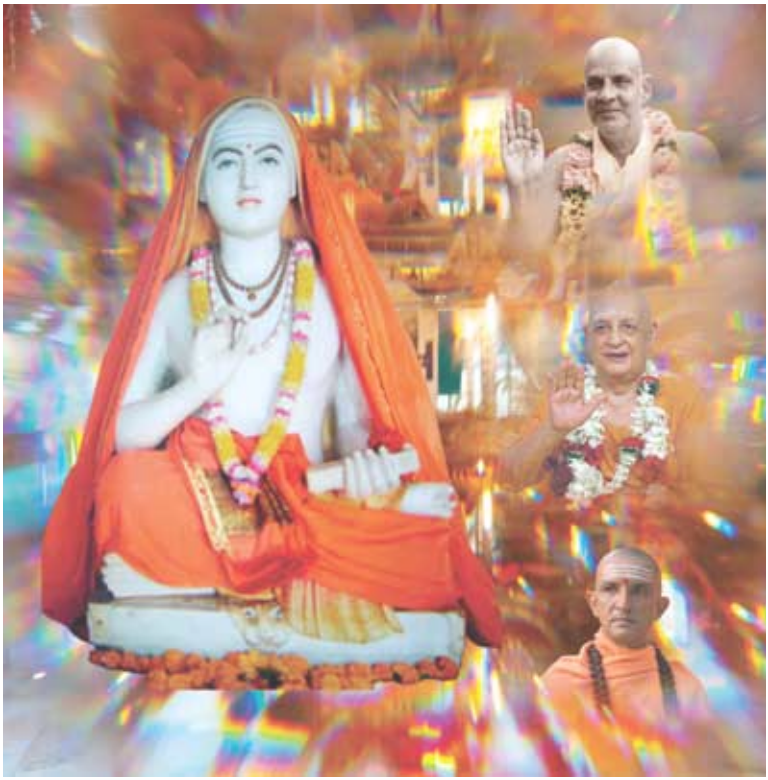
BIHAR YOGA®

Living Shankara

The Legacy of Adi Shankaracharya

Swami Yogakanti Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Living Shankara

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Swami Niranjan

Living Shankara

The Legacy of Adi Shankaracharya

Swami Yogakanti Saraswati

Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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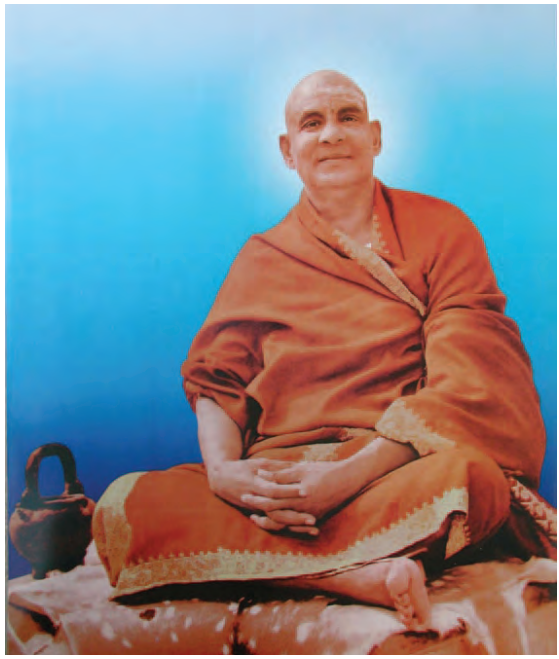
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Dedication

In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is about Adi Shankaracharya, a grand personality from centuries past who had a tremendous impact on the spiritual fabric of India and the tradition of sannyasa. Shankaracharya is as much a historical as a mythical figure. Books have been written about him across the centuries and he also lives in the minds of the Indian people through the oral tradition. In addition, there are texts that he himself authored. All these sources have been used to compile this study. More importantly, however, he has remained alive through the legacy that he left behind – and that is the inspiration of this book.

The traditions and philosophies that he founded were handed down in an unbroken lineage of spiritual seekers, and the best of them make Shankara come alive again and again. I have seen this in my own gurus, Swami Satyananda Saraswati and Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, who belong to the Dashnami tradition of sannyasa established by Shankara. It is their life and teachings that helped me to see the 'living Shankara', to understand this historical and mythical figure as an individual, a seeker, a sage, a scientist and siddha.

The origin of this book lies in an MPhil thesis completed by research while living in India: *The Contemporary Position of Yoga in the Dashnami Tradition of Shri Adi Shankaracharya*. It was guided by Assoc. Professor S. N. Mukherjee and accepted by Sydney University in 1996. Since then, through continued study, reflection and inspiration derived from the living tradition of sannyasa, I arrived at various conclusions

on the subject. This book is therefore a study on Shankara based on objective data and also a story of his life based on subjective understanding.

We have to learn to stand on our own two feet. The mother encourages her children to walk, even knowing they will fall. Therefore I would like to add that the views expressed in this book are mine, and any mistakes should not be considered representative of the Bihar Yoga tradition or of its masters.

I am grateful to the Yoga Publications Trust (Bihar School of Yoga) for agreeing to publish this work.

—Swami Yogakanti Saraswati
December 2017

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1

Who is Shankara?

AN INTRODUCTION

Shankara is alive in the consciousness of India, especially for the sannyasins of the tradition he founded, as well as for the average person, for people who go to temples, who struggle to live good lives and to understand life and why we are here. Therefore, there is a great deal of information about him in the oral tradition, and in India this oral tradition has been preserved.

There are also ten ancient accounts of Shankara's life that have been written down, but several of them are unavailable in full. Many of the 'facts' of his life are disputed by the scholars. But that shouldn't surprise us as many of the facts about our own lives would be disputed if two people who actually know us were asked to write a short biography, even if this included incidents where they were physically present. Due to different perspectives and perceptions, human beings throughout the ages have written about events of the day in terms that guarantee any other independent witness of the same event can scarcely recognize it.

Who is Shankara?

Our own perceptions of ourselves and our lives often change dramatically within just a few years of time. For example, how small the park where one played as a child looks now. Sometimes our self-perception changes just because we are forced to witness external events, or to spend time in self-

reflection, or even due to a flash of intuition. So we can proceed with our investigation of the life of Shankaracharya knowing that we will learn more about him even though other people may perceive him differently, and we also may perceive him quite differently from time to time.

In fact, some people say he was actually two or more people whose life stories have become totally fused. However, rather than being confused by this, we should regard it philosophically. After all, at times we are all at least two people in this life itself, sometimes at the same time – but definitely at different times. And if our culture allows us to consider transmigration of the *atma*, the soul, from birth to birth, then we have to agree that the number of people we become, or lives we live, can be quite numerous.

Everyone agrees, however, that Shankara spent his life teaching that ultimately we are all One on the plane of absolute reality. His tradition refers to the evolution of the living being, the *jiva*, through many births, and teaches us to identify with the atma, the soul, unaffected by these transmigratory journeys. So, no matter how many of him scholars think there were, from his viewpoint there is only One.

Written sources

Our main source amongst the ancient *Shankara Vijayas*, biographies written about Shankara, will be the *Shankara Digvijaya* written by Madhavacharya-Vidyaranya[1] and views of sannyasins from the Dashnami tradition he is said to have founded. That tradition, as we know it today, has four *maths*, centres of learning, often translated as monasteries, which can be regarded as the nuclei of the sannyasa parampara.[2]

[1] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Shankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Shri Shankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986

[2] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Sannyasa Darshan: A Treatise on Traditional and Contemporary Sannyasa*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 1993) p 57

These are:

1. Govardhan Math (Jagannath Puri), with the responsibility of protecting the *Rigveda*.
2. Sharada Math (Dwarika), with the responsibility of protecting the *Sama Veda*.
3. Sringeri Math (on the banks of the Tungabhadra river), protecting the *Yajurveda*.
4. Jyotirmath (Badrinath), protecting the *Atharva Veda*.

We will also take into consideration the views of some respected modern scholars from different disciplines and traditions.

All this has been done before, but the exciting part about this investigation is that we will also study Shankara's 'unpublished autobiography'. After all, almost by definition, he is the one who wrote commentaries on the *Prasthanatrayi*, that is, on the principal Upanishads, the *Brahma Sutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Also, although his authorship of any individual text is probably disputed by someone or the other, everyone agrees Shankara wrote his own philosophy and teachings in independent leaflets and teaching texts, *prakaras* and *upadesha granthas*. In the living Dashnami tradition, he is also said to have composed and chanted many still existent hymns, and some are so nearly proven to be his, that actually, if he didn't write them then he isn't the person we are looking for.

Other sources

So in this book, rather than just studying the published words, we will be looking at the author himself, listening to his silences and feeling the rhythms of his chants, hymns and bhajans. Being aware of his songs and writings, travels and the institutions he established to safeguard the sannyasa traditions, we get to meet Shankara and realize that he knew what he was doing. Shankara knew about human needs and consciousness, how to manage them and transcend them.

With the help of modern research into neurology and human consciousness, we are just beginning to appreciate

the depth of knowledge reflected in the sadhanas of yoga, tantra and Advaita Vedanta. This also gives us a new perspective on his skills as a teacher. He adapted the knowledge, practices and lifestyle of sannyasa to the needs of his own time. Simultaneously, he established a tradition that has preserved time-tested methods to expand the awareness into deeper levels of consciousness, and yet is itself able to change and respond wisely to the needs of the time even today.

Who is Shankara? We are looking for that person, that great original teacher of universal consciousness who is so worthy of respect, who composed, wrote, and chanted those amazingly profound texts. However anyone on the planet cares to define him, some inspiring being who has been called Adi Shankaracharya, had the experiences, composed the mantras, established the rituals, trained the eligible, and founded the institutions to protect an esoteric pathway through the dimensions of consciousness. Amongst the subtle reflections we can see the living teacher, we can receive darshan.

> In India there is a tradition of inner experience. They say that the ultimate accomplishment of human beings is to have darshan. Darshan means 'to see'. Darshan is inner vision or perception. It is not psychological or emotional; it is actual and real. In darshan you have face to face experience of your inner reality. The experience of intelligence leaps out of you and you can see that intelligence in front of you.[3]

By imbibing Shankara's philosophy, practising the sadhanas and experiencing the rituals and the corresponding chants, we can glimpse not only what he was teaching but who Shankara is.

---

[3] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Teachings of Swami Satyananda, Vol. V*, Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 1986)

2

Background

The Vedas

As many people around the world are now interested in the ancient sources of knowledge in India, we will begin with a brief introduction to the Vedas. This will give a framework when we consider the work of Shankara, because his life and philosophy was based on the Vedas.

The four Vedas are regarded as *shruti*, sources of revealed knowledge realized by the *rishis*, the seers, in states of deep meditation.

> When knowledge unfolded in the inner vision of the rishis their experiences were given an expression through hymns called mantras, which constitute the Vedas. Initially, there was only one Veda, which contained four types of hymns – *rig*, *yajus*, *sama* and *atharva* mantras. All these types were intermixed and the whole conglomeration was used in yajna. This is how it was at the beginning of Satya Yuga and it continued to be the same throughout Dwapara Yuga.[1]

The Vedas preserve knowledge of the vedic civilization which flourished along the banks of the Saraswati river. Today the subterranean remnant of that mighty flow dries

[1] Sannyasi Gyanshruti and Sannyasi Srividyananda, *Yajna: A Comprehensive Survey*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2006, p. 32

out in the desert of Rajasthan. Many thought it unlikely that the *Rigveda* (VII.95.1–2) was speaking of a real river when it eulogized her flowing from the Himalayas to the ocean, greater than all other rivers, pure, giving wealth and abundance to the living creatures of her world.

> She moves as if on a chariot by greatness surpassing all other rivers and waters. Saraswati has appeared as unique among the rivers, pure in her course from the mountains to the sea. Revealing wealth and abundance to the world she yields milk and ghee to the descendants of Nashua.

It seemed until just a few years ago that no river could be so reduced, but now we see the sacred Ganga reduced to a mere shadow of her former self.

In *Gods, Sages and Kings*, David Frawley discusses evidence ranging from archaeology to satellite pictures, which makes it clear that the homeland of the founders of the vedic tradition and its people was in fact the fertile region surrounding the river Saraswati.

> The Vedic Aryans could not have attributed their culture to the banks of a river that went dry before they got there. Thus the Vedic glorification of the Saraswati . . . proves the antiquity of the Vedic culture, the authenticity of the region it demarcates, and its identity with or precedence over the Indus Valley culture . . . Yet this takes us back much earlier than the Indus culture. Modern scientific studies indicate that the Saraswati river dried up around 1800 BC, while its previous ocean-going flow ended perhaps as early as 8000 BC.
>
> Archaeologists first assumed the Indus Valley culture was destroyed by outside invasion (supposedly by the Vedic people). Now that has shown not to be the case. There is no evidence of a violent end to this culture. Climate change and a shifting of rivers may have done it.[2]

[2] David Frawley, *Gods, Sages and Kings: Vedic Secrets of Ancient Civilization*, Morrison, Salt Lake City, USA, 1991, p. 75

Western scholars thought the vedic civilization ended with the 'Aryan invasions' and that the Vedas were therefore speaking of a civilization existing around 1,500 BC, but this is now known to be incorrect. We cannot ascribe definite dates to the Vedas, nevertheless, we can now be sure the oldest parts predate the ancient Egyptian civilization in antiquity. In *Gods, Sages and Kings*, it is mentioned that satellite photos have found the remains of the riverbed in the Rajasthan desert, and archaeological excavations have established that the Saraswati dried up in about 8,000 BC.

There are separate classes of literature in the vedic tradition. The *itihasas*, histories, such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, deal with the ancient avatara-heroes Sri Rama and Sri Krishna. The eighteen Puranas are ancient texts preserving mythological knowledge – and just how ancient is only recently being recognized. The oldest of the Vedas is the *Rigveda*. The Vedas were classified by Sage Vedavyasa and his disciples into the *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sama Veda* and *Atharva Veda*, at the dawn of civilization, and the original mantras and material which predate this classification were preserved for generations before that.

> A situation arose wherein the existence of the Vedas came into doubt. Destruction of the Vedas was feared, which would mean the collapse of the yajna system and the eventual end of civilization . . . Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa undertook the work of sifting through the heap of mantras to separate them into orderly compilations . . . The Vedas available to us today in the form of orderly Samhitas are the outcome of the herculean efforts of Vyasa, his four disciples Paila, Vaishampayana, Sumantu and Jaimini, and their followers. The stupendous work put in by Vyasa was acknowledged by addressing him as Veda Vyasa.[3]

[3] Sannyasi Gyanshruti and Sannyasi Srividyananda, *Yajna: A Comprehensive Survey*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2006, p. 33

We can outline the scope of the Vedas as follows[4]:

1. *Rigveda* deals with cosmology, nature and aspects of the agrarian culture practised with a natural harmony, as well as mathematics and physics.
2. *Yajurveda* deals with social and personal aspects of lifestyle and includes details of rituals.
3. *Sama Veda* is a poetic collection of chants, hymns and mantras dealing with devotion, worship and contemplation.
4. *Atharva Veda* describes the use (or application) of herbs, medicines and mantras, tantric concepts and spells.

Each of these four Vedas is itself composed of four sections:

1. *Samhita*: a collection of mantras and hymns with particular methodologies of grammar and tone for chanting in yajnas.
2. *Brahmana*: extensions of the Samhitas giving explanations of rituals, mantras and hymns, and also methods of normal social worship for householders.
3. *Aranyaka*: contemplative scriptures with subtle interpretations of vedic rituals and methods of internal sadhana and worship, composed by rishis who had withdrawn to the forests.
4. *Upanishads*: records of intimate discussions between guru and disciple on the nature of reality; the mystical, philosophical and spiritual culmination of the vedic concepts.

Also, each of the four Vedas has a smaller associated *Upaveda*:

1. *Rigveda* is associated with the *Ayurveda*.
2. *Yajurveda* is associated with the *Dhanurveda*.
3. *Sama Veda* is associated with the *Gandharvaveda*.
4. *Atharva Veda* is associated with the *Sthapatyaveda*.

Of the 108 existing Upanishads, some appear to be very ancient, such as the *Mandukya* and the *Brihadaranyaka*.

[4] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Sannyasa Darshan, A Treatise on Traditional and Contemporary Sannyasa*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 1993)

However, some of the Upanishads seem to be relatively modern, up to the 12th or 13th century AD. The 108 Upanishads can be classified as follows:

1. Major (Principal) Upanishads (ten)
2. Vedantic Upanishads (twenty-five)
3. Shaiva Upanishads (fourteen)
4. Shakta Upanishads (eight)
5. Vaishnava Upanishads (fourteen)
6. Yoga Upanishads (twenty)
7. Sannyasa Upanishads (seventeen)

The Vedantic and Major Upanishads are generally agreed to be the most ancient. The Major Upanishads are so called because they were commented on by Adi Shankaracharya. The thirty-six sectarian Upanishads (Shaiva, Shakta, Vaishnava) seem to occupy a middle position, with the oldest *sampradaya*, denomination or tradition being the Shaiva sampradaya.[5] Shiva is a deity associated with the original population that lived on the banks of the Saraswati, so some Shaiva Upanishads may be very ancient. The female consort of Shiva is worshipped by a distinct sampradaya known as Shakta. These two traditions continue up to today.

The Vaishnava sampradaya is an important but later addition, wherein Vishnu and his various incarnations (Krishna, Rama, and so forth) with their consorts are worshipped. The Yoga and Sannyasa Upanishads are the most recent, and some appear to be the product of the relatively modern Dashnami tradition of Shankara himself.

