot be related to it since the action is not present when the thought occurs.

Though one thought may follow another, there can be no connection between them either.

A past thought is one that has ceased to exist: how then can such a thought come into contact with a new one?

Two or more thoughts can never occur simultaneously. For this reason also, thoughts can never have any connection between themselves.
VII This clearly proves that action and thought exist independently of each other.

VIII This being so, how can they be the cause of bondage? To think that bondage is caused by them is clearly an illusion.

15 The Subject and the Object are one in Myself

Experience and knowledge are inside. How can their objects be outside?

It follows that there is nothing outside: all is within.

What is within is Myself, and therefore the experiencer and the experience are one and the same, that is Myself.

NOTE: — In this section the word "action" is used to denote only bodily activities.
16 The "I" in its Pure State

I In between thoughts and in the deep-sleep state shines that principle to which the word "I" points.

II There the mind has dissolved and cannot therefore perceive it.

III When the mind is directed to it, it changes into that, losing the characteristics of mind. This is called samadhi.

IV Whether there is thought or not, to be always self-centred is called the natural state (Sahaja-samadhi).

17 Perceptions and Objects

Seeing goes into the make of form and form into the make of seeing; therefore both are non-existent as such. This is true of the other sense-perceptions also.

No one sees anything, no one hears anything, and no one thinks anything, because objects and sense-activities have no existence.

Thus all are in deep-sleep state, a deep-sleep state where there is no ignorance (non-knowingness).
18 To the Mind

I If you are going to live as you please, claiming that you are I, how can you accomplish your desire?

II Don't believe hereafter that by such a claim, your vagaries will be accepted by Me.

III At least hereafter, you must know the truth of the saying, "He who does a thing, alone reaps the fruit of that action, good or bad."

IV If you can live according to your claim, it is well and good. But, to do so, you must first try to see Me.

V Although I am in front of you, in you and behind you, it is better first to look behind and try to see Me there.

VI I am always standing behind you disinterestedly witnessing your varied activities. You can see Me so without much effort.

As soon as you turn behind to see Me, I will take you into the inmost core of your being and there you will see Me.

Later on, you will see Me in your thoughts and feelings.

Still later, you will see that the thoughts and feelings are none other than Myself.

Since all objects are mere thought-forms, they will also be seen in the end as Myself.

Then you will not see Me different from yourself. Your claim that you are I, will become true only when you reach that state.
Thereafter, action done will be no action, and VII passivity will be no passivity, because ignorance has been rooted out.

NOTE.—PUJA is the worship done to an Idol. It consists of various acts, such as bathing the Idol or washing its feet, placing garlands round its neck, applying sandal-wood paste to the forehead and other parts of the body, burning camphor in front of it and throwing flowers at its feet; the final act is the worshipper’s prostration before the Idol. All these together constitute a Puja. These acts, taken by themselves, have no connection with each other. They get connected through the Idol. Likewise the varied activities of the senses and mind get connected with each other through the “Happiness” aspect of the “I-Principle.”
I Variety is in the objects (of consciousness). The perceiving consciousness is one and the same throughout. But because consciousness is commonly seen connected with the objects, change is attributed to that also by delusion.

II Objects can never cause any change in consciousness. If consciousness changed, how could it perceive the variety of objects?

III Objects undergo that change called destruction. Consciousness alone is changeless. Body, sense-organs, mind, will and intellect come under the category of objects.

IV On account of the inability to see them simply as objects, one supposes them to be changeless through delusion.

V Being always the knower, one can never come under the category of the known. Even the word knower is wrong, because the changeless knower is knowledge (consciousness) itself, not an embodied being.

VI Nothing hides consciousness. It is present in all mental activities such as thought, grief, pleasure, pain, etc. It is in it (consciousness) that all men are carrying on their life's activities.

VII A man believes he is bound, becomes miserable, seeks liberation and for that purpose approaches a Guru and listens to His teachings. But all this time he was unknowingly standing in pure consciousness alone which is itself the truth he was seeking.

VIII When once he becomes fully aware of this stand he is freed and thenceforward, all thoughts, feelings and objects of perception will be pointing to himself.
I Knowledge has nothing to know. The insentient can never know, being insentient.

II Therefore no one knows anything. All beings stand established as pure consciousness.

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I created thoughts, feelings, perceptions and the rest as a means whereby I could make Myself known.

Yet people don’t look at Me but cling to the objects of their thoughts and feelings. How then is their bondage to end?

Taking away the objects, I created a deep-sleep state; it was also meant to make Myself known.

