

The Heart of Awareness

a translation of *The Ashtavakra Gita*
by Thomas Byrom

1: The Self

1

O Master,
Tell me how to find
Detachment, wisdom, and freedom!

2

Child,
If you wish to be free,
Shun the poison of the senses.

Seek the nectar of truth,
Of love and forgiveness,
Simplicity and happiness.

3

Earth, fire and water,
The wind and the sky -
You are none of these.

If you wish to be free,
Know you are the Self,
The witness of all these,
The heart of awareness.

4

Set your body aside,
Sit in your own awareness.

You will at once be happy,
Forever still,
Forever free.

5

You have no caste,
No duties bind you.

Formless and free,
Beyond the reach of the senses,
The witness of all things.

So be happy!

6

Right or wrong,
Joy and sorrow,
These are of the mind only.
They are not yours.

It is not really you
Who acts or enjoys.

You are everywhere,
Forever free.

7

Forever and truly free,
The single witness of all things.

But if you see yourself as separate,
Then you are bound.

8

"I do this. I do that,
The big black snake of selfishness
Has bitten you!

"I do nothing."
This is the nectar of faith,
So drink and be happy!

9

Know you are one,
Pure awareness.
With the fire of this conviction,
Burn down the forest of ignorance.

Free yourself from sorrow,
And be happy.

10

Be happy!
For you are joy, unbounded joy.

You are awareness itself.

Just as a coil of rope

Is mistaken for a snake,
So you are mistaken for the world.

11

If you think you are free,
You are free.

If you think you are bound,
You are bound.

For the saying is true:
You are what you think.
[On this see *Dhammapada* 1:1-4.]

12

The Self looks like the world,
But this is just an illusion.

The Self is everywhere.

One.
Still.
Free.
Perfect.

The witness of all things,
Awareness
Without action, clinging or desire.

13

Meditate on the Self.
One without two,
Exalted awareness.

Give up the illusion
Of the separate self.

Give up the feeling,
Within or without,
That you are this or that.

14

My child,
Because you think you are the body,
For a long time you have been bound.

Know you are pure awareness.

With this knowledge as your sword

Cut through your chains.
And be happy!

15

For you are already free,
Without action or flaw,
Luminous and bright.

You are bound
Only by the habit of meditation.

16

Your nature is pure awareness,

You are flowing in all things,
And all things are flowing in you.

But beware
The narrowness of the mind!

17

You are always the same,
Unfathomable awareness,
Limitless and free,
Serene and unperturbed.

Desire only your own awareness.

18

Whatever takes form is false.
Only the formless endures.

When you understand
The truth of this teaching,
You will not be born again.

19

For God is infinite,
Within the body and without,
Like a mirror,
And the image in a mirror.

20

As the air is everywhere,
Flowing around a pot
And filling it,
So God is everywhere,
Filling all things
And flowing through them forever.

2: Awareness

1

Yesterday
I lived bewildered,
In illusion.

But now I am awake,
Flawless and serene,
Beyond the world.

2

From my light
The body and the world arise.

So all things are mine,
Or nothing is.

3

Now I have given up
The body and the world,
I have a special gift.

I see the infinite Self.

4

As a wave,
Seething and foaming,
Is only water

So all creation,
Streaming out of the Self,
Is only the Self.

5

Consider a piece of cloth,
It is only threads!

So all creation,
When you look closely,
Is only the Self.

6

Like the sugar
In the juice of the sugarcane,
I am the sweetness
In everything I have made.

7

When the Self is unknown
The world arises,
Not when it is known.

But you mistake
The rope for the snake.

When you see the rope,
The snake vanishes.

8

My nature is light,
Nothing but light.

When the world arises
I alone am shining.

9

When the world arises in me,
It is just an illusion:
Water shimmering in the sun,
A vein of silver in mother-of-pearl,
A serpent in a strand of rope.

10

From me the world streams out
And in me it dissolves,
As a bracelet melts into gold,
A pot crumbles into clay,
A wave subsides into water.

11

I adore myself,
How wonderful I am!

I can never die.

The whole world may perish,
From Brahma to a blade of grass,
But I am still here.

12

Indeed how wonderful!
I adore myself.

For I have taken form
But I am still one.

Neither coming or going,
Yet I am still everywhere.