The vedic lifestyle

A person's life was seen as an opportunity to practise and realize the vedic concepts. The *Bhagavad Gita* is often described as the essence of the Vedas. In it, the philosophical concepts of the Upanishads are embodied and put to work as guides on the journey of life. Adi Shankaracharya's

[5] Swami Tattwananda, *Vaisnava Sects, Saiva Sects, Mother Worship*, Firma KLM, Calcutta, India, 1984

commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* shows that the work in which he was deeply involved, the establishment of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy and the Dashnami sampradaya, was not a way to escape from a meaningless world. It was a method for finding meaning in life.

In the vedic culture, a person's life was specifically related to learning and implementing vedic teaching through living and understanding the concept of the *ashramas*, different stages of life, each with a related *purushartha*, or worthwhile aim. The four ashramas are:

1. *Brahmacharya ashrama*: The first quarter of life as a child and a student, the time to learn necessary skills, and the time to learn the basic texts of the Samhitas.
2. *Grihastha ashrama*: The second quarter of life in which, while fulfilling the role of a householder, one should use the time to understand and utilize material resources in relation to the rituals of the Brahmanas.
3. *Vanaprastha ashrama*: The third quarter of life was when, with increasing maturity, one retired from society and family responsibilities, had the time to focus on what the enduring reality might be behind the phenomenal universe. One strove to develop *viveka*, discrimination between the real and the unreal, and sufficient *vairagya*, detachment, to internalize and establish oneself in *sadhana*, regular spiritual practice, through the Aranyakas.
4. *Sannyasa ashrama*: The final quarter of life, recognized as a time for one-pointed dedication to vairagya, when one would turn away from the panoramic projection of life, towards the divine source. Instead of sliding reluctantly towards death, the increase in vairagya, coupled with sadhana meant death was considered as a transition for consciousness, to be managed skilfully, with awareness and grace. As a sannyasi or a *vairagi*, one prepared to end one's life auspiciously by dedicating oneself to realize and live for spiritual unfoldment through the teachings of the Upanishads.

The first two ashramas relate to *karma kanda*, the art of doing, the third is the essential period of transition from

pravritti to *nivritti marga*, from the path of attachment to the material world to the path of detachment from the material world, and the last quarter of life relates to *jnana kanda*, the state of wisdom.[6] Another way of looking at this is to consider the four *purushartha*, the worthwhile aims in the life of a *purusha*, a human being, as relating directly to the four ashramas. Then the four purusharthas become *sankalpas*, or resolves, for the four quarters of life in the following way:

1. *Artha*: Building a foundation for security and wealth becomes the aim of brahmacharya ashrama.
2. *Kama*: The fulfilment of one's desires becomes the aim of grihastha ashrama.
3. *Dharma*: The fulfilment of one's duties according to one's real nature becomes the aim of vanaprastha ashrama.
4. *Moksha*: Liberation from samsara is the aim of sannyasa ashrama.

Glucklich, in his book on pilgrimage[7], comments that there is a long-standing question in the Indian spiritual tradition: whether one should live an active life to uplift society or renounce society and dedicate oneself totally to the search for spiritual enlightenment. Shankara advocated the view that the ashramas are stations or periods of effort for worthwhile aims that most people should go through consecutively to live a full and happy life. Then, following the fulfilment of desires and responsibilities, one can shake off grief and delusion, knowing that all phenomena, *vikaras*, are really non-existent, and one can progress naturally to sannyasa.

Shankara supported the tradition of the four ashramas with the important provision that one with intense vairagya and *mumukshutva*, longing for liberation, could take sannyasa at any age on meeting the *sat guru*, the true guru. His

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[6] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Sannyasa Darshan: A Treatise on Traditional and Contemporary Sannyasa*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 1993) pp. 12–16

[7] Ariel Glucklich, *Climbing Chamundi Hill: 1001 Steps with a Storyteller and a Reluctant Pilgrim*, Bantam Books, UK, 2004

philosophy echoes Sri Krishna's, pointing out that although the real is ever-existent and the unreal is never existent, the Self and the non-Self are always present to those absorbed in Brahman. The crux of the matter is: "*He shall renounce on that very day on which he has become disillusioned with the world.*"[8]

The Dashnami tradition

The sannyasa tradition predated Adi Shankaracharya, but he organized the most ancient sampradaya, the Shaivite sannyasa tradition into ten branches, known collectively as the 'Dashnami'. He put them under the jurisdiction of the four major maths and assigned them different responsibilities in the task of studying and preserving the Vedas. Each of the major Upanishads was assigned to one branch:

1. Saraswati, Bharati and Puri, associated with Sringeri Math, have the duty to study the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, *Taittiriya Upanishad* and *Katha Upanishad*, respectively.
2. Tirtha and Ashrama, associated with Sharada Math at Dwarika, study the *Kena Upanishad* and *Chhandogya Upanishad*.
3. Giri, Parvata and Sagara, associated with Jyotirmath study the *Mundaka Upanishad*, *Prashna Upanishad* and *Mandukya Upanishad*.
4. Vanam and Aranyam, associated with Govardhan Math, preserve the *Aitareya Upanishad* and *Kaushitaki Upanishad*.

The guru and vedic education

We will see that Shankara himself only experienced two of the ashramas as he took sannyasa at an early age. As a child he helped his mother and composed hymns to the Devi. He attended the gurukul run by his father and, at the age of eight, he had imbibed such an understanding of the whole

[8] Prof. A.A. Ramanathan, *The Samnyasa Upanishads (On Renunciation)*, The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Madras, India, 1978, p. 153

system of ashrama and purushartha that he instructed the king of his region on its importance.

In the traditional *gurukuls*, or schools run as a 'family' of the guru, each school would tend to concentrate on a particular Veda. This would be interpreted in accordance with the understanding and experience of the *guru*, enlightened teacher, of that school. The training could include any or all of the six *Vedangas*, or parts of Vedas:

1. *Kalpa*: codes of ritual worship.
2. *Shiksha*: training in pronunciation and concepts.
3. *Vyakarana*: rules of grammar used in the Vedas.
4. *Chhanda*: the tunes and metres for vedic chanting.
5. *Nirukta*: etymological explanations of different vedic words, contributing to an encyclopaedic knowledge of vedic concepts, ideas and practices.
6. *Jyotisha*: astrology used to fix auspicious dates for rituals, life events, and so on.

Subtler aspects of education included:

1. Epistemology, the philosophical search into the extent and limitations of knowledge, which involves deductive logic in extracting the real meaning of the yogic texts.
2. History, establishing a perspective on any particular event or concept, involving validation and comparison.
3. Mythology: identifying and understanding mythological symbols in both folklore and the psyche.
4. Science: identifying and investigating aspects open to perception or experience, involving logic and repeatability (even if that perception or experience is inherent in an altered state of consciousness).
5. Intuition: opening and investigating *vijnanamaya kosha*, the sheath of subtle knowledge, harvesting experience and insights, and acting them out (manifesting them in life).
6. Ritualism: practising moral, physical, psychological and spiritual concepts in specific and precise order, which at times involves creating or evoking higher or deeper aspects of reality.

7. Subjects like agriculture, archery, architecture, and so forth.

During the different ashramas or stages of life, people would develop an appropriate relationship with the guru. For example, children would join a *gurukul*, a school which was also the family of the guru, before entering their lives as householders. Householders would continue a respectful relationship with the guru while they fulfilled the demands of family life. People who had retired from their worldly responsibilities would be able to consult the guru on matters of sadhana. Spiritual aspirants might flock to the ashrams of self-realized sages at any time for their spiritual education.

So we can understand why the culminating texts of the Vedas are called *Upanishads*, which implies they are learned in close proximity to the guru. Indeed, the whole structure of the vedic lifestyle revolved around the hub of the guru's grace and knowledge.

Who is Shankara?

In our search for Shankara, as we consider the scope of vedic education, we should consider that he is known to have completely mastered all these aspects of vedic education by the age of eight.

3

Shankara's Life: A Summary

There is a controversy about whether Adi Shankaracharya, the original teacher about consciousness, was one person, two or even more. Many scholars wonder whether writing all the texts attributed to him could have been possible in the life of only one person, and then there are all of his other achievements. The traditional view in India placed him after the birth of Buddha, but well before the birth of Christ. Until recently, scholarly opinion in the West was convinced he lived from 788 to 820 AD. Nevertheless, there is a basic storyline told about the life of Shankara which is well-known and generally approved of:

- He was born in Kaladi, Kerala, in a family of Nambudri brahmins.
- He left home as a boy to take sannyasa and was initiated into sannyasa by Govindapada, the disciple of Gaudapada.
- He wrote commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras*, the ten principal Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita*.
- He travelled all over India establishing the doctrine of non-dualism, or Advaita Vedanta, as the true teaching of the Vedas and refuting non-vedic doctrines.
- He left four principal disciples to continue his mission.
- He established centres of vedic learning in many places.
- He passed away at the early age of thirty-two.

Whether the details of this storyline are 'historically true' or not, its elements must be considered, as this is what the tradition he founded considers appropriate in terms of teaching how such a great personality moves, talks, thinks, and generally conducts himself on planet earth. It is therefore worth investigating who this living Shankara is on at least two levels: one, the historical and two, the psychic.

The sublime engineer

Shankara is a challenging figure whose life focused on Ultimate Reality. Now, what does 'sannyasa in the modern world' have to do with the Ultimate Reality? Shankara said:

Brahma satya jaganmithyaa; jeevo brahmaiva naaparah.

As long as our total focus is on life on planet earth, we have forgotten our true nature. His attitude to the phenomenal daily reality we identify with seems like that of an engineer: how is it assembled? Taken apart? Adjusted? Reassembled? Used? Made more beautiful? But this portrait of him as a remote intellectual does not do him justice. It relates to his early period as a philosopher. He was, after all, a yogic siddha, a traveller, a tantrika, open to change, and definitely not without heart, and certainly not the misogynist he is often portrayed as. Many of the things he is reported to have said and done are socially unacceptable, or at least politically incorrect, yet he was sublime. The clarity and constancy of his insight and the playful freedom of his life and songs are, in fact, heart-wrenching.

Let us begin by looking at the life story preserved in the *Shankara Digvijayas*, books traditionally accepted as biographies of Adi Shankaracharya, and glimpse the egoless genius who inspired them.

Short life story according to the Digvijayas

- He was born as an incarnation of Lord Shiva because Earth was suffering, with the mission to uphold *vedic dharma*, righteous living.

- His parents were *brahmins*, of the priestly caste, righteous people though not wealthy. His father died, leaving him in the care of his mother. As a child he obtained her permission to take sannyasa, and left, promising he would return when she was dying to ensure her safe transport into the next *loka*, plane of existence.
- He had *siddhis*, powers usually associated with the perfection of tantric and yogic practices. These were displayed naturally during his childhood, such as spontaneously composing exquisitely wrought Sanskrit chants pregnant with mature insights, and being able to change the course of rivers.
- As a child, he found and served his guru, Govindapada, whom he pleased by exhibiting *sanyam* and *karuna*, wise self-restraint and compassion, despite his youth and his siddhis.
- His guru sent him out to teach the truths of Vedanta, reaffirming the mission which he had taken birth to accomplish.
- He walked to Kashi (Varanasi or Benares), and there engaged and defeated many scholars of opposing schools of thought in debate.
- He walked to Badrinath and there wrote his *bhashyas*, commentaries on the *Prasthanatrayi*, the three pillars of Vedanta:
  1. The *Bhagavad Gita*
  2. Ten major Upanishads
  3. The *Brahma Sutras.*
- Vyasa (Vedavyasa, also called Badarayana), author of the *Brahma Sutras* (also called the *Vedanta Sutras*), was impressed by Shankara's commentary. He extended Shankara's mission from writing and debating with the learned pandits of Varanasi to travelling throughout India, firmly establishing Advaita Vedanta and the sanatana dharma against all opponents. To enable Shankara to fulfil this new mission, his lifespan was also extended (doubled from sixteen to thirty-two years).

- He travelled, mainly by foot, to Prayag (Allahabad) where the great Mimamsa scholar Kumarilla Bhatta was immolating himself to atone for the sin of deceiving his Buddhist guru. Kumarilla sent Shankara to his own greatest disciple, Mandan Mishra. Shankara defeated both Mandan Mishra and his wife Ubhaya Bharati, in debate. Now Kumarilla, Mandan Mishra and his wife were also divine incarnations who had been born to help Shankara achieve his mission. His interaction with them gives insight into Shankara's attitude to karma kanda, the Buddhists, women, and his character as a siddha, so we will deal with this whole episode extensively later.
- With his four major disciples who were all incarnations of *devas*, beings of light, and who had taken birth to help with his mission – Sanandan (Padmapada), Mandan Mishra (now Sureshwara), Hastamalaka and Trotaka – he travelled widely, attracting other disciples and the patronage of kings, and setting up an organization to preserve the teachings by:
  1. Sending his trained disciples out teaching.
  2. Uniting different sects.
  3. Establishing the Dashnami order of sannyasa.
  4. Establishing at four major *maths*, spiritual institutions: Govardhan Math in Puri in the east of India, in Orissa; Sharada Math in Dwarika in the west, in Gujarat; Jyotirmath in Badrinath in the northern Himalayas; and Sringeri Math in the south, in Karnataka on the banks of the Tungabhadra river with the associated Kamakoti Math in Kanchi, and many others.[1]
- He was established as the *sarvajna*, the knower of all.
- He suffered, transcended and died.

Guru-disciple tradition

Perhaps he reincarnated to continue the teaching, becoming known as *Abhinava Shankara*, the new Shankara, or maybe he

[1] Prof. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, Oxford University Press, Madras, India, 1955

lived again mainly in the minds of others who simply wrote his name to the teachings he inspired them to write.

Upadesha Sahasri, is one of the texts widely thought to be written by Adi Shankaracharya, and has been commented on by many established scholars and leaders of the sannyasa tradition. In it, Shankara refers to self-knowledge as the means to liberation. The two main qualities Shankara deemed necessary for an aspirant to become a disciple are *mumukshutva*, intense desire for liberation, and *shraddha*, faith, which together transform one's life into a search for knowledge. It is that search for knowledge, and the effort to transmit it effectively and accurately, which defines the life and teachings of Shankara. He concludes *Upadesha Sahasri* by listing the necessary qualities for discipleship:

> This Knowledge should be imparted only to him whose mind has been pacified, who has controlled his senses and is freed from all defects, who has practised the duties enjoined by the scriptures and is possessed of good qualities, who is always obedient to the teacher and aspires only after liberation and nothing else.[2]

Shankara's requirements are demanding, and would eliminate many from being accepted as students. Maybe this is why Shankara is not so popular – would he be willing to teach us?

[2] Swami Jagadananda, (trans.) *Upadesa Sahasri of Sri Sankaracarya*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 9th Impression, 1941, pp. 189–190 (16:71–72)

4

The Sources

When looking at the chronological events of Shankara's life, what are our sources? There are the *Digvijayas* or biographies written about his victories in all directions. There are separate records kept in the maths that claim him as their founder, and from many smaller communities and temples in far-flung parts of India, from Kashmir and Badrinath, Assam, the South, Nepal and Tibet, and other neighbouring countries. There is the information in the commentaries, books and hymns that he is said to have composed, once they have been sifted for authenticity. Plus there are oral traditions, mainly of the Dashnami sannyasins, that have not been committed to the interceptible written word. First we will look at the biographies.

The Digvijayas

The Digvijayas convey the life story remembered and accepted by various people and traditions. They do not define the man any more than anyone's opinion defines a person, but much can be learnt from them about how he is regarded and what impression he left in his wake.

The very number of the Digvijayas conveys a sense of his importance. As with the gospels, before only four were chosen by the Church to represent the record of Jesus Christ's life, we find differences between the Digvijayas in regard to various biographical details. Also, they speak

of superhuman beings, gods and the karma of past lives which shape people's present lives. This can give a double sense of relief. The heads of the established traditions have not removed all controversy from the records; a breathing human being is still in there somewhere. In addition, past karma offers an explanation for the lessons we have to face in life, and assures us of their meaning and importance.

There is a standard list of ten *Shankara Digvijayas*, referred to by authorities with only minor variations, which is helpful to look at. The list below is drawn mainly from Swami Tapasyananda.

1. *Brihat-Shankara-Vijaya* by Chitsukhacharya
2. *Prachina-Shankara-Vijaya* by Anandagiri (i.e. by Trotakacharya of Jyotirmath)
3. *Shankara-Vijaya* by Vidya Shankara
4. *Keraliya-Shankara-Vijaya* (or *Acharyacharita)* by Govindanatha from Kerala
5. *Shankarabhyudaya* by Raja Chudamani Dikshita
6. *Shankara-Vijaya*
7. *Shankara-Vijaya (*or *Acharya-Digvijaya*) by Vallisahayakavi
8. *Shankara-Digvijaya-Sara* by Sadananda
9. *Shankara-Vijaya-Vilasa* by Chidvilasa
10. *Shankara Digvijaya (*or *Sankshepa-Shankara Vijaya*) by Madhava-Vidyaranya.

In his commentary on the *Shankara Digvijaya* authored by Madhava-Vidyaranya, Swami Tapasyananda deals with the question of the authorship of the ten *Shankara Vijayas.* He says the first two are no longer available anywhere, but are said to be written by the Shankara's immediate disciples, at a time contemporary with him.