There being no thought or feeling nor anything else to be seen in that state, they blindly began to see nothingness in it.

Whether objects are present or absent, I am always there without change.

My position is just in front of the eyes. It is in and through Me that all men see, yet they don’t see Me. This is most surprising.

If a man always insists on closing his eyes when he faces Me, how can he see Me?
23 *Experience and the Objective World

I It is experience that must prove the existence of anything. An object as such is never experienced.

II It is the knowledge of it that may be said to have been experienced. Even this is not strictly correct.

III If an object is not experienced it must be held to be non-existent. How can there be knowledge of a non-existent thing? Therefore it is not even the knowledge of an object that is experienced but knowledge itself. Thus experience proves that the entire objective world is knowledge and knowledge alone. That is consciousness and that is ATMA.

* EXPERIENCE is deeper than the superficial knowledge or feeling. It is in that sense that the word is used here.

The following is the English rendering of three Malayalam articles I published in different periodicals at different times. They are incorporated in this book because it is hoped that they will be of help to understand TRUTH better.
"I"

The ordinary man does not care to know the true significance of the word "I." Nor is it necessary for his temporal needs. It is only when one begins to lose interest in worldly life and develops a sincere longing to know the Truth that one turns attention to spiritual matters. Those who are purely worldly-minded and do not want to know anything else can never profit by hearing the Truth. There are some who have spiritual samskaras lying hidden in them, which are not allowed to manifest themselves by the opposite ones that have temporary sway. If such people hear the Truth, their dormant spiritual samskaras are awakened and they produce a sincere longing for the Truth. This leads them on to the desired goal. The goal is liberation from bondage, which is gained by establishing oneself in the true nature of the "I-Principle."

The word "I" is often indiscriminately used to denote many things. I stand identified with the body when I say, "I am fat, I am lean, I sit, I walk, etc."; with the senses when I say, "I see, I hear, etc."; and with the mind when I say, "I think, I feel, I desire, etc." I know the activities of the body, senses, and mind and know also that they get themselves coordinated and subordinated through me. This fact is within the experience of all. It is clear from this that these activities come under the category of the known. The "I-Principle" is their knower and therefore separate and distinct from body, senses, and mind. It simply stands as
their witness when they are functioning. It will at last be seen that even this witnesshood is a superimposition. Nevertheless it helps one to rise above the ego (doer and enjoyer) and get established in the pure “I-Principle.”

It can also be proved in a different manner that the “I-Principle” is distinct and separate from the body, senses, and the mind. The waking, dream, and deep-sleep states are common to all living beings. In the dream state the “I” identifies itself not with the body existing in the waking state, but with an entirely different one. It is evident that the waking body and the dream-body are quite different. The dream-body does not exist in the waking state, nor does the waking body exist in the dream state. Neither of these bodies, nor the mind functioning in the dream and waking states, continues in the deep-sleep state. I know that I am present in all those states without a change. The “I” can never be the bodies or the mind, which appear in one state and disappear in another. Certainly it transcends all that. Since it knows the coming and going of these three states, it is of the nature of consciousness. That consciousness never disappears. When there are objects, I know the objects. When there are no objects, I stand objectless in my own nature as pure consciousness. The pain I experience in the dream is confined to the dream state and does not affect me in the waking state. And the pain I experience in the waking state is likewise confined to that state and does not affect me in the dream state. Therefore, it is clear that the experiences I am having in particular states do not go into my being. For this reason it stands proved that the “I-Principle,” which is of the nature of consciousness, is also unattached.

I love and seek objects because they give me pleasure. Therefore it is clear that objects are loved not for their own sake. The “I-Principle” is loved more than the objects. But since it stands transcending even the mind, it does not come under the realm of objects. Therefore it cannot be an object which gives me happiness. It is pure happiness itself. Thus we have seen the real nature of the “I-Principle” is pure consciousness and happiness. That alone is Sat, which cannot even be thought of as non-existent. We can think of anything to be non-existent. But nobody can think that the “I” is non-existent. Therefore the “I-Principle” is Sat itself. It is this “I-Principle” in its real nature of Sat-Chit-Ananda that the ordinary man mistakes for the body, senses, and the mind, and thereby becomes bound and suffers.