13

How wonderful,
And how great my powers!

For I am without form,
Yet till the end of time
I uphold the universe.

14

Wonderful!

For nothing is mine,
Yet it is all mine,
Whatever is thought or spoken.

15

I am not the knower,
Nor the known,
Nor the knowing.

These three are not real.
They only seem to be
When I am not known.

For I am flawless.

16

Two from one!
This is the root of suffering.

Only perceive
That I am one without two,
Pure awareness, pure joy,
And all the world is false.

There is no other remedy!

17

Through ignorance
I once imagined I was bound.

But I am pure awareness.

I live beyond all distinctions,
In unbroken meditation.

18

Indeed,
I am neither bound nor free.

An end to illusion!
It is all groundless.

For the whole of creation,
Though it rests in me,
Is without foundation.

19

The body is nothing,
The world is nothing.

When you understand this fully,
How can they be invented?

For the Self is pure awareness,
Nothing less.

20

The body is false,
And so are its fears,
Heaven and hell, freedom and bondage.

It is all invention.

What can they matter to me?

I am awareness itself.

21

I see only one.

Many men,
One wilderness.

Then to what may I cling?

22

I am not the body,
Nor is the body mine.

I am not separate.

I am awareness itself,
Bound only by my thirst for life.

23

I am the infinite ocean,

When thoughts spring up,
The wind freshens, and like waves
A thousand worlds arise.

24

But when the wind falls,
The trader sinks with his ship.

On the boundless ocean of my being
He founders,
And all the worlds with him.

25

But O how wonderful!

I am the unbounded deep
In whom all living things
Naturally arise,
Rush against each other playfully,
And then subside.

3: Wisdom

1

You know the Self,
By nature one
Without end.

You know the Self,
And you are serene.

How can you still desire riches?

2

When from ignorance
You see silver in mother-of-pearl,
Greed arises.

From ignorance of the Self
Desire arises
For the world where the senses whirl.

3

Knowing yourself as That
In which the worlds rise and fall
Like waves in the ocean,

Why do you run about so wretchedly?

4

For have you not heard?

You are pure awareness,
And your beauty is infinite!

So why let lust mislead you?

5

The man who is wise
Knows himself in all things
And all things in himself.

Yet how strange!
He still says, "This is mine."

6

Determined to be free,
He abides in the oneness
Beyond all things.

Yet how strange!
Indulging in passion, he weakens,
And lust overwhelms him.

7

Feeble with age,
Still he is filled with desire,
When without doubt he knows
That lust is the enemy of awareness.

Indeed how strange!

8

He longs to be free . . .

He has no care for this world
Or the next,
And he knows what is passing
Or forever.

And yet how strange!
He is still afraid of freedom.

9

But he who is truly wise
Always sees the absolute Self.

Celebrated, he is not delighted.
Spurned, he is not angry.

10
Pure of heart,
He watches his own actions
As if they were another's.

How can praise or blame disturb him?

11
With clear and steady insight
He sees this world is a mirage,
And he no longer wonders about it.

How can he fear the approach of death?

12
Pure of heart,
He desires nothing,
Even in despair.

He is content
In the knowledge of the Self.

With whom may I compare him?

13
With clear and steady insight
He knows that whatever he sees
Is by its very nature nothing.

How can he prefer one thing to another?

14
He is beyond all duality,
Free from desire,
He has driven from his mind
All longing for the world.

Come what may,
Joy or sorrow,
Nothing moves him.

4: The True Seeker

1
The wise man knows the Self,
And he plays the game of life.

But the fool lives in the world
Like a beast of burden.
[On this see Shinn, *The Game of Life*.]

2
The true seeker feels no elation,
Even in that exalted state
Which Indra and all the gods
Unhappily long for.

3
He understands the nature of things,
His heart is not smudged
By right or wrong,
As the sky is not smudged by smoke.

4
He is pure of heart,
He knows the whole world is only the Self.

So who can stop him
From doing as he wishes?

5
Of the four kinds of being,
From Brahma to a blade of grass,
Only the wise man is strong enough
To give up desire and aversion.

6
How rare he is!

Knowing he is the Self,
He acts accordingly
And is never fearful.

For he knows he is the Self,
One without two,
The Lord of all creation.