However, in *Adi Shankara: The Saviour of Mankind*, S.D. Kulkarni refers continually to the first of these, the *Brihat-Shankara-Vijaya*, or the *Complete Unabridged Shankara-Vijaya*, explaining that fragments of it are to be found quoted in other texts. He claims that it is the most valuable biography because it was written by a contemporary, Vishnu Sharma, who was a fellow student at the gurukul run by

Shankara's father. According to Kulkarni, Shankara later initiated Vishnu Sharma into sannyasa with the name Chitsukhacharya and eventually he was installed as the second pontiff at Dwarika Math.

It does seem that the *Brihat Shankara Vijaya* is accessible in part, for Govind Chandra Pande also refers to it, claiming it gives the occasions on which Shankara composed his works. He also points out that T.S. Narayan Sastri claims to have a fragmentary copy of it.

Kulkarni agrees that the *Prachina Shankara Vijaya*, which means the *Ancient Shankara Vijaya*, is not available, but would be most interesting and authentic because its author is Anandagiri, one of Shankara's four major disciples, who was initiated as Trotakacharya, and installed as the second acharya of Jyotirmath. However, he adds the interesting information that the *Shankara Digvijaya* is said to be an abridged version of that ancient text.[1] This explains why in this list of Sanskrit texts, the *Shankara Digvijaya* of Madhava-Vidyaranya is also known as the *Sankshepa Shankara Vijaya*, which means, the *Summary of the Shankara Vijaya*. If the main source is indeed the *Prachina Shankara Vijaya*, written by Shankara's direct disciple, Trotakacharya of Jyotirmath, then regard for the authenticity of this work must increase.

The Shankara Digvijaya of Madhava-Vidyaranya

This study focuses mainly on that *Shankara Digvijaya* written by Madhava-Vidyaranya. Swami Tapasyananda's introduction provides a great deal of additional information on who Madhava-Vidyaranya actually is. He supports the generally accepted view that the author is the highly esteemed historical figure who was born in 1295 and lived until 1386. Before taking sannyasa, he was a principal adviser to the kings of Vijayanagara and helped to establish their empire. He was the Shankaracharya of Sringeri Math from 1380 to 1386. He demonstrated his profound understanding of

[1] S.D. Kulkarni, *Adi Sankara The Saviour of Mankind*, Shri Bhagavan Vedavyasa Itihasa Samshodhana Mandira (Bhishma), Bombay, India, 1987, p. 86

Advaita Vedanta and the sannyasa tradition in such texts as *Panchadasi* and *Jivanmukti Viveka*.

Some disagree that Vidyaranya who wrote the *Panchadasi* is the author of this *Shankara Digvijaya*. However:

1. Every chapter has the colophon of Madhava as the writer's name, and Madhavacharya was Vidyaranya's name before sannyasa, when he was the chief minister for the first three rulers of the Vijayanagara kingdom.
2. The first verse pays respects to the author's teacher, Vidyatirtha, who was head of Sringeri Math from 1228 to 1333 (followed by Bharatikrishna Tirtha from 1333 to 1380) and then by Vidyaranya himself.
3. There is also what seems to be a reference to the author's previous life in a royal court in the introduction: Canto 1 (Prologue), stanzas 7–8: (7) *By using my literary talent in this way, I am cleansing it in the waters sanctified by the glories of the Lord, and thus ridding it of the dirt it has accumulated through its deployment in the praise of mean and proud men whom wealth has raised to the ranks of pretenders to greatness.* (8) *By indulging in insincere praise of the goodness and magnanimity of kings . . . my poesy has become extremely impure. Now I shall render it pure and fragrant.*[2]

Vidyaranya's authorship of the *Shankara Digvijaya* is widely accepted within the oral and teaching tradition of the Dashnami sannyasins; to discount it we would also have to reject Sringeri Math's claim that it is a work of their lineage. On the other hand, to accept Vidyaranya as the author adds weight to the value of the details and opinions recounted in the *Shankara Digvijaya*. Swami Tapasyananda comments on the many mythological elements in it, but feels these unhistorical features are shared with all other available biographies.

This is not just a plain biography of fact, and if Vidyaranya's authorship is doubted then we must struggle to

[2] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, Sankara Digvijaya: *The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, p. 1

find another author with sufficient genius to match this work. Swami Tapasyananda further comments that the genius of the author of the *Panchadasi* is clearly reflected in its wisdom, dialectical skill and mastery of Vedanta, and he considers it is far superior to all the other Shankara Vijayas both as a philosophical and a literary work.

We should ask ourselves again what is meant by authorship. Vidyaranya was living several centuries after Shankara, his knowledge and position as head of Sringeri Math guarantee that his work would be based on prior accounts within the Dashnami tradition, both written and oral. Also, his work would have been dedicated to maintaining a living tradition of sannyasa. It is quite possible that he and other authors of the Digvijayas, while referring to ancient sources for information on the original Adi Shankaracharya, also included works preformed by an *abhinava*, new, Shankaracharya of the eighth century. The Digvijayas may contradict each other in some details, but should not be dismissed; rather, they should be searched for common features.

Acknowledging other dimensions

Some may argue that the references to the debates of the gods and other mythological elements are not in keeping with Advaita Vedanta. Pande comments[3] that one cannot say the Digvijayas are false just because they speak of miracles, pointing out that even the New Testament claims to have many reports of miracles by first-hand witnesses. Rather, one should realize that many societies have belief in supernatural events as part of their make-up (just as our society now believes in monetary theories, etc.).

The written word carries its own reality which when skilfully used can take us beyond a fixed belief in the material world as the only reality. This itself is an important

[3] Govind Chandra Pande, *Life and Thought of Shankaracarya*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, India, 1994, p. 373

first step in grasping the importance and relevance of Advaita Vedanta. This was surely known to Vidyaranya. It was demonstrated by Adi Shankaracharya in his devotional hymns. It is acknowledged in the field of psychology.

References to other dimensions of reality and other beings interacting with the phenomenal reality on planet earth for various purposes are present in the Digvijayas just as they are present in so many scriptures: it seems almost a defining feature of sacred literature. In fact, such a grand perspective on life underlines the authenticity of the Digvijayas when we look at the biographies of other historical figures of similar spiritual stature such as Swami Vivekananda, Paramahamsa Yogananda, Swami Sivananda, Swami Satyananda, John the Baptist, Saint Teresa, the Dalai Lama and the Rimpoches. None of the above figures can be adequately described by confining the narration to daily events, for their lives are remarkable primarily for the fact that they convince any witness of the intervention of the noumenal reality in the material world.

Spiritual works thus speak of the material worldly existence on earth, and other existences in other dimensions, as matters of experiential fact. Vedic, tantric and yogic texts give techniques to facilitate the development of such experiences. If we search for alternative explanations of miraculous events recorded in the Digvijayas, we should refer to the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. Almost the whole of his third chapter, 'Vibhooti Pada', refers to *samyama*, conscious oscillation of awareness between the states of dharana, dhyana and samadhi. This is practised by a yogi to attain penetrating insight, or to actually affect matter physically, thus explaining the 'miraculous' powers of a yogi.

Integrating experience of other dimensions

To investigate and, where appropriate, help integrate such teachings in our world perspective, we need to look at the testimony of the contemporaries of acknowledged siddhas and our own experience. Baba Ram Dass, gives eye-witness

accounts of his guru's supernatural knowledge and powers. Paramahamsa Yogananda refers to yogic powers repeatedly in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and these range from the ability to stop a train according to will, to being able to be in two places at once, to being able to transmit the experience of samadhi.[4]

An example of the intervention of 'other forces' in everyday life was experienced during the 1993 World Yoga Convention in Munger, India. I was present myself and actually collected reports of the events from eye-witnesses.[5] Definitely there were contradictions in regard to the perception of exact events, and later rationalizations, but everyone remembered a sense of awe at the way the power of wind and storm was used by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati to shape events and raise every participant's awareness from the merely empirical to the transcendental. That was a long time ago, and such powers are not frequently displayed.

In 2009, however, during and after Sri Swami Satyananda's mahasamadhi, when he died consciously, with full awareness, gathering his pranas to exit through sahasrara in the manner of siddhas, many people around the world had simultaneous, unexplained contacts with him and these have been recorded in the *Avahan* magazines.[6] Also these unexplained visions of him have been captured on camera.

From the Buddhist tradition, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* repeatedly speaks of the universal, transcendental experiences during the process of dying and death. The teachings remind us forcefully that death is a real

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[4] Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 1st hard back ed., Yogoda Satsanga Society of India, Kolkata, India, 2001

[5] *Continuation . . .* (*Past, Present and Future 1983–2008, Volume 2: History of Bihar School of Yoga Under the Guidance of SNS*), eds. Swami Yogakanti Saraswati et al, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, 2013 (first pub. 1995), pp. 393–406

[6] *Avahan*, bi-monthly magazine, Sannyasa Peeth, Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, India

phenomenon that everyone must go through, and explains it as an impending window of opportunity that it is folly to ignore:

> For what happens at the moment of death is that the ordinary mind and its delusions die, and in that gap the boundless sky-like nature of our mind is uncovered . . . if all we know of the mind is the aspect of mind that dissolves when we die, we will be left with no idea of what continues, no knowledge of the new dimension of the deeper reality of the nature of mind. So it is vital for us to familiarize ourselves with the nature of the mind while we are still alive.[7]

The practical force of such teachings is realized more compellingly as fellow-travellers die all around us and we realize that this is a real experience that everyone does actually go through, and that it is wise to start training ourselves for it beforehand.

Being aware of our own consciousness and exploring beyond the limited range of conscious external perceptions is the subject matter of spiritual disciplines. To let the senses and associated thought processes drop external projections and, turning inwards, to practise looking inside before the process of dying begins for us, allows our awareness of the bardo states, enhancing our performance in life also. Death shows us the practical necessity for exploring existence, consciousness, bliss and other dimensions as real phenomena which, although beyond the normal perceptual range of human existence on earth, are keys to our real nature. Shankara's teachings of Advaita Vedanta, yoga and tantra assure us that the range of experience open to a human being can be broadened through sadhana, and this is not merely theory, techniques for practice are offered.

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[7] Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (Rigpa Fellowship), Rider, London, 2002, p. 12

Other sources

The Digvijayas are not the only sources of information on Shankara, other sources, for example, are the *Shiva Rahasya*, an epic about Lord Shiva, and the *Markandeya Samhita*. But more importantly, we can also glean information from Shankara's own writings.

Then there is another potential source. How about the experiences that one receives during training under a guru of Shankara's tradition, as he works to inculcate the necessary qualities he requires in a disciple? Or after practising some of the sadhanas derived from Shankara, or simply adjustments in lifestyle – for example, the experiences that occur from repeatedly chanting the verses of his hymns, such as the *Saundarya Lahari*? From the yogic point of view, can we be justified in feeling that these actually constitute meetings with Sri Shankaracharya on some level?

5

Birth and Childhood

According to our sources, the traditional life story of Shankaracharya is that he was born at a critical time in history because the inspiring vedic lifestyle, which accommodated the full experience of human potential, was beginning to contract into the observance of sets of rules, that is, into religious sects. There were various tantric schools and other groups whose practices and conduct had degenerated. Shankara's biographies mention his interactions with the Kaulas, Kapalikas, Kalamukhas, Pashupatas, Pancharatras, Ganapatyas, Sauryas, and atheists or Charvakas with atheistic and hedonistic attitudes. His life story is full of his efforts to reform such groups, while retaining their essential discoveries and strengths.

Likewise, he tackled the orthodox philosophies and the conservative society of the time. The six 'orthodox' philosophies were so called because their inspiration was based on the Vedas. However, by the time of Shankara, the Samkhya and Nyaya-Vaisheshika systems of thought were based on reasoning and logic rather than the shrutis or experience. Poorva Mimamsa minimized the importance of the Upanishads and jnana kanda. Its adherents believed in the pre-eminence of the karma kanda of the Vedas, and the importance of ritualistic karma. The cosmic scope of yajna, which was originally fashioned to maintain harmony between different *lokas*, or dimensions, of the universe, was reduced to

the attainment of earthly and heavenly happiness. The once vibrant darshanas were undergoing a calcification process, and there was quarrelling among splinter groups. Because of this, the vedic lifestyle was losing ground to rival viewpoints and lifestyles.

Before birth (the bardo of becoming)

The *Shankara Digvijaya* of Madhava-Vidyaranya claims that the historical situation was so bad that the *devas*, beings of light, became concerned and went to Lord Shiva about it. Now, many of us today are not sure that we believe in devas as gods, divine beings or forces out there, or in their opposites, the *asuras*, devils, malevolent demons or forces. But we still believe in strength of character, calmness and benevolent natural cycles on one side, split personalities, uncontrolled passions, inhuman materialistic pursuits, and so forth, on the other, and these are other names of the devas and asuras.

We can therefore read these passages knowing that 'devas' correspond to our enlightened inner qualities or strengths, which may be physical, emotional, mental, genetic or spiritual, and 'asuras' to our base instincts and weaknesses. We know very well these live and fight inside us, as for example courage, conscience, humility, arrogance, rage, appetites and diseases.

Just as our strengths are not always pure, neither are the devas, and just as our weaknesses and attachments sometimes lead us to nobility, so it is with the asuras. We are accustomed to being overcome by these personality traits in moments of crisis, and to recognizing and striving with these forces whenever we seek to improve ourselves. But the Digvijayas report that, once upon a time, things got so bad externally and on the inside, that the devas got really worried. They realized they had lost it to the point where Earth herself, along with all her children, was about to collapse, so they consciously gathered themselves together to call on the higher consciousness for help. They appealed

to the higher consciousness in the form of Lord Shiva, because he is the auspicious one who always helps, and is also called *Pashupati*, the lord of beasts, because he can control humankind's most selfish and limited base instincts.

Beam me down!

Lord Shiva said, "Okay, I'll come down and help. But you, you and you," pointing out various devas and devis, "will have to get involved in this too. I'm not going in there without backup."

So this is how, according to the *Shankara Digvijaya*, some devas were sent down; taking birth so as to manifest as an advance guard. Lord Shiva outlined the mission and preparatory steps as follows:

> The Veda has three strands in its comprehensive teaching: the ritualistic, the meditative and the gnostic. By establishing the sway of the Vedas with its three-pronged message, the spiritual ideal can be preserved in the world. If the spiritual ideal is saved, society is saved, for sound social organization leading to the good of man is based on the spiritual ideal. Now, coming to understand My design and following My instruction, Hari and Sesha have already been born as the sages Sankarshana and Patanjali for the resuscitation of the middle section of the Vedas dealing with meditation and have produced texts on bhakti and yoga . . .[1]

The next step, according to the *Shankara Digvijaya*, was to help revive the ritualistic karma kanda section of the Vedas, and Shiva sent his own son, called Shanmukha, Skanda or Subrahmanya, to incarnate as Kumarilla Bhatta. Lord Brahma and Indra, king of the gods, were to take birth and help him as Mandan Mishra and King Sudhanvan.

[1] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, p. 5

With his arrangements complete, Lord Shiva undertook to be born and manifest as Adi Shankaracharya who would have four disciples and explain the *Brahma Sutras*. So Lord Shiva took human birth as Shankara, and around the same time a whole lot of mothers started having babies who were remarkably quick off the mark as his coterie manifested here on earth.

The force of mythology

Should we dismiss this account because it resembles mythology and speaks of earth as a living entity suffering from human and demonic exploitation, and finally turning for help to divine forces and the higher consciousness? Well, this perception of earth as a Divine Mother, was basic to civilizations all over the planet until a few centuries ago. And in this new century, where we are facing extinction of life as we know it due to breakdown of Nature's biorhythms, people are beginning to realize that modern scientific perceptions are not nearer to the truth than the time-tested mythological understandings:

> From the seventeenth century onwards, science was able to view Nature in terms of its mechanisms. Nature became completely objectified. 'She' became 'it'. Nature was deemed by science to be inanimate, unconscious and mechanistic. Intelligence and purpose were not to be found in Nature . . . Meanwhile, humanity came to be seen as having the right – a human right – to explore, manipulate and exploit every element of the natural world for the betterment of mankind . . . By the end of the eighteenth century the idea that the universe was a living presence, that it had purpose and was endowed with an inherent intelligence, had become, as it remains very much today, an inconceivable notion.[2]

[2] The Prince of Wales, Tony Juniper & Ian Skelly, *Harmony: A New Way of Looking at our World*, Blue Door (HarperCollins), London, UK, 2010, p. 156

Should we dismiss the Digvijayas because they are unfashionable enough to speak of gods and goddesses as though they really exist outside of our psyche? No. These characteristics underline their authenticity as ancient records of the intervention of other forces in the material world. They are ways in which storytellers try to record the importance and the impact of experiences beyond the scope of our conscious mind:

> The word 'mythological' is not used here in any sense of disparagement. A highly poetic and mythological narration of the lives of individuals or events marks the measure of the tremendous impact that these individuals and events have made on the racial mind of a people in those ancient days.[3]

Auspicious birth

Shankara's parents were good people and his father, Shivaguru, in particular used to spend a lot of time conversing with the devas, or if you prefer, looking into his own inner nature and developing positive qualities. As a brahmin, he had access to all the right books and had been trained in how to read them perceptively and how to put their principles into practice. Such a person, according to the philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita*, would be worthy of bearing a divine son who brings happiness to all. And so it happened: The *Shiva Rahasya* (9:16) and the *Markandeya Samhita* (72:7) record:

> *Kerale shashalagraame viprapatnyaam madaamshajah;*
> *Bhavishyati mahaadevi shankaraakhya dvijottamah.*

> Maha Devi! A boy will be born on Earth named Shankara. Carrying my energy, he will be born to a brahmin lady in the village Shahala in Kerala.