Man’s duty is to attain liberation from this bondage, and that is gained by knowing his true nature and establishing himself in it.
“WITNESS”

No object can exist without getting recorded in knowledge. Sense-objects (sound, form, touch, taste, and smell), bodily activities, activities of the senses (seeing, hearing, etc.), and of the mind (thinking and feeling)—all come under the “object series” (i.e., the known). It is evident that without this knowledge it is not possible to remember the past activities of the body, the senses, and the mind. It is through it that they get connected with each other, and this connection is absolutely necessary for one’s life in this world. There is no denying the fact that this knowledge is not transient like the bodily, sensory, and mental activities. Thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are getting immediately recorded in knowledge. If this knowledge were not permanent, it would never be possible to remember them subsequently. This knowledge must come to show anything. Hence it stands as witness to everything. One cannot help standing as a witness to carry on life’s activities. The ordinary man does not know it, and hence his bondage and misery. If one knowingly takes up this stand, that by itself, without anything further, brings about liberation.

We say, “I know this, I know that, etc.” In such statements knowledge is treated as though it is the name of an action and the “I” as a doer. The word knowledge is not understood here in the sense in which it was discussed in the foregoing paragraph. Action needs an instrument. Seeing has its instrument, eye; hearing, ear; thinking and feeling, mind. Knowledge alone has no such instrument. To contend that there is action even beyond mind is absurd. In deep sleep and Samadhi, where there is no mind, there is no action but there is knowledge. The knowledge which knows thought and feelings must certainly be beyond mind. It cannot therefore be a doer and the knowing cannot be an action for the same reason. Knowing cannot be the function of a knower because here there is no knower other than the knowledge. There is only this knowledge beyond mind. All that is not “I” is its object. All that is not consciousness is its object. As between the “I” and consciousness, neither of them can be the object of the other. Further, at no point of time can they remain separate. Therefore the “I” and consciousness (knowledge) are one and the same. In its real nature the “I” is not possessed of body, senses, and mind. Mistaking this “I-Principle” as doer or enjoyer is the root of bondage and misery. Even when it is so mistaken, the “I” simply stands as the Witness. To stand there knowingly is all that is needed. It is this that Ashtavakra also says in the following verse:

\[\text{अस्वत्तमा द्वारोपिते सुभाषितोत्तमे}\
\[\text{तथा अंगों सम्बन्धे}\
\[\text{अत्यंते हि ते अन्यों} — \text{द्रापरं परस्मार्थं} \]
"You are the one knower of everything. Therefore you are the liberated soul. Seeing the knower differently (or not as such) is your only bondage."

"WORLD"

An examination of the world is also helpful to get established in the Real Self. The following verse is seen in PanamarthaStotram, an ancient authoritative work on Vedanta Philosophy.

* अतेष दर्शनं न अन्यस्तूरं नायम—दर्शनं सत्तमानं अन्यस्तूरं ।
  समालोक्यं दर्शनम्—दर्शनं सत्तमानं अन्यस्तूरं ॥

This literally means that what is perceived is not different from perception and perception is not different from the Perceiver and that therefore the world is the Perceiver himself. This needs elaboration to make the sense clear. The world is nothing but sense-objects and they are sound, form, touch, taste, and smell. It is not possible to separate these from sense-perceptions. One cannot even think of a form without allowing the idea of seeing to get into the act of thinking. The same is the case with the objects of the other senses also. It can be seen from this that even in idea, the sense-objects do not admit of separation from the respective sense-perceptions. Therefore objects are not different from, but one with perceptions. These perceptions not being outside, what is called the world cannot also exist outside. Sense-perceptions themselves may be examined now. They never stand separate from consciousness. With eyes open one does not see anything unless consciousness is there. Therefore sense-perceptions are nothing but consciousness. So also are all the activities of the mind. This shows that the entire gross world and the subtle are consciousness itself. In my previous article on the "I," I showed that the "I-Principle" is consciousness. It follows then that all that is known and the knower "I" are only pure consciousness. Liberation from bondage consists in establishing oneself there.

Now we may examine the world in a different way. The world is nothing but objects of perception. They are not experienced by anyone. It is experience that must prove anything. Since objects are not experienced they are not existent as such. Sound and form do not come within one's experience. Only their knowledge may be said to form the content of experience. Therefore, relying on experience, one can only say that there is knowledge of a world, not that a world exists. Can there be knowledge of a world when there is no world? No. Therefore it is not even the knowledge of a world that is experienced, but only mere knowledge. It is clear from this that what is called world is only knowledge itself (consciousness).
In the first paragraph it was shown that the world is but a perception and perception is consciousness itself. This may be made briefer still. The gross and subtle worlds (physical and mental) cannot be separated from knowledge (consciousness) at any point of time. Therefore they are nothing but Consciousness.