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[3] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, p. vii (Swami Tapasyananda's Introduction)

Kaalataakhya purottame shivaguru
vidyaadhinaathasya cha yah;
Tatpatnyaam shivataarankamshamuditah
shrishankaraakhyaam vahan.

In the holy village Kalaadi, in Kerala, to a great learned scholar, Shivaguru and his wife, a boy who would be called Shankara will be born as the incarnation of Lord Shiva.

It is an archetypal story line. Shivaguru is said to have told his wife Aryamba of a dream prior to Shankara's conception, in which he had agreed to an omniscient but short-lived son, rather than an ordinary child.

There are records in many cultures that the birth of a great soul is often known beforehand, as with Jesus Christ and the Rimpoches of Buddhism. Paramahamsa Yogananda mentions that before his own birth, his mother was told about his imminent arrival and destiny by his guru Lahiri Mahasaya.

I first knew your destined path when you were but a babe in my arms . . . Lahiri Mahasaya seated you on his lap, placing his hand on your forehead by way of spiritually baptizing you.
"Little mother, thy son will be a yogi. As a spiritual engine, he will carry many souls to God's kingdom"
My heart leaped with joy to find my secret prayer granted by the omniscient guru. Shortly before your birth, he had told me you would follow his path.[4]

More recently, the mother of Swami Niranjanananda has recorded similar experiences at his birth:

In the early morning of 14th February, 1960, a beautiful baby announced his arrival in this world. Swami Satyam

[4] Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 1st hard back ed., Yogoda Satsanga Society of India, Kolkata, India, 2001, pp. 17–18

was in Bombay at the time. That day he told Vishwaprem, 'The one I have been waiting for has finally arrived. Today we will receive a telegram of his birth.' On 20th March, Swami Satyam came to Nandgram. Taking the little boy in his lap and blessing him, he said:

The light of God has descended in the form of this child to illuminate the darkest corners of this earth. He has been born through a pure, divine sankalpa. He hasn't come merely to be your cuddly son. He has come to fulfil a grand purpose and mission. All of us owe him a debt of duty and responsibility. He will not like any fawning or over-attachment. We have to prepare him for the great task he has come to undertake, a task that will involve countless other souls.

He is an embodiment of divine light and he has come with the requisite ingredients. Water this young seed with the holy name of Rama and in the course of time, this precious flower will spread its divine fragrance throughout the world. Dharmashakti, you had asked for a name for the child, and so I say: He is 'Niranjan'.[5]

One would think that such a personality as Shankara would have an outstanding horoscope, and that the debate over the time of his birth would be possibly solved by reference to the stars. What information have we, and how can it be processed or interpreted? Kulkarni quotes both the *Shankara Digvijaya* and the *Brihat Shankara Vijaya* of Chitsukhacharya to establish the time of Shankara's birth:

It was the fifth day of the bright half of the month of Vaisakha in the year called Nandana. It was 2631st year of Yudhisthira Saka (era). It was a Sunday. He was born when the moon was in transit in the star Purnavasu and the time was about 12 noon. At the time of birth, the

[5] Swami Dharmashakti Saraswati, *Mere Aradhya*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 2011) p. 149

rising sign was in Cancer, the Sun was in Aries, the Moon and the Jupiter in Cancer and Saturn in Libra. Mars was in Capricorn and Venus in Pisces. The planets were there in exalted positions and some in their own houses.[6] (BSV 32:12–16; SVM 6:9–14)

On the basis of this information, Shankaracharya's horoscope includes the Sun and Mercury in the first house, Moon in the third, Jupiter in the fourth, Saturn in the seventh, Mars in the tenth, Venus in the twelfth. This means that every planet was exalted in his chart, and perhaps explains Shankara's name as the 'bestower of auspiciousness' – *Sham karoti iti Shankara*.

Childhood

Shankara's devotion and literary genius is reflected in his first composition. One day, Aryamba was unable to perform her daily worship of the goddess. So, although only a young child, Shankara performed the pooja. The story goes that his great devotion caused the goddess to appear and suckle him at her breast. In response, Shankara went into ecstasy and composed his first hymn, the *Devi Bhujanga Stava*, a prayer in praise of the devi which ends.

Iti premabhadrena kinchinmayoktam
na buddhvaivam tatvam tvadeeyam madeeyam
vinodaaya baalasya maurkhyam hi maatah
tadetat pralaapastutim me grihaana.

Oh Mother! I have praised you only from love. I know neither about your glory nor about my limited perception. Kindly accept this child's foolish and playful praise.

Shivaguru made his living as a priest and was head of a widely respected gurukul which his son attended. So

[6] S.D. Kulkarni, Adi Sankara: *The Saviour of Mankind*, Shri Bhagavan Vedavyasa Itihasa Samshodhana Mandira (Bhishma), Bombay, India, 1987, pp. 88–89

Shankara was able to soak up a lot of good techniques and attitudes like a sponge. Unfortunately, we will find that he soaked up a lot of other prevalent attitudes like a sponge too. This was inevitable. Even an avatara, though born with divine powers and awareness, has to undergo this process during incarnation:

> One of the difficulties encountered in Western perception of divinity is the mindset that one is either human or divine. If human he is made in man's image and subject to all the flaws inherent therein; if divine, he is made in God's image and must bear no hint of imperfection. But India's vedic wisdom, and especially Bhagavan Krishna's yogic science in the *Bhagavad Gita*, quite reconciles human attributes and divinity in those whose consciousness transcends the ordinary and realizes its oneness with God.[7]

During Shankara's childhood, along with all the wonderful teachings of the Vedas, he was exposed to the common attitudes of the society including denigration of women, shudras, and anyone outside the caste system. Like the air we breathe, attitudes are shared unconsciously yet permeate us to the most subtle levels. This sort of racial, sexual and social egoism is crippling for the development of *atmabhava*, true spiritual recognition of the divine nature in all beings, and so these attitudes had to be removed.

It is hard to remove attitudes, particularly those encountered in earliest childhood and prevalent throughout the culture that one is born into because one doesn't realize they are there – just as we don't realize air is there until we can't breathe. Then, Shankara's father died. By this simple act he released upon his wife and son the consequences of some of the cruellest attitudes engendered by the society of his time.

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[7] Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of Christ Within You: A revelatory commentary on the teachings of Jesus, Vol. 1*, 1st ed., Self-Realization Fellowship, Los Angeles, USA, 2004, reprinted 2007, p. 70

For example, once a woman's husband had died she became a widow, which in practical terms meant an unwanted outcaste. She was no longer one of the *saubhagya*, of good destiny, instead she was thought to be the instrument of bad luck and in some way responsible for the tragedy. As a little boy, Shankara would have observed this. He would have experienced not only his own grief, but his mother's and suffered under the injustices meted out to her by self-righteous arbiters of social convention, as would any child in such circumstances.

It means he had a childhood which allowed him to eventually break through the veil of illusion, to know that happiness due to sensory fulfilment is not enduring, is not the most real thing; to remember the Other. He had the same sort of childhood that Christ and Krishna had, where he was given cause to suffer but was able to rise above it.

Indications of greatness

Others in recent history have been recorded as having deep understanding at an early age; for example, Swami Vivekananda, disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa; Ramana Maharshi, whose guru was a mountain; and Swami Niranjanananda, disciple of Sri Swami Satyananda. This phenomenon of children born for spiritual life is recognized in many spiritual traditions as presented by such books as *The Chosen*, *The Promise* and *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, which show that the Judaic religion and Tibetan Buddhism had developed special modes of teaching children recognized as spiritually advanced, or who exhibited psychic development and have rare talents such as a photographic memory.

Despite the limitations of embodiment, that Shankara was a perfected siddha, born in an enlightened state, is illustrated by the beauty of the songs he spontaneously composed. Also, several biographical stories in the *Shankara Digvijaya* tell of outstanding qualities in the child Shankara. We will include a few here.

The old woman and the goddess

One day, when he was seven years old and a student brahmachari collecting alms, he visited a pious old woman, so poor she could only give a small gooseberry-like fruit, an *amalaka*, and the blessing, "May your self-knowledge shine like the amalaka in your palm." He was deeply moved by her devotion and as a result prayed to Lakshmi who, pleased by his worship, showered the old lady with golden amalaka. His spontaneous song at that time is known as the *Kanakadhara Stotram* with beautiful and intricate imagery which builds from verse to verse.[8]

This is the second of the devotional hymns, or *stotras*, traditionally attributed to him. It is an intense devotional appeal to Devi to manifest, and can be taken as an anecdote showing Shankara to be a realized siddha even as a child, and also, as with most things about him, interpreted as symbolic on different levels.

The king

The next story highlights Shankara at the age of eight. He had already mastered all the sciences taught in his father's gurukul, which traditionally amounted to sixty-four subjects, and had returned to his mother. King Rajasekhara heard of this extraordinary child and sent a minister, with presents and elephants to tempt the young lad, and instructions to bring him to the capital.

The *Shankara Digvijaya* makes Shankara's response so childlike yet so uniquely wise that it deserves remembrance and thought. It presents a fine role model, though one few in society would be courageous enough to follow:

> The boy gave a ready reply: "I am a Brahmacharin, wearing a dress of skin, living by alms, and engaged in the numerous observances that the Vedas have laid down for this station of life. A Brahmacharin should not leave

[8] See Appendix 1

his duties, lured by the luxury of riding on an elephant and the chances of being honoured at a king's court. It is, therefore, difficult for me to comply with this request. And I am sorry to have to send you back home, disappointed. It is the duty of the king to see that men of the four Varnas and the four Ashramas do their respective duties properly. Therefore do not come with a request that goes counter to this duty of kings."[9]

The king was so impressed by this answer that he came and prostrated before Shankara, asked for his comments on some dramas that he had written and gave the boy a kingly gift. Shankara praised the dramas and promised the king a boon. The king asked for a son. Shankara told him that his request would be fulfilled – but that he should give the gold and gifts that he had been presented with to the poor. Both stories establish Shankara's real stature in that, even as a child, he was able to appreciate the nuances of a situation in a wide perspective and was dedicated to the welfare of others.

The crocodile

In order to achieve his mission, Shankara needed to take sannyasa and renounce the sensory world for the life of the spirit, but his widowed mother naturally did not want to let her only child go. One story is that Lord Shiva took the form of a crocodile and snaggled Shankara one day while bathing. He was dragging the boy to his death in front of his distraught mother when Shankara cried out, asking her to give permission for him to take sannyasa as this was his life's wish. Again the story can be taken to have symbolic meanings, for example, the crocodile, which inhabits the watery realm of swadhisthana chakra, represents attachment to worldly life – when that danger is passed, sannyasa dawns.

[9] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, p. 41

Shankara promised his mother he would return when she was dying to ensure her correct transport into the afterlife, even though this breaks the traditional rules of conduct of a sannyasi. Kulkarni says the following verses appear in the *Vyasachaliya Shankara Vijaya* as well as the *Shankara Digvijaya* of Madhava-Vidaranya (5:71, 72):

Aaryaamba raatrisamaye samayaantare vaa
Sanchintya svavashagaa avashagaathavaa maam
Esyaami tatsamayam sakalam vihaaya
Vihsvaasamaapnuhi mrtaapi samskarishye.

O my beloved Mother! Let it be night or day – if you remember me, consciously or otherwise, I shall appear very immediately, without delay, keeping aside all my priorities. I assure you that, if you give up the mortal body, I shall definitely perform the final ceremonies for you.

Samnastavaan shishurayam vidhavaamanantaam
Kshiptveti maam prati kadaapi na chintaneeyam
Yaavanmayaa sthitavataa phalamaapaneeyam
Maatastatah shatagunam phalamaapayishye.

My dear Mother! Do not think, even for a moment, that your child has left you in a miserable state by taking sannyasa. I shall be able to accomplish (things) a hundred times better as a sannyasin than by remaining with you, as your child.

Aryamba reluctantly gave her permission for Shankara to leave for sannyasa, according to all the Digvijayas. Madhava-Vidyaranya records Shankara as saying:

Why are you so sorry in anticipation of the future? The conditions of life in this Samsara are well known to you. As that of a silken flag tossed and torn by strong winds, is the condition of the extremely fickle life of man . . . How many children have we looked after, how many wives and husbands have we married, in the course of our repeated births and deaths? Those who live the life of the world will

not have one iota of happiness. So what I desire is to take to the fourth stage of life, that of the Sannyasin, in order to liberate myself from this repeating desire of Samsara.[10]

Centuries later, Ramana Maharshi addressed his mother in similar terms when she tried to persuade him to return home from his spiritual journey:

> Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try as you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent.[11]

The river

Our final story, as the young boy sets out on his search for his guru, shows Shankara's mastery of the elements. Many temples regard Shankara as their founder, or record that he personally restored them or inspired their rituals in some way. This penchant for temples is seen as another characteristic of the child Shankara.

Love of his mother persuaded him to change the course of the river Purna (also called Curna) before he left home so that it flowed near her house and gave her an easy source of pure water. However, this weakened the walls of a temple dedicated to Lord Krishna. Before leaving in search of his guru, he rebuilt the temple and rededicated it with the hymn *Achyutastaka*, the eight-versed hymn to *Achyuta*, the Immovable, another name for Lord Krishna.

Achyutam keshavam raamanaaraayanam
Krishna daamodaram vaasudevam harim
Shreedharam maadhavam gopikaa vallabham
Jaanakinaayakam raamachandram bhaje

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[10] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, p. 43

[11] Arthur Osborne, *Ramana Maharshi & The Path of Self Knowledge*, Sri Ramanashramam, Tiruvannamalai, India, 2010, p. 42

I salute Lord Achyuta, who is known as Keshava, Narayana Krishna Damodara, Vasudeva, Hari, Shridhara, Madhava, and the Lord of the Gopikas and also Ramachandra, the Lord of Janaki.

This is a most beautiful and popular bhajan sung today with a beautiful tune – who knows if it is the original?

The next important phase of Shankara's life that all the texts agree on is his search for his guru. He had obtained permission for sannyasa from his mother because, although a siddha by birth, he still needed the formal initiation and training that could be given only by an enlightened master. After travelling for many miles alone and with other aspirants, he came to the sacred river Narmada and finally approached Govindapada, the learned disciple of the master of Vedanta, Gaudapada, and asked to be accepted as a disciple.

6

Guru and Mission

Patanjali, the author of both the *Mahabhashya*, the great commentary on Panini's sutras on Sanskrit grammar, and of the *Yoga Sutras* on raja yoga, and Shuka, the son of Vedavyasa who wrote the *Brahma Sutras*, were both the gurus of Gaudapadacharya. Gaudapadacharya wrote the *Mandukya Karika*, the famous vedantic commentary on the *Mandukya Upanishad*, which is why it is also known as the *Gaudapada Karika*. Gaudapadacharya's disciple, Govindapada (who Kulkarni claims was previously the adventurous Chandra Sharma of Kashmir), became the guru of Adi Shankaracharya.

This lineage of gurus gleaned from the Digvijayas and the sannyasa tradition employs an unhistorical use of time but explains the transmission of teachings in which Shankara was an acknowledged adept. It explains the foundation of Shankara's exquisite Sanskrit and insights into the *Brahma Sutras*. It would also explain his intimate knowledge of Buddhism, tantra and yoga. Darling[1] traces similarities between the *Gaudapada Karikas*, Mahayana Buddhists and vedantic Vijnanavada and hence we can understand that the 'crypto-Buddhism' of Shankara was part of his inheritance from his *guru parampara*, his line of gurus.

[1] Gregory J. Darling, *An Evaluation of the Vedantic Critique of Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, India, 1987

It was Shankara's ardent wish to find Gaudapada's enlightened disciple, Govinda Bhagavatpada, said to be an incarnation of Adishesha, and to be accepted as his disciple. Shankara was about ten years old when he left home in search of his guru. He travelled over 1,500 km to the site of the sacred Shivalingam at Omkareshwara on the banks of the Narmada, and the ashram of Govinda Bhagavatpada.

The meeting

Tradition says that the sublime moment when Shankara met his guru is commemorated in a hymn that he composed and sang spontaneously during that meeting. In that hymn he recognizes Patanjali the grammarian and Patanjali the author of the *Yoga Sutras* to be one and the same person. This is the traditional view accepted by many sannyasins. Although criticized as unhistorical by many modern scholars, it indicates respect for the teachings in the *Yoga Sutras* would be integral to Shankara's training. It also indicates that young Shankara would have studied its techniques with his guru. This should be kept in mind when we consider the authenticity of the commentary on the *Yoga Sutras* attributed to Shankara.

There is a whole collection of ecstatic hymns and stories that relate to Shankara's meeting with his guru, including *Swatma Nirupama*, in which he prays for discipleship, *Atma Panchakma*, five verses about the soul, and *Dasha Sloki*, containing insights on *Advaita*, non-dualism. It was a meeting charged with emotion. At first, the young mendicant was not allowed to meet the guru as his other disciples said it would disturb his meditations. Hearing the commotion, Govindapada called out, "Who are you?" and in reply, Shankara spontaneously composed the *Nirvana Ashtakam*, also called the *Atma Ashtakam*[2], which begins:

Mano-buddhyahankaara-chittaani naaham
Na cha shtotrajihve na cha ghraananetre

[2] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Siddha Stotra Mala*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2009 (first pub 2004), p. 248

Na cha vyoma bhoomir tejo na vaayuh
Chidaanandaroopah shivoham shivoham.

I am not mind, intellect ego or memory
I am not ears, tongue, nose or the eyes.
I am not sky, earth fire or wind.
I am Shiva in the form of consciousness and bliss.

The wise disciple

The hymn confirms Shankara's enlightened state of consciousness even before meeting his guru. Actually, the profound insights of these beautiful verses have led many to regard these short works as teaching texts, *upadesha grantha*, but really they are the motiveless expression of bliss. They would have convinced Govindapada that this young boy was indeed ready to take sannyasa, despite the traditional rules of the ashramas, which advocate that one must experience all the different stages of life rather than taking sannyasa before one is fully mature.

The *Paramahamsa Parivrajaka Upanishad* is categorized as one of the Sannyasa Upanishads. It defends the spirituality of ascetics who do not wear the sacred thread or tuft, yet who are brahmins by nature. It also makes a clear reference to people who do not need to experience all the four ashramas in this life in order to prepare for sannyasa. Maybe it was written after Shankara embodied the success of such provisions. It is the 66th amongst the 108 Upanishads and is part of the *Atharva Veda*.

The seeker (Brahma) asks:
"Who is authorized to become a wandering mendicant? What are the attributes of a parivrajaka? Who is a Paramahamsa?"
The guru (Adi Narayana) replies:
"After acquiring all the knowledge by intense effort from the true guru, the learned (disciple), treating all the worldly and higher pleasures as illusion, and treating the

three desires (for wealth, children and fame) and three vasanas (possessiveness, egotism, etc.) as being worth discarding, and after completing brahmacharya ashram, which is a means on the path of liberation, should become a householder. After being a householder he should be a vanaprasthi (one who lives in the jungle), and after that a parivrajaka.

He may become a parivrajaka directly from brahmacharya, or from the householder stage, or from vanaprastha."[3]

Stages of sannyasa

In the tradition of sannyasa there are six stages:[4]

1. The *kutichaka* lives in a kutir, works hard, and learns yama and niyama, mantra and meditation from the guru for a traditional period of twelve years. This can also correspond to the gurukul period in brahmacharya ashrama.
2. The *bahudaka* who begins to move among many people; as a *parivrajaka*, a wandering ascetic, visiting places of pilgrimage, practising the disciplines and skills learned from the guru and spreading the teaching. This can also correspond to the pilgrimages of the vanaprastha ashram.
3. The *hamsa* is described variously as renouncing social conventions, living alone and being constantly occupied in contemplation of Brahman, and as one who settles to teach and uplift the spiritual consciousness of those caught by the illusory world.
4. The *paramahamsa* renounces all achievements and remains focused on reality in constant samadhi.
5. The *turiyatita* who is beyond the three gunas that constitute this phenomenal universe.
6. The *avadhuta* who is beyond all conditioning and is simply sky-clad.

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[3] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Sannyasa Darshan: A Treatise on Traditional & Contemporary Sannyasa*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 1993), pp. 432–434

[4] *ibid.* Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Sannyasa Darshan*, pp. 38–42

The qualification by which the different states of sannyasa are attained are simply described in the *Paramahamsa-parivrajaka Upanishad*:

> All the time treating loss and gain as equal he should eat food using his hands as a vessel, by begging in such a manner that it should not increase (his) fat, (rather he) should become thin. Meditating on 'Aham Brahmasmi', firm in character, he should go to villages in the interest of his guru, not with anyone (alone), travelling for eight months.
>
> When the intellect becomes sufficient, then the kutichaka or bahudaka or hamsa or paramahamsa, by the above quoted mantra, abandons his waist thread, loin cloth, staff, water-pot, everything, in water and moves in the form in which he was born.[5]

The attainment of *siddhi*, perfection or psychic powers, is recognized as a necessary or unavoidable outcome of following the spiritual path. A character which guarantees the correct (selfless) use of these siddhis is therefore regarded by the guru as a necessary prerequisite for further learning. Cleansing the psyche of obsessions and conditionings, imbibing self-restraint, vairagya and viveka as part of one's character takes time. The teachings given by Sri Govindapada show that Shankara had passed his scrutiny and mastered the correct conduct and correct understanding. Instead of the traditional twelve years as a kutichaka, Shankara only stayed with his guru Govindapada for one year. However, the teachings given by Sri Govindapada show that Shankara had passed his scrutiny and mastered the correct conduct and correct understanding considered necessary in a student of Brahma Vidya.

> Highly pleased with the disciple's service, the sage imparted to him the knowledge of Brahman through the four Maha-Vakyas (great Vedic sentences) Prajnaanam Brahma

[5] *ibid.* Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Sannyasa Darshan*, p. 439

(Brahman is pure Consciousness); Aham Brahmaasmi (I am Brahman); Tat-twam-asi (Thou art That); Ayamaatmaa Brahma (This Atman is Brahman). He was then taught the Vedanta Sutras of Vyasa, and through them the innermost essence of the Vedanta philosophy. [6]

In that one year Shankara mastered the *maha vakya*, the four famous 'great sayings' that catapult one into deep meditation, and all the *darshanas*, philosophies. During this period he is also thought to have written:[7]

1. *Pratah Smarana*: first morning prayers.
2. *Sadhana Panchakam*: a five-versed hymn equipping one for a better life.
3. *Yati Panchakam*: five verses on the duties of a sannyasin.
4. *Viveka Chudamani*: a balanced judgement on the system of Vedanta in the form of a dialogue between guru and disciple.
5. *Narmada Ashtakam*: eight verses in praise of the river Narmada when it flooded and threatened the cave of his guru.

Attitude

That Shankara had the powers and the correct spiritual attitude is shown by the incident when the sacred river Narmada (Rewa) flooded, and began to cover the villages nearby. The *Shankara Digvijaya* describes him using a powerful mantra which stops the flood, thus protecting the villagers and his own guru who was oblivious to the situation, absorbed in samadhi. In fact, Govindapada only heard about the 'miracle' from the reports of other people. After this Govindapada started his disciple on the next phase of his training and mission.

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[6] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, p. 48

[7] S.D. Kulkarni, *Adi Sankara: The Saviour of Mankind*, Shri Bhagavan Vedavyasa Itihasa Samshodhana Mandira (Bhishma), Bombay, India, 1987, p. 116

The incident showed that Shankara had attained yogic siddhis, but the important thing here is the attitude with which Shankara performed this feat. It was not done to convince people of his greatness or to bend the elements to his will, but arose out of his love for his guru, the river, and compassion for the people. This can be seen from just a couple of the eight verses of *Narmada Ashtakam*, which he spontaneously composed at that time in praise of the river:

Mahaagabheeraneerapoora-paapadhootabhootalam
Dhavanat samasta-paapa-kaari daaritaapaadachalam
Jagallaye mahaabhaye mrikandusoonu-harmyade
Tvadeeya paadapankajam namaami devi narmade.

Your mighty flow, with a thundering sound, washes away the entire sins and difficulties of the Earth – which appear like a mountain. When fear happens in the mind due to total destruction in the world, O Pleasure Giver to the son of the sage Mrikandu, I bow down at your lotus feet, Devi Narmada.

Gatam tadeva me bhayam tvadambu vikshitam yadaa
Mrikandusoonu saunaka-surari- sevitam sadaa
Punarbhavaabdhi janmajam bhavaabdhi dukha varmade
Tvadeeya paada pankajam namaami devi narmade

On seeing your flow of water, my fear is gone. You are worshipped by many, like (Markandeya) the son of Sage Mrikandu, Sage Saunaka, Lord Indra, etc. The fear of birth and death (again and again) in my mind, is fully reduced. I bow at your lotus feet, Devi Narmada.

Mission

According to the *Shankara Digvijaya*, Govindapada interpreted this incident as confirmation of Shankara's destiny. He then proceeded to explain to Shankara that at a yajna, Vyasa himself had manifested and promised Govindapada a disciple who would miraculously confine the waters of the flooding

river Rewa, and be capable of writing a commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*, interpreting the teachings in a way beneficial to the times. After a few days, therefore, the guru sent his disciple out on his mission to the world. First he was to go to Varanasi and start preaching and writing about Advaita Vedanta.

This is reminiscent of legends commemorating spiritual masters around the world – their arrival is announced beforehand. In India and other eastern countries this is recorded up to the present day, for example, Babaji, a legendary figure in India who has appeared across the centuries to direct the propagation of self-knowledge, appeared to Paramahamsa Yogananda's guru, Sri Yukteswar, with prophesies of his world mission, and instructions regarding his life and training. Paramahamsa Ramakrishna appeared to Sarada Devi with instructions regarding disiples who would shelter with her after his departure.[8]

> When I saw the Master dissolve into the Ganga on that full moon night, I resolved to keep alive. Master's words at once came back to me: 'You cannot die, you have to live; after all, I have taken care of so few of them. Many more will come to you, you shall have to take charge of them.'

Similarly, Swami Satyananda not only prophesied the coming of his disciple, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, but also performed special sadhana to ensure the birth of a great soul, instructing his parents that the child would be his. At the age of four, the young Niranjan began to insist that he was going to live in the ashram of his guru, packing his bag and going to the railway station for the journey. He finally achieved that aim at the age of six. He was initiated into the sannyasa parampara at the age of ten. Like Shankara, he began the life of a parivrajaka sannyasin at the age of eleven, when he was sent overseas to propagate yoga.

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[8] Swami Purnatmananda, (compiled & ed.) *Reminiscences of Sri Sarada Devi, Holy Mother* by Ashutosh Mishra, Advaita Ashram, Kolkata, India, 2004, pp. 157 ff.

Varanasi

History recounts that Shankara, already a yogic siddha and equipped with the teachings of Gaudapadacharya and Govindapadacharya, was sent out to travel, learn the problems of the world, and discover the solutions. Govindapada, called him and sent him out on his Mission to the world as follows:

> . . . you have now got to move to Varanasi, the city of Siva. There you are to clarify the essential spiritual truths revealed by the Vedas through your writings and preachings, which will act like a shower of rain on the forest fire of worldliness raging in the minds of men. [9]

However scholars may wish to define him, whoever Adi Shankaracharya was, and however many of him contributed to the legendary persona, he was definitely of the line of Gaudapada and his disciple Govinda Bhagavatpada.

Vidyaranya's *Shankara Digvijaya* (canto 6) starts with Shankara initiating the first of his own sannyasa disciples, a learned brahmin and renunciate, as Sanandana. This disciple addresses Shankara as Sadashiva, who is known in the Vedas as the physician who can cure one from the disease of life in samsara. Sanandana prays:

> May my mind, O Great Teacher, be ever inclined to do service unto thee, which promotes one's good here and hereafter, which destroys all worries and dangers in life, which is the fruit of one's many good deeds in the past, which prompts one to devote oneself to the uplift of the suffering, and which gives one relief from the baneful life of Samsara. Thou art the incarnation of that Sadasiva, praised in the Vedas as the best of physicians. Therefore, I, who am suffering from the ailment of Samsara, approach thee for treatment and relief. [10]

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[9] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, p. 55–56

[10] *ibid.* Madhava-Vidyaranya, *Sankara Digvijaya*, p. 58

Still learning

That Shankara, although born enlightened, was fallible as a person and was still engaged in the process of learning and maturing, is a crucial discovery in this study of his life. It is also central to the understanding of why and how the Dashnami tradition that he founded so long ago is still a vibrant and relevant force in the world today. The sannyasins are trained to maintain a broad, balanced perspective on life, and to maintain the ability to change, adjust and adapt. Rather than withdrawing from life, they are encouraged to practise *nishkama karma yoga*, selfless service, as Shankara did, striving to guide people struggling to live correctly and to adapt their concepts to an expanding world vision.

So far the young Shankara has been shown dealing with high-born people and saints, but the meeting with the *chandala*, the outcaste hunter, in Varanasi shows that he still had some immaturity of outlook and needed to learn how to apply his realizations. We can be fairly certain that this meeting must have occurred because it is recorded in many of his biographies, even by those groups that most disagree with the teachings it presents. Shankara and his party of high-caste disciples met the outcaste hunter and his pack of dogs in the narrow backstreets of Varanasi. The story is given in detail in the *Shankara Digvijaya*, and deserves to be recounted because it was here that Shankara had an obstacle to his vision removed.[11]

In brief, the disciples ordered the chandala to move away so his presence did not pollute the environment for their guru. He responded by speaking directly to Shankara and asking how one who was teaching about the non-dual Brahman throughout Varanasi could allow such differentiation between an outcaste and a brahmin in the conduct of his daily life. How could the witnessing consciousness identify with the body and social roles in such a manner? He spoke so lucidly that Shankara, astonished,

[11] *ibid*. Madhava-Vidyaranya, *Sankara Digvijaya*, p. 59, sl. 32–33

hailed him as a man of wisdom rather than an outcaste, and also one established in the truth of non-difference. The *Shankara Digvijaya* records that Shankara found him worthy of worship – and these sentiments are echoed in the hymn *Manisha Panchakam* that Shankara spontaneously composed at that time.[12]

After this, according to the *Shankara Digvijaya*, the outcaste and his four dogs disappeared and in their place Lord Shiva manifested accompanied by the four Vedas. Of course, this sort of explanation is convenient for those wishing to keep caste distinctions intact – an actual outcaste could not have such insights according to hard-line-touchables, but Shankara's intention was to open his philosophy to all castes, even the shudras, and the untouchables.

We should note how all the recorded incidents are highly symbolic, but this does not mean that they were not literally true also. As we look at own lives, we see more and more how apparently random events are significant signposts, symbols or blessings. The skill lies in being aware of this in the present moment rather than only appreciating it with the benefit of hindsight. After Shankara met the chandala, a veil lifted. We can see his realization expressed in the hymn *Manisha Panchakam* in which he speaks of an experience beyond all life forms, beyond humanity, beyond all realms.

Yaa tiryang naradevataabhirahamityantah sputaa grihayate
Yad bhaasaa hridayaakshadehavishayaa bhaanti
svato'chetanaah
Taam bhaasyam pihitaarka mandalanibhaam sphoortim
sadaa bhaavayan
Yogee nirvritamaanaso hi gururityeshaa maneeshaa mama.

That which makes animals, humans and gods feel that 'I exist', by whose power the parts of the body like the heart, eyes, etc., get energy and shine (though they are also inert),

[12] see Chapter 13

That who, by being the indweller of sun, moon and stars, illumines them – that yogi who well understands this as Atma, has surpassed the mind – and he is my Guru. This is my understanding.

Three commissions

It was only after this significant breakthrough that Shankara was commissioned by Lord Shiva directly. His mission was revealed as having three aims. The first was clearing apparent contradictions in the scriptures and explaining their meaning. It included writing the commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras* of Vyasa, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the major Upanishads. The second entailed travelling on foot throughout India, meeting the leaders of different schools of thought around the country in order to debate on different issues, establishing the correct interpretations of the teachings and facilitating correct understanding. The third commission related to training disciples and institutions to further spread and protect the knowledge of the Vedas.[13]

This meeting with Lord Shiva can be understood as a transcendental experience. Why complain that this is unhistorical when it should be interpreted as a visionary or meditative experience? The vividness of Shankara's inner experience is conveyed by a hymn in praise of Lord Shankara called *Dakshinamurti*, meaning 'the one who looks southward from Kailasha', part of which is translated in Chapter 13.

Journey to Badrinath

The *Shankara Digijvaya* reports that Shankara then left Varanasi for a long, difficult journey through the Himalayas to Badrinath. There, at the age of twelve, he completed his commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the major Upanishads and various other works such as the

[13] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, pp. 61–62

Sanatsujatiya, *Nrisimahatapani Upanishad*, *Vishnu Sahasranam* and *Upadesha Sahasri*. Maybe it is from this time that the math in Badrinath was first connected with Shankara.

Having established his own teachings in the commentaries and upadesha granthas, Shankara began to teach his disciples. At this time the *Shankara Digvijaya* again specifically mentions the disciple Sanandana who was devoted to his guru and to study, and was being taught through Shankara's commentaries. This caused some jealousy among the other disciples so Shankara went to the other side of the river and called Sanandana to come to him. His disciple ran across the water in his eagerness to obey and was renamed Padmapada (meaning 'lotus-foot'). This may not be believed, but various traditions have enlightened beings walking on water.

The Dashnami verbal tradition states that guru and disciple meet life after life. As study into Shankara's life and attainments progresses, it seems probable that Shankara was being reborn again and again to continue his commission. Not only that, it seems possible that this particular legend refers also to Shankara teaching disciples further truths again and again as they continue to work on this same mission. So we may be meeting Shankara's major disciples with different names at different periods of history.

Today such theories are becoming acceptable in the West due to research carried out by respected scholars such as Prof Ian Stevenson[14], who headed the Department of Psychology in the University of Virginia. He interviewed hundreds of children between the ages of three and eight years who were convinced that they remembered previous lives, and had been able to convince their current and 'previous' families too by recalling objects, situations, shared intimate experiences, etc. Many of his studies are impressive because the 'next birth' had happened quite quickly, and it was possible to go to the

[14] Ian Stevenson M. D., *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*, Praeger, Westport, USA, 1997

former birthplace and meet people the child remembered from before. The rapid rebirth helped Prof Stevenson's research, as he found that they could recognize places and remember relationships with people related to their previous lives when taken to their previous 'home'. The traditional teaching, however, explains that adepts able to 'consciously' participate in the choice of the next birth are by nature very discriminating, and do not take rebirth hastily.

Prof Stevenson found the children often carried with them illnesses and attitudes which marked their previous lives. Some even had birthmarks marking bullet holes, etc., which caused their previous death. This is in line with the beliefs in many countries and civilizations of the world, and with Shankara's culture, which accepts as a matter of fact that one carries one's karma and experiences from life to life. Siddhas and yogis are also reborn with memories and powers associated with their previous levels of attainment.

Rishi Vedavyasa

It was still as a young boy that Shankara journeyed to Badri, wrote his great works and attracted disciples. He was honoured by all as a great luminary until one day an old man arrived and engaged him in learned debate on the scriptures for eight long days. Eventually the old man revealed himself as Vedavyasa, the legendary author and compiler of the scriptures, whereupon Shankara's humility becomes striking. Historically this meeting is not possible, so again we can interpret it as happening on a psychic-meditative plane rather than material-historical. Or we can say it is an account of happenings in different bardos or *lokas*, for these are primarily dimensions of consciousness.

Vedavyasa whole heartedly congratulated Shankara on his writings, and especially the commentary on his *Brahma Sutras*, and gave him another sixteen years of life in which to protect and firmly establish the sanatana dharma. So when Shankara had completed the first part of the mission given to him by his gurus, he was 'reborn' for a new commission.

To understand what is going on, is it possible for us now to accept that the concepts of avatara, reincarnation and multiverses (rather than the one manifest universe) comprise the matrix of Shankara's story? Can we see here the same auspicious spirit being referred to in different historical periods, consistently engaged in the same basic endeavour of uplifting human consciousness?

7

A New Life

Shankara was initially to have lived only sixteen years according to the contract made between the gods and his father before he was actually conceived. We may view this as mythological; however, it becomes clear that the young Shankara knew of the limited tenure of his life on earth and was completely reconciled with that. We can gather this from the remarks and attitude towards the brevity of life reflected in so many of his songs and commentaries.

> One of the important and unusual characteristics in the lives of all divine incarnations is that they are not only fully conscious of their mission but they are also perfectly satisfied and peaceful. Being aware of the goal of life, they go directly to it without faltering. They reveal joy and bliss in their lives. A survey of their lives shows that their joy knows no bounds. The attraction that the average man and woman feels toward them is due to the joyous atmosphere in them.[1]

The *Shankara Digvijaya* reports that Shankara had, as it were, two lifespans; it is a well-known and integral part of the traditional story of Shankaracharya, but how does

[1] Swami Akhilananda, *Hindu View of Christ*, Philosophical Library, New York, USA, 1949, p. 20

the tradition allocate his achievements during these two distinct lifespans? According to the *Shankara Digvijaya*, during his first lifetime the sixteen-year-old Shankara wrote the commentaries and became the philosophical lord of Varanasi.

His first lifespan comprised his early spiritual experiences and training, the composition of his earlier devotional hymns and other works. He was sent out from his guru's ashram, successfully debated with the pandits of Varanasi in order to establish his teachings, then travelled to Badrinath to complete his major philosophical writings: his early commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras*, *Bhagavad Gita* and the ten major Upanishads. Thus he completed the first commission that he had received from his gurus and from Lord Shiva, the higher Self.

Somehow, he then got out of the linear historical timeframe and met his guru and paramguru, Govindapada and Gaudapadacharya. They praised his work but conducted him to meet Vedavyasa in another (Himalayan) loka. Canto 7 speaks of this meeting. Vyasa praised Shankara's commentaries and announced that now, satisfied that people would be guided as to the true meaning of his works, he was preparing himself to depart from this world. Shankara responded by explaining he was also going to leave his body now, because he had finished his work: written the commentaries and refuted misguided doctrines through debate – and the sixteen years that had been allotted to him had expired.

Vyasa thought about this and then remarked that actually Shankara's task was not complete. Although he had cleared the way in Varanasi itself, throughout India there were still many dissident doctrines. He decided, unasked, to give Shankara the boon of a further sixteen years of life to fully establish the renaissance he had begun.

> At this Shankara said: "I have already written the commentaries, expounded them, and also refuted all

hostile doctrines. What else have I got to do? Nothing more. I have come to the end of the sixteen years' span of my life, and so shall presently give up this physical body of mine . . . Please tarry a while at Manikarnika and witness it." Hearing this, the sage Vyasa thought for a moment and said: "No, you should not end your life now. There are many more learned men, leaders of hostile schools of thought, whom you have not yet defeated in debate. Your life has to be prolonged for some years more, so that you may triumph over them also. Otherwise, the orphaned infant of aspiration for spiritual freedom, that has taken birth from you for the good of mankind, will perish prematurely with no parent to take care of it. The intensity of joy that I experience by reading your very lucid and profound writing based upon your intuition of the atma, prompts me to give you a boon. The Creator had given you only eight years of life. The satisfaction you gave to Agastya and other sages by your learning won for you an extension of your life's span by eight years more. May you live for another sixteen years by the blessings of God Shiva!" (51–58)[2]

When we are discussing whether there were two or more historical Shankaracharyas who over time coalesced into one, or whether there was in fact only one, whose name has occasionally been applied to the acts and works of others, Vyasa's reference to three distinct lifespans becomes very interesting.

Another span of life

In his second span of life, it seems that Shankara used his early work and studies as a philosophical basis from which he undertook his next two commissions. He engaged himself first in the dynamic task of debating with leaders of rival

[2] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, pp. 74–75

philosophies, moving around the country in a triumphal tour, a *digvijaya*, and simultaneously training his own disciples, so as to engage them in the next stage of work. His enlarged task was not only to spread the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, but to establish it. So in his new lifespan he established the *Alakhabaras*, the invisible boundaries, remote, hidden places where knowledgeable people could retreat and preserve the wisdom of the teachings when they were threatened. The Akharas developed later to protect them from social upheavals.

The Kapalikas, Bhairavas, Tantrics, Shaktas, Buddhists and Jainas are all mentioned as influencing the general population. Sannyasins were many but disorganized and often without a coherent philosophy. Shankara's guru asked him to use the extension of his life to reconcile the opposing doctrines and practices so as to guide the laypeople and to meld the different sects of sannyasins into a single organized whole. So later he established the Dashnami tradition and the maths, founding the network of institutions that preserved sannyasa and its traditions through centuries of political and cultural upheaval, and which ensure that Advaita Vedanta remains the philosophy of Dashnami sannyasins even today.

In his early journey from Varanasi to Badrinath, Shankara passed through various kingdoms observing the state of the people. Maybe the flavour was rather militant, for he was moved to take action in order to defuse the tension between different sects. He discovered the statue of Narayana in the river Alaknanda and reinstalled it in the temple at Badrinath. In a bold move, he appointed a Namboodiri brahmin from Kerala to conduct the regular worship there – and this tradition still persists today.

The underlying tension between followers of Shiva and followers of Vishnu is often underestimated by western scholars, but it is clear Shankara was dealing with a centuries old divide, a very real problem of the time. The resultant clashes between devotional Vaishnavite

and Shaivite movements were not only prevalent during Shankara's time. Although Shankara worked to mitigate the situation, according to Swami Satyananda Saraswati, they continued until Tulsidas addressed this issue in his *Ramacharitamanas*:

> The animosity between the Vaishnava and the Shaiva sects was so acute that in spite of Adi Shankaracharya's reforms assigning a Shaiva priest in the temple of Sri Narayana, the differences were not settled. The intellectuals and the common people were still fiercely divided over the Shaiva-Vaishnava factions. Tulsidas found a way to end the differences and integrate the people into a cultural unity. He made Sri Rama and Shiva each other's devotees and ishta devatas. This artifice trickled right down to the grassroots and the masses accepted the ensuing harmony. Today we see the fruit of this, Sri Rama is worshipped in a Shiva temple and Lord Shiva is worshipped in Sri Rama's temple.[3]

So, Shankara began his reforms, gradually re-establishing the ancient traditions that served a particular region well. Adjusting the modes of worship, making reforms and establishing new teachings where necessary, he travelled continuously, visiting temples throughout the land, so that many places have their own legends of Shankara's visit and often his innovations are still being maintained.

> As a true Vedantin, he lived the simple life of a devotee of the Lord. Thus, whenever he passed through a sacred place, he would invariably make it a point to visit the important temples there . . . there is hardly a temple worth its name in the country which has no legend of a visit by Adi Shankara attached to its history, the reforms

[3] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Bhakti Yoga Sagar*, *Vol. 4*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2007 (first pub 1999), p. 240

that he brought about, or the hymns that he composed to its deity during his visit. Crowds of devotees and admirers thronged to him.[4]

The practice of giving satsangs to the local people and refurbishing the temples and their procedures began when he first started travelling and lasted throughout his life. This gave him authority, the trust of the laypeople and respect amongst the initiated, and this was needed for his major reforms to work. Kulkarni's description brings Shankara's early journeys to life. Shankara left the abode of his guru and, as a parivrajaka sannyasin, travelled with his friend Vishnu Sharma, who later became his disciple Sukhacharya. During his journeys across the extensive forests and rivers and villages of India, Shankara composed the *Shata Sloki*, a book of one hundred verses. Each night he would stay in a new village, compose one verse, and would teach it there after begging for alms:

> There is a graphic description in *Patanjali Vijaya* of the mood in which Shankara would move from place to place. The verse runs thus:
>
> *Gacchan vanani saritah nagarani sailan*
> *graman passun ca janan pathi sah api pasyam*
> *nanu aindrajalikam iva adbhutam aindrajalam*
> *brahma evam eva paridarsayati iti mene*
>
> 'He was going through the forests, crossing the rivers and seeing the cities, mountains, villages, animals and meeting different types of people on the way. He used to feel that all this is a variegated show or a piece of jugglery presented by a deft juggler. This juggler is Brahman.'[5]

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[4] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara the Missionary*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, India, 1978, p. 37

[5] S.D. Kulkarni, *Adi Sankara: The Saviour of Mankind*, Shri Bhagavan Vedavyasa Itihasa Samshodhana Mandira (Bhishma), Bombay, India, 1987, p. 123

Later, Shankara was able to travel and debate extensively, for he had the patronage of kings and, after a while, the protection not only of their armies, but also of devoted disciples. During these extended travels he re-established and established many of the temples and maths which still claim him as their founder. Later, four or five spiritual centres gained ascendancy due to the brilliance of their 'Shankaracharyas', which is the honorary title bestowed upon the head of a math of the Dashnami tradition.

Shankara had travelled extensively in the south while searching for his guru, had already lived in Kashi and visited Badrinath and spoken with the pandits there. Vyasa mentioned three distinct lifespans, and tradition says the Adi Shankara lived about two-and-a-half thousand years ago. It is difficult now to see clearly what happened then and what was set in motion. Did the *Adi*, original, Shankaracharya simply set up the Alakhbaras and establish his spiritual wisdom and authority at the Sarvajna Peeth?

Then perhaps it would be a necessary step to ascend to the Sarvajna Peeth in ensuing incarnations in order to re-establish his identity and authority within the tradition – just as the rimpoches of the Tibetan culture are sometimes gradually recognized as their former selves as they mature. Different traditions all have their own ways of recognizing the truly enlightened. Swami Chinmayananda remarks that while Shankara was in Kashmir, the pandits said that he must defeat the scholars at Sarada Peeth, otherwise they would not accord him the title of 'Sarvajna'.

> While resting there for a few days, the pundits of Kashmir came in a big representation to the Acharya and said that unless he defeated the learned patrons of the Sarada Peetha there, they would not accept the supremacy of his philosophy. The Sarada Peetha was renowned as the Sarvajna Peetha, the seat of the highest learning. The custom was to place the most learned man on this seat

and crown him as the sarvajna, i.e., he who is well versed in all branches of learning, both sacred and secular.[6]

By some such mechanism he could have been recognized as Shankaracharya, even several centuries later, when he returned to again preserve the vedic dharma in threatening times.

Earth mission: Advaita Vedanta and tantra

According to the *Shankara Digvijaya*, Ubhaya Bharati was an incarnation of the goddess Saraswati and part of the original earth-mission team. She knew Shankara's real identity and when he returned from his research into *kama*, desire and sexuality, and defeated her in debate with his newly-acquired knowledge, she asked his permission to give up her life. An extreme reaction?

Well, according to her original mission decided before birth, she was to conduct the debate between Shankara and her husband, Mandan Mishra. She had completed that assignment. Mandan had lost and so would now take sannyasa, and she would therefore be reduced to the status of a widow. So, although Shankara formally recognized her as an incarnation of Saraswati and asked her to bless the devotees of temples established in her honour, the official version is that she was given permission to ascend to Brahma loka. And the remark is made that this saved a lot of unpleasantness all round.

Shankara later installed her husband, newly named Sureshwaracharya, as the first Shankaracharya of Sringeri Math, also known as Sarada Math, 'Sarada' being another name of Saraswati. However, there is another historical tradition still prevalent that Ubhaya Bharati did not ascend to heaven at that time, but rather was initiated as a disciple by Shankara and installed by him as the head of a math,

[6] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara the Missionary,* Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, India, 1978, pp. 47–48

which required a high calibre of learning and wisdom from their head.

In both versions of the story, we again have reference to the miserable condition of women in the Indian society of that time if they found themselves unfortunate enough to end up as widows (because their husband actually died, or symbolically died as in sannyasa).

Shankara's awareness of the sufferings of women as widows developed in childhood by seeing the situation of his mother, and it is said that later he disciplined and punished people who had been exploiting her. He showed great loyalty to her by returning to be with her as she lay dying, even though he was belittled for it by contemporaries and down through the ages. He is shown to have dealt compassionately with women in chance meetings, as evinced in the *Kanakadhara Stotra*. However, his relative inexperience with women was ensured by a society which restricted them from participation in higher education, vedic rites, sannyasa, or even freedom of movement.

In the society of the time, most women had very little knowledge of the Veda or the Vedanga because of the system of education. As the male brahmins insisted upon vedic knowledge as a direct requirement for enlightenment, women were neither 'eligible' for moksha, nor thought competent to even speak about it.[7] So Shankara hesitated to accept Ubhaya Bharati's challenge to debate. As far as society was concerned, she was a woman and therefore not qualified to debate with him. Then, maybe because he understood the desperate fate which would await her as a widow, or maybe because he recognized who she really was, he agreed.

He won the debate, and would have pondered her fate, aware of the inferior status accorded to women in the society at that time. So if he did give her formal initiation into Brahma vidya, it was a bold and controversial move – and

[7] Arvind Sharma (ed.), 'Women in World Religions', K.K. Young, *Hinduism*, State University of New York Press, Albany, USA, 1987

one his contemporaries would not easily understand. He could only have taken such a step from a deep conviction that it was a necessary part of his mission.

When one considers the practical difficulties faced by the Buddhists in incorporating women into the spiritual tradition, and later the difficulties of the Brahmo Samaj in attempting to free widows from their social bondage, it can be argued that Shankara's failure to include women formally in the organization of the Dashnami tradition was not due to philosophical considerations. Practically speaking, it was a difficult undertaking to express the conviction that women were equally entitled to receive Brahma vidya. So what path could be opened for women?

Shankara and the tantrics

When Shankara went to Kashmir in the course of his travels, the king of Kashmir, King Sudhanvan (originally Lord Indra, king of the gods) gave Shankara VIP status and provided him with a security guard, not only in Kashmir but throughout his later travels. This was necessary because such a fiery and potent young teacher was on the hit list of leaders of sects that opposed him. The *Kapalikas*, from a particular tantric tradition that used human skulls, *kapala*, in their ritual worship, for example, were violently opposed to Shankara and had to be met with a show of force from king Sudhanvan's soldiers. Swami Chinmayananda reports that their leader was killed by his own favourite deity Bhairava, whom he had summoned to kill Shankara, during their psychic joust.[8]

The force of Shankara as a philosopher seems to have shaped people's impression of him to an extent greater than justified when we look at his great adventures travelling throughout India, developing his own learning and teaching. The *Shankara Digvijaya* (Canto 11:30–44), records the

[8] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara the Missionary*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, India, 1978, pp. 44–45

continuing conflict with the Kapalikas in a manner befitting the wilder passages of *Harry Potter*. Shankara encountered the fierce Kapalika leader, Krakacha, in a solitary spot. Krakacha wanted Shankara's head to use as an offering in order to advance his sadhana and Shankara, in a detached mood, agreed to help him. However, he solemnly warned that if his disciples heard of this they would try to prevent it.

Sure enough, the indefatigable Padmapada saw the ensuing meeting in his hridayakasha. Shankara, true to his word, bowed his head, withdrew his senses, entered nirvikalpa samadhi, and prepared to leave his body. The Kapalika approached with uplifted sword to chop off his head when, uttering the mantras invoking the man-lion, *Narasimha*, Padmapada arrived on the scene and tore the Kapalika apart![9]

Tantric involvement

Despite his bizarre experiences with the Kapalikas, Shankara began to be interested in tantra in the second part of his life. Definitely, Shankara was closely associated with Kanchi and tantric practitioners there. Shankara installed the yantra of Devi Kamakshi, and the king of that place built a temple around it. Swami Chinmayananda comments that the local people, who had thought this famous acharya to be just an intellectual, found to their delight that he was a siddha yogi.[10] There is no doubt that Shankara is honoured there as the founder of the math and its spiritual tradition.

Maybe the debate with Ubhaya Bharati was as significant as his collision with the chandala, for finally Shankara's path led him from the restrictive setting of orthodox Brahmanism to tantra. Anyway, he followed his convictions and these led him to a deep involvement in tantra and Sri Vidya upasana,

[9] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, pp. 132–133

[10] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara the Missionary*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, India, 1978, p. 44

where women are not excluded and caste is not a totally restrictive factor. Such an evolution beyond the society and even the spiritual milieu of his time made Shankara a jagat guru in more than name. And this is reflected in the tradition he founded.

Jagat guru

One cannot be a *jagat guru*, a world guru or universal guru embodying the light of eternal truth, and exclude more than half the human population from the path of spiritual evolution. This may be one of the reasons that Shankara, in his later life shifted towards tantra in lifestyle and philosophy, and promoted Sri Vidya.

We can see that this shift from Advaita Vedanta to tantra was a natural progression. Perhaps external events were catalysts for its expression, but Shankara's understanding that experience of different levels of reality is not dependent on rites, nor on distinctions of sex, caste, education, etc., is already clear in his Bhashya on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*:

> Moreover, the knowledge of Brahman as a means to immortality has been imparted to Maitreyi, who was without the means to perform rites. Also wealth has been deprecated. If rites were means to immortality, the derogatory remarks on wealth would be out of place, since on it rites with five factors depend. If, however, rites are desired to be shunned, then it is proper to decry the means to them. Besides (in the state of knowledge) there is an absence of consciousness about caste, order of life, etc., which are the qualifications for the performance of rites, as we see in the texts . . . When one ceases to consider oneself a Brahmana, a Kshatriya, or the like, there is certainly no room for such injunctions as that this is the duty of Brahmanas, or that this is the duty of Kshatriya, for there are no such persons. For a man who does not identify himself as a Brahmana, a Kshatriya, or the like,

> rites and their accessories, which are the effects of that consciousness, are automatically dropped because of the giving up of that consciousness.[11]

Shankara was not confused about the distinction between *sanatana dharma*, universal and eternal spiritual truths, and religious injunctions which enforce local and transitory social customs and values. Not only the founder of the Dashnami tradition but its gurus throughout the centuries, such as Swami Vivekananda and Swami Satyananda, are known to have freed themselves from social restrictions and philosophical retreat, adopting a universal vision of equality and a growing appreciation of bhakti as they matured.

Shankara is not considered to be limited by his Advaita philosophy; rather he is a master of all the arts and sciences of the Indian spiritual tradition. Sri Vidya and Advaita Vedanta are not opposed philosophically, although tantra challenges the concepts of purity and pollution which are important in brahminical traditions and Poorva Mimamsa. In the context of tantra, the initiation by the guru constitutes a new birth. At least an outcaste can become a *dvija*, a twice-born, during ritual, and maybe outside of that context too.[12] In tantra, women are accepted as qualified aspirants, and they can participate in and practise all the sadhanas and rituals. In Sri Vidya, traditionally, the initiating guru is also a woman.

It has been often thought that women's participation in tantra is limited to the panchamakara sadhana, but that is an erroneous perception. The *panchamakara sadhana*, where one practises the five 'M's: *maithuna*, *mudra*, *mamsa*, *matsya*, *madya*, has different levels of interpretation depending on the qualities of the aspirant. It can take external ritual form as well as internal meditative form. On one level this may

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[11] Swami Madhavananda (trans.), *The Brhadaranyaka Upanisad with the commentary of Shankaracarya*, 4th ed., Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, India, 1965, p. 243

[12] Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Srividya Sakta Tantrism in South India*, pp. 156–157

refer to correct use of sexual union, grains, meat, fish and wine, respectively. On another level it can refer to the union of atma and paramatma (or the awakening of kundalini); the psychic attitude of concentrating on the supreme self in sahasrara chakra; control of the tongue (mamsa), implying silencing the mind; control of inhalation and exhalation (or the awakening of sushumna due to the balancing of ida and pingala nadis) and experiencing amrit (the nectar of immortality).[13]

Shankara practised samayachara tantra, which is not different from the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. The hymn, *Saundarya Lahari* forms part of this tradition. Historically, it is attached to the specific event of Shankara being attacked by black magic, resulting in sickness. Rather than using siddhis directly to heal himself, tradition states that Shankara responded to the attack by composing this intricate hymn with accompanying yantras and sadhanas. It did work to heal him and was effective for his own protection, but also works powerfully for the benefit of any practitioner. Not only does *Saundarya Lahari* work as a healing force, its essential nature is as an evolutionary sadhana for the awakening of kundalini and direct spiritual experience.

The point is that Shankara demonstrated his non-attachment to the body, mind and to life itself on numerous occasions. If we believe he was an avatara and actually descended more than once to fulfil his obligation to earth, then we cannot think that *Saundarya Lahari* was composed primarily for his own benefit.

The end or the beginning?

There are different opinions about where Shankara left his body (not surprising if he had more than one), but everyone agrees his life was benevolent. The *Shankara Digvijaya* opts for Kedarnath. The sixteenth chapter of the *Shiva Rahasya*

[13] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Tantra Darshan*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, pp. 131–136

(v. 47)[14] records his mahasamadhi in Kanchi and at this time, reference is made to five crystal Shivalingas that he practised with:

Tad yoga bhoga vara mukti sumokshayoga
Lingarchanaat praaptajayah svakaashramam.
Tan vai vijitya tarasaa khsatataastravaadaih
Mishraan cha kanchyaam atha siddhimaapa.

Yoga, Bhoga, Vara, Mukti and Sumoksha – by worshipping these five lingas Shankara achieved victory and got back his ashrams. Later, by conquering his remaining opponents quickly with his scriptural knowledge, he obtained siddhi (salvation) at Kanchi.

The reference to the crystal lingas is also clear in the *Markandeya Samhita* (5:158:7):

Gatvaa kailaashashailam jagadakhila guruh
Shankaraachaaryayogee
drishtvaa saambam Shivam tam svayamatishichiram
chintayannantarange
labdhvaa panchaatmalingam amalatarasudhaa
lingitaadanga bhajam
bhootyai saundaryasaaram himagiri duhituh praapayan gam
ayaaseet.

Shankaracharya the great yogi and the guru of the entire world, went to Kailash Mountain. He had darshan of Shiva and Parvati and concentrated on him in his heart for a long time. Thereby he obtained five atma lingas which arose through the Lord's power. They were very pure like nectar and were considered as parts of Lord Shiva himself, appearing as the total essence of Parvati's beauty. He obtained them for the benefit of the world and descended back to earth.

[14] S.D. Kulkarni, *Adi Sankara: The Saviour of Mankind*, Shri Bhagavan Vedavyasa Itihasa Samshodhana Mandira (Bhishma), Bombay, India, 1987, pp. 213–216

There are different opinions about the significance of the Shivalingam. Why were rituals concerning this symbol amongst Shankara's last legacy? Swami Satyananda states:

> In Samkhya philosophy and in Vedanta, the causal body is known as the *linga sharira*, the linga body, the subtle body, which is there but you can't see it. When you see the sphatik lingam, it explodes the images from the causal body or the unconscious, which is in you and was in your ancestors also. That is how, when your ancestors somewhere in the North or South Pole, or in America, Africa or India, confronted the crystal Shivalingam, they jumped over the fence.
>
> With that leap the human evolution started. With that leap, you began to know that you are existing. That is why concentration and meditation on the Shivalingam are considered very important, because it can explode the inner source of awareness where infinite knowledge is hidden and where the possibility of the great evolution of man is stored.
>
> Man is not at the final stage of evolution. What man is experiencing today is not the beginning of the end. It is not the end of the beginning, but the beginning of the beginning. You have started. You have now begun, and gradually the consciousness will evolve to a point where every man will become a superman. So, in short, this is the philosophy of the Shivalingam.[15]

[15] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Teachings of Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Vol. V*, Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar, India, 1986, pp. 200–201

8

Shankara, Buddhism, Jainism and the Brain

Adi Shankaracharya has been accused by some scholars of being a crypto-Buddhist, that is, of including doctrines sympathetic to Buddhism within his school, while others have hailed him as the saviour of India from the evils of Buddhism. The idea that Shankara was responsible for the defeat of Buddhism is well-established in the general mind today to the extent that in response to the question 'Who is Adi Shankaracharya?' lecturers may reply 'He is the one who defeated Buddhism in India'.

Interpretations of reality keep changing both in ancient and modern times. Although Shankara argued against particular aspects of Buddhist philosophy in his *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*[1], he is famous finally, because he respected all views as facets of the one view; thus he was known as *Shankara*, which is derived from *sham-karoti*, 'he who does the auspicious thing'. It was this quality which, as Shankara continued travelling and teaching, enabled him to unify the spiritual and cultural values of the whole of India from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari, and from Assam to Afghanistan. In fact, we can go a step further. He was not only interested in uniting such beliefs in the present; he aimed to preserve the underlying truths of sanatana dharma embedded in the vedic culture for the future.

[1] Swami Gambhirananda (trans.), *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Sri Shankaracarya*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, India, 1993, pp. 402–426

Shankara systematized seeming contradictions within the Vedas and between various schools of thought that he met while travelling throughout India. But not everyone accepts reconciliation; Shankara was sympathetic with the Buddhists to such an extent that he was accused of being a hidden Buddhist both in debates and by later commentators.

Attitudes to Buddhism

In *An Interpretation of the Life & Teachings of Sri Shankaracharya*, Swami Mukhyananda gives Buddhism the benefit of the doubt. He speaks critically of the degeneration of the Buddhist movement at times, but retains a high respect for the Buddha himself. He explains that Buddha was teaching the same non-dual transcendental truths as Vedanta without reference to ritual or religious belief in God, stressing instead the need for good conduct and self effort.[2]

This refers to the fundamental division of the Mimamsa school. The original ancient scriptures of the Vedas were organized by Badarayana (that is, Vyasa). The compilation of *Uttara* or *Brahma Mimamsa* deals with the 'high' issues of the nature of Brahman and today it is usually called *Vedanta*, implying it contains the final teachings of the Vedas. Vedanta reveres the teaching of the Upanishads as the culmination of the Vedas' highest knowledge, and is the immediate forefather of Shankara's non-dual philosophy, *Advaita Vedanta*.

Vyasa's disciple, Jaimini organized the scriptures of *Poorva Mimamsa* or *Karma Mimamsa*, which deals mainly with the correct interpretation of the ritual portions of the Vedas, the *karmas* or actions necessary during ceremonies, and is more usually referred to today simply as *Mimamsa*. Today, Vedanta and Mimamsa are counted separately as two of the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy.

The strength of the Buddhist influence is seen when we realize that Kumarilla Bhatta, the leader of the Mimamsans,

[2] Swami Mukhyananda, *An Interpretation of the Life & Teachings of Shri Shankaracharya (Elucidatory & Reconciliatory)*, 2nd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Ernakulam, India, 1998, p. 34

learnt the doctrines of Buddhism from a Buddhist guru and lived within their order for some time in order to attack the Buddhists in his *Sloka Vartika*. The Buddhists and the Jainas both criticized Poorva Mimamsa, for example regarding its exclusiveness and its use of animal sacrifice. By breaking down the restrictive grasp of Mimamsa's emphasis on external ritual and the use of yajna for private agendas, Shankara was actually moving parallel to the Buddhists.

Philosophically speaking, Shankara and the Buddhists had their differences, but it must have been due to the success of the popular Buddhist and Jaina movements that Shankara was so curt to the Buddhists in his commentary on the *Brahma Sutra* (2:2:28), where Vyasa says:

> *Naabhaava upalabdhe.*
>
> (External objects are) not non-existent, for they are perceived.

Defending himself in the ensuing debate with Shankara, the Buddhist spokesman responds:

> "Well, I'm not saying that I don't perceive any object – just that I don't perceive anything apart from the perception."

Shankara's vedantic spokesman replies caustically:

> "Yes, that's how you speak, since you have no curb to your mouth, but you do not speak logically – just because it is perceived, there must be something other than (the mere process of) perception."

Maybe it is just that Shankara was very young at the time; he attacks the Buddhist stance although they seem to have much in common with Advaita Vedanta's *mayavada*, theory of illusion, and denies any common ground. The Buddhist says their view that knowledge shines by itself echoes Shankara's description of the self-effulgent witness, but the Vedantin

points out there are many varieties of knowledge, and they are perceived by a witness who stands apart from them.

This apparent inflexibility accords with Vyasa's summary dismissal of the Buddhists in *Brahma Sutra* (2:2:32):

Sarvathaa'nupapatteshcha

Moreover, (the Buddhist view) is untenable from every point of view.

Shankara follows Vyasa when he likens the Buddhist doctrine to a well sunk in sand, and condemns it as untenable – along with their conduct.

Is this the same Shankara who later named Buddha an avatara? Why such antagonism? He explains that the Buddhist doctrine is confusing the people's allegiance to the vedic dharma because of their contradictory views. And of course the Buddhist acceptance of shudras and outcastes would have made their teachings popular with a large portion of the population excluded from the vedic dharma.

The interaction with Buddhism in Indian culture has been taking place for centuries and at different times had different influences. As a defender of brahminical values, and then later of vedic dharma, and later of the sanatana dharma, Shankara's attitudes changed. Kulkarni claims that it was Shankara's masterly stroke to declare Bhagavan Buddha to be the ninth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, thus removing the cause of the separatist tendencies. In *Dashavatara Stotra*, Shankara does have a verse in praise of Lord Buddha:

Dharabaddha padmaasanasyanghriyastih
Nigamyanilo nyasta naasaagradrshtih
Ya aaste kalau yoginaam chakravartee
Sa Buddhah prabuddho'stu nishchittavartee

Being firmly seated on the earth in the steady padmasana with his gaze fixed at the nose tip, the emperor of yogis in this Kali Yuga – may the great Buddha, who has mastered the chitta vrittis (modifications of the mind) guide us forever.

If Shankara really wrote this hymn that shows such respect for the Buddha, it means that we are looking at a person whose views changed a lot as he matured. He broke out of the mould, the matrix in which his personality was set by early beliefs and social influences.

Attitudes to Jainism

The Jaina tradition is most famous for its adherence to *ahimsa*, non-violence in word, thought and deed, in all circumstances. Their respect for all living beings engenders a very difficult lifestyle, where great effort is used to protect even insect-life from accidental harm as one walks around or eats one's food. For the Jainas, if the atma is born as a butterfly, it takes on the shape of a butterfly, if born as an elephant, it takes on the shape of an elephant, yet there is no real difference in essence. The Jaina were, therefore, absolutely opposed to *bali*, the sacrifice of animals in yajna, which had been incorporated into the Mimamsa tradition.

Whereas the Poorva Mimamsa tradition emphasized the importance of details, and in particular the privileges and duties of the male Hindu brahmin, the Jaina stance of ahimsa was based on the recognition of *atmabhava*, the presence of the same atma in all beings. The Jaina philosophy does not support ritual actions or forms of worship to ensure private agendas, or exclusiveness and feelings of superiority towards animals or other humans. Jainism and Buddhism were open to all people and advocated the attitudes of equality in diversity.

A fundamental doctrine of the Jainas is *Anekantavada*, which says everyone has a different aim or purpose – there isn't just one purpose in life because everyone is at different stages of development. Anekantavada is the field in which ahimsa and Syadavada grow.

When Shankara wrote the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* he was possibly seeing things in black and white, and the Syadavada of Jainism seems to particularly upset him. *Syadavada* is the Jaina theory of relativity, illustrated by their story of blind men

grasping different parts of an elephant – its tail, ear, trunk, etc., and variously thinking an elephant is like a rope, fan or snake. In his commentary on *Brahma Sutra* (2:2:33), Shankara outlines the Syadavada viewpoint that everything is relative, that truth is many-faceted and really beyond our knowing – and he strenuously objects to it. Interestingly enough, the argument is not because it is intrinsically wrong, but because such indefiniteness is not a good way to inspire people. Vyasa says Jainism:

> *Naikasminnasambhavaat.*
>
> Is not right – the presence (of contradictory attributes) in a thing is impossible.

Shankara the revolutionary

We see here that Shankara had two roles. He was propagating Advaita Vedanta and the realization of the oneness of all. Simultaneously, however, he was working in the everyday world of samsara and needed to inspire people to get up and get out of the burning building of the phenomenal world which ultimately collapses.

For Shankara, the problem is how can one inspire people to act with full conviction if you are not definite about what it is they are going to achieve by their actions? What he really seems to object to in Buddhism and Jainism is that their different views are clouding the situation. However, he did realize that the Buddhist and Jaina criticisms of the vedic culture as it was interpreted at the time needed to be addressed. After writing the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, his extended mission acknowledged:

1. Excessive vedic rituals, especially those concerned with animal sacrifice, should be purified and made more spiritual.
2. People need a God that they can relate to.
3. Sadhana should be according to the needs and capacity of the people and should be well regulated.
4. Yajna is for cosmic harmony, not selfish agendas.

The Gaudapada connection

The Buddhist tradition independently supports some of the details recounted in the Digvijayas, and on investigation we find that there is an intimate connection between the Buddhists and Shankara's guru's guru, Gaudapada. For example, *Gaudapada's Karikas* refer to Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyama Karikas* in several places.

Darling traces similarities between Gaudapada's *Mandukya Karikas*, Mahayana Buddhists and vedantic Vijnanavada, hence explaining the source of this crypto-Buddhism that Shankara's critics refer to. He explains that through Gaudapada, knowledge of Buddhist thought was inherent in Shankara's training and the tradition he established.

Parallels between Shankara's Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism can be seen clearly in his discussions about ignorance, *avidya*, and his acceptance of there being different levels of truth or reality: absolute truth, *paramartha*, and the daily reality, *vyavahara*.[3]

Sleep, dream and objections

So again we see the essential importance of the guru parampara. Shankara's relationship with Gaudapada must be considered when we try to assess his relationship with Buddhism. In his section on the authorship of the *Gaudapada Karika Bhashya*, Darling notes that one main problem in attributing it to Shankara is that it appears to agree with the *Karikas* in equating the waking and dream states. This would contradict Shankara's arguments in the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, where he stresses the vyavahara reality of perception in the waking state which actually overtakes or annuls the dream reality as soon as we wake up. As a result, Shankara's opponents can accuse him of inconsistency, or even hypocrisy.

Maybe Shankara wanted to emphasize the importance of the dream state and he equated it with the waking state as a

[3] Gregory J. Darling, *An Evaluation of the Vedantic Critique of Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, India, 1987, p. 97

teaching strategy. Maybe he was going through a period of having particularly strong dreams. Another explanation of these disparate views, besides the fact that Shankara was a fast-developing child open to different views, is simply that of respect.

If Shankara was given the task of commenting on his paramguru's *Karikas*, he would elucidate them respectfully, not contradict. Similarly, when his gurus later entrusted him with the task of commenting on the *Brahma Sutras* of Vyasa, he would have enormous respect for the philosophy there and support it, even if it was not his own conviction. Being able to put aside one's own convictions, even deep-rooted ones perceived as essential to one's individual integrity, is necessary if one wishes to break through the ego and conditioning, and learn what is being taught.

The task given to the twelve-year-old by his gurus Govindapadacharya and Gaudapadacharya, was not to criticize Vyasa but to expand on the extremely terse Sanskrit sutras, to unearth Vyasa's meaning so people could understand it. It was not part of that task to support opposing views, not even really to present his own views on the current situation.

Kumarilla Bhatta felt his sin of betraying his (Buddhist) guru could only be atoned for by self-immolation. And Shankara understood that. Today, respect for established tradition or for one's teachers is not so very deep; however, the culture of humility and respect is essential in a spiritual aspirant. It is a quality that Shankara embodied and taught in the upadesha granthas. So here, the young Shankara seems to have regarded himself as a disciple defending his gurus.

Avidya and different realities

Although one may not think so, after reading Shankara's comments on the reality of external objects in his *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, and his criticisms of Buddhism and Jainism, one of Shankara's more famous teachings is that there are

different levels of reality. On the level of absolute reality, there is only Brahman, all else is *maya* or illusion. But in the matrix of our lives there is a daily reality, distinct from mirages or false perceptions.

Such views were already formulated in the Vedas and in Buddhism. Darling often deals with Shankara's objections to Buddhist philosophies by asserting that Shankara did not understand the subtle nuances of the Buddhist position, and his arguments were therefore misdirected. However, Shankara was very familiar with Buddhist doctrines, and focusing on the nature of consciousness is fundamental to both traditions. Shankara speaks of three levels of reality:

1. *Paramarthika satta*, the highest truth as taught in the shrutis.
2. *Vyavaharika satta*, truth as manifested in the phenomenal universe as the basis of thoughts and activities.
3. *Pratibhasika satta*, illusory and dream experiences.

So, although Shankara speaks of Brahman as the one reality, his approach to reality is not so dismissive of the world of the senses and the waking mind as one might think.[4] And again, there is an interesting connection between Shankara's philosophical stance and the lifestyle he advocates. The acknowledgement of vyavaharika satta gives a philosophical basis for the vedic concept of the four ashrama or stages of life being necessary for most people to mature through.

Shankara's insistence on the practical, *vyavahara*, and the absolute, *paramartha*, also helps his Advaita philosophy to explain the differences in the creation texts in *Brahma Sutra* (1:4:14), for he asserts that they all agree on their primary function of describing the Brahman, their differences are only in the vyavahara realm of things created:

> *Broomah satyapi prativedaantam srooyamaanesvaakaadishu kramaadidvakarae vigane, na srashtari kinchit vignamasti.*

[4] Gregory J. Darling, *An Evaluation of the Vedantic Critique of Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, India, 1987, p. 123

Our opinion is – though there are conflicts in different Upanishads about the order of creation like space, there is certainly no conflict in the case of the Creator.

> *Karyamaakaashaadikam bahuprapancham jagat; karanam param brahma; tasmat karanaat paramaarthato'nanyatvam yatirekena bhavah karyasyaavagamyate*
>
> The manifestation of the multitudinous world consisting of space, etc., is the effect; the cause for the manifestation is the supreme Brahman. So it is well understood that the effect, the world, is not separate from the cause, the Brahman. And creation cannot function as an entity by being away from Brahman.

Vidya: the one reality

Simply put, there is one very interesting experience that comes when one begins meditation, and increases in scope and intensity with continued practice: one experiences that there is really no difference between the internal world and the outer manifestation. This is a distinctive feature of Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta philosophy, but the experience is potentially universal. It is not, at base, a conjecture or a subject matter of philosophy; rather, it is a description of what is, or what happens – of what one can experience.

This experience of the world reflecting our inner life is at the heart of religious traditions and cultures throughout the world. For a few centuries it became rare, but now it is being rediscovered:

> The difference we tend to see between the outside, material world and what we might think of as our own personal, mental space within is, in fact, an artificial distinction. We experience them both as a whole and therefore the balance we achieve within us directs how balanced our behaviour will be without. This is why the

> ancients considered humanity to be what they called a 'microcosm' of the macrocosm. They saw no separation between the Man and Nature and no separation between the natural world and God . . . As the Buddha says, "with our thoughts we make the world".[5]

Philosophical language tends to mask that this can actually be experienced through sadhana, or that it becomes established once one has arrived at a steady state of consciousness. So those scholars who have not experienced this, attempt to deal with descriptions of transcendental reality at the level of intellectual concepts. The intellectual concepts are part of the conditioning of the brain and therefore they naturally differ from each other; however, the parallels between Shankara's Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism are there because they are both attempting to explain an actual truth, which is there to be experienced, one way or another.

Shankara was not simply commenting on scriptural texts, he was translating and communicating the experiences gained in samadhi, samyama and nididhyasana, or we can say in the state of sthitaprajna, into practical insights for his disciples. Like the Buddha, he was functioning as an avatara.

The Witness

In the *Upadesha Sahasri* (18:36) Shankara disagrees with the Buddhist theory of the temporal gap – that what we call the individual soul is only a momentary consciousness of the present moment, and there is no separate witnessing consciousness that persists from the beginning to the end of momentary phenomena (and beyond).

This is a very interesting point on the nature of consciousness. By claiming that consciousness can transcend

[5] HRH The Prince of Wales, Tony Juniper & Ian Skelly, *Harmony: A New Way of Looking at our World*, Blue Door (Harper Collins), London, UK, 2010, pp. 133–134

the brain and personality, Vedanta foreshadows the discoveries of Oliver Sacks, a leading scientist in the field of neuropsychology. His researches into degenerative brain diseases such as Parkinson's indicate that there is a 'witness' to the breakdown of brain function which can stay intact throughout the process. Sacks writes that while he was studying how the nervous system is organized at the level of primitive, subcortical behaviours and controls, he was overwhelmingly confronted by the responses of his patients to the ongoing breakdown of their mental processes. He speaks of their heroic struggle to adapt and survive as their external and internal worlds collapsed. For him, this became the real focus of his work and the study – how they struggled to maintain their identity while different levels of 'reality' collapsed around them:

> . . . it was, by virtue of the enormous range of disturbances occurring at every level of the nervous system, a disorder that could show, far better than any other, how the nervous system was organized, how brain and behaviour, at their more primitive levels, worked . . . But then, over and above the disorder and its direct effects, were all the responses of the patients to their sickness – so what confronted one, what one studied, was not just disease or physiology, but people, struggling to adapt and survive . . . Through them I would explore what it was like to be human, to stay human, in the face of unimaginable adversities and threats. Thus, while continually monitoring their organic nature – their complex, ever-changing pathophysiologies and biologies – my central study and concern became identity – their struggle to maintain identity.[6]

Like Sacks with his patients, Shankara is totally absorbed in the effort his disciples must make to regain and maintain their identity – which for him implies realization of *Brahman*,

[6] Oliver Sacks, *Awakenings*, Picador, Pan, London, UK, rev ed 1991, p. xxviii–xxvix

the ever-expanding consciousness. It is a one-pointed flight through the matrix of different levels of consciousness by constantly identifying with the Witness. In *Upadesha Sahasri* (18:83) he writes:

> The non-conscious intellect appears to be conscious, and its modifications also, like sparks of red-hot iron. But one's knowledge of the appearance and disappearance of the mental modifications is only possible because of the (continuous) witness – and it is through this reflection of the witness that the intellect may know itself to be Brahman.

Neuroplasticity and sadhana

The new concept of neuroplasticity helps one recognize the aptness of Shankara's description of the relationship between brain, awareness and consciousness. Although for some years science argued that mind was a result of the brain, experiments on animals and humans have now shown the brain as being a tool of consciousness. The brain can actually be shaped by how we direct our awareness; it is not only shaped by genetics.

Neuroplasticity means the brain is not totally 'hardwired' from birth. We can, ourselves, affect the conditioning of the brain and nervous system at a molecular level because new areas of the brain can be assigned to new perceptual or motor tasks by repeating an activity for a long time. For this neuroplasticity to happen in experimental situations, however, sustained awareness or attention is indispensable. And we should note that for yoga sadhana or for meditation to 'happen', sustained awareness or attention is also indispensable.

Sharon Begley refers to Mike Merzenich's experiments in 1996 with monkeys who received repeated stimulation of their fingertips while music was played.[7] Some monkeys were

[7] Sharon Begley, *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain*, Ballentine Books, New York, USA, 2007, pp. 158–159

taught to pay attention to music, some to the tactile sensation. As a result, different parts of the brain developed, with an expansion up to three times, either in the auditory cortex or in the somatosensory cortex, according to where attention was trained. Such experiments prove that one's attention directly affects the activities of the neurons in the brain, resulting in physical changes in the structure and capability of the nervous system. Her assertion that we therefore 'choose' from moment to moment what the ongoing form of our own mind will be is an interesting scientific validation of the teaching of Buddha, Shankara, and the living gurus of today.

It gives new insight into why Patanjali stressed *abhyasa*, extended unbroken practice for a long time, with respect (attention), and why Shankara placed such emphasis on the need for *nididhyasana*, the relentless repetition of the practice of meditation.

The recognition of neuroplasticity focuses attention on the need to leave the once-accepted hypothesis that the brain creates consciousness or mind, and demonstrates that it is a reciprocal process, or even the other way round. If the brain is like a laptop, consciousness is like the internet. The brain is controlled by physical-electrical circuits, enclosed by DNA and conditioning, but the number of dendrites, and the myelin sheathing which speeds up some neuronal channels and affects our habit patterns, moods, perceptions and responses is shaped by life experiences. So, new software and motherboards can be added, and one can download from an ever-expanding source: consciousness.

The 'discovery' of neuronal plasticity can be used to argue that the personality is mechanical, but the core identity can witness the personality inherited, the conditioning received, the breakdown of it and its evolution – even, it is claimed by adepts – through death and rebirth.

The path of integration

In conclusion, we should ponder on the basic aim behind Shankara's teachings. He insisted on the Vedas as being

the foundation of Truth, but at a practical level aimed at establishing unity of spirit. He did not set out to war with other valid paths to liberation.

Experience is the basis for Shankara's 'Three-Fold Doctrine of Reality'; its key is the identity of Brahman and atma. His realizations, written down as philosophies, formed the basis for his work in reconstructing society so that it can accept all religions, so that human beings can experience their true nature and enjoy the play, the *lila*. One can live the full life recommended by vedic dharma, gradually acquiring viveka and vairagya, the necessary six disciplines, or *shat sampatti*, and, eventually, *mumukshutva*, the burning desire for liberation, which leads one back to the Source so that one is no longer bound to return to samsara.

Shankara set out to defend and re-establish the vedic dharma which was being misinterpreted by established interests, such as the Mimamsans within it, and was also losing popularity, in part due to philosophies such as the Buddhists and Jainas without. Basically, once he was able to enlarge his experience, he worked on establishing the sanatana dharma, the truths that give humankind a life path leading from the mundane to the transcendental. He recognized the necessity for an integrated network of spiritual paths for beings at different levels of evolution.

9

Poorva Mimamsa

We are told that Shankara started his second span of life, in direct obedience to the instructions of Vyasa, travelling, mainly by foot, to Prayag (Allahabad), where the three rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati merge. There he met the great scholar and leader of the Mimamsa school, Kumarilla Bhatta. As mentioned previously, Shankara had been told to engage Kumarilla in debate so that he could clear misconceptions prevalent in the Mimamsan school. However, no debate ensued as Kumarilla was preparing to burn himself to death to atone for the sin of deceiving his Buddhist guru.

Poorva Mimamsa, the real opponent of Buddhism

Kumarilla's crusade against Buddhism is therefore portrayed as tainted at the root. Kumarilla explains, as he immolates himself before Shankara, that he is doing so to try to atone for two sins. At the end of his life he sees two important mistakes he made. Firstly, he rejected the idea of God, or *Ishwara*, as the Creator in order to emphasize his interpretations of the Veda. Secondly, he betrayed his guru by using the knowledge he had gained from him by trickery to persecute the Buddhists and stop their doctrine spreading throughout India.[1]

[1] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986

From this it would seem that Kumarilla had achieved much of the work of 'throwing off the evils of Buddhism' which is sometimes so enthusiastically allocated to Adi Shankaracharya. In contrast to Kumarilla Bhatta's determined conscious campaign to overthrow Buddhism, it seems that Shankara's opposition to other traditions was mainly a side-effect of the mission to re-establish the sanatana dharma and Advaita Vedanta. It was not a main objective.

In his last moments, the great scholar Kumarilla is confessing not only his own sins and shortcomings, but is also pleading for help. He wants Shankara to defeat his own disciple, Mandan Mishra. As the fire burns, the old man needs to have the mistakes he made, and which are now being perpetuated by his successor, reversed.[2]

Shankara, although routinely described as a dry philosopher, was a great bhakta. In him, devotion to Ishwara and the atma in all beings was incandescent. He was just as much, if not more, opposed to Mimamsa's materialistic, ritualistic interpretation of the Vedas as he was to Buddhism. The young sannyasi was fighting against pointless restrictions and focusing attention on the spirit behind vedic guidelines. His taking sannyasa at such a young age was itself a lesson: general guidelines given in the vedic tradition are there to facilitate spiritual growth, not to curtail it.

Poorva Mimamsa: privilege and prejudice

Poorva Mimamsa emphasizes the importance of yajna and vedic rituals, and that only a particular type of person is qualified to conduct or participate in them. In the *Brahma Sutra*, Vyasa argues that shudras are not competent to perform rituals and cannot achieve the realizations that depend on vedic knowledge. Shankara follows his lead in his commentary (1:3:34), arguing that only the first three castes (the brahmins, kshatriyas and vaishyas) are competent:

[2] *ibid*, Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya*, p. 80

> The Shudra has no competence, since he cannot study the Vedas; for one becomes competent for things spoken of in the Vedas, after one has studied the Vedas and known these things from them. But there can be no reading of the Veda by a Shudra, for Vedic study presupposes the investiture with the sacred thread, which ceremony is confined to the three castes.[3]

We should remember that in the society of the time, women of any caste were usually banned from real education and so were equally disqualified, but they must have been more easily subdued as a group than the shudras who were targeted by the dharma shastras (which are also called smritis). *Smritis* are respected religious writing, based on the *shrutis*, the revealed knowledge of the Vedas. The shrutis contain the *sanatana dharma*, the eternal dharma, revealed to rishis in deep samadhi. The *smritis* are what religious classes 'remember' should be done. They are referred to in social disputes and represent the accepted practices of the powers in society. *Smritis* are social or religious writings designed to stabilize society; they are not spiritual literature like the Upanishads discussing the nature of reality. For Shankara, therefore, any contradiction between shruti and smriti is decided in favour of the shruti.

On the crucial topic of caste, Shankara simply follows Vyasa's lead (BS 1:3:36–39). At this early stage of his development, he refers to the practices encoded in the dharma shastras, such as the *Manu Smriti*, denying the possibility of purification for the shudras because they are barred from purificatory rites. Such regulations enforce ignorance by barring shudras from studying the Vedas, barring them from even being in the vicinity of a yajna where the sacred mantras are chanted. Vyasa says, in *Brahma Sutra* (1:3:36)[4]:

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[3] Swami Gambhirananda (trans) *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Sri Shankaracarya*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1993, p. 230

[4] *ibid*, Swami Gambhirananda (trans) *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Sri Shankaracarya*, p. 232

Samskaaraparaamarshaattadabhaavaabhilaapaat

Because purificatory rites are mentioned (for others) and absence of these is declared (for the Shudra).

Shankara explains Vyasa's meaning thus:

> The absence of purificatory rites for the Shudra is mentioned in the Smriti thus: 'The Shudra belongs to the fourth caste and has but a single birth' (Manu, 10:4), as also in such texts as, 'The Shudra has no sins, nor is he fit for any purificatory rite' (Manu, 10:126).

Vyasa continues (1:3:38):

Shravanaadhyayanaarthapratishedhaat smriteshcha

And because the Smriti prohibits for the Shudras the hearing, study and acquisition of the meaning (of the Vedas).[5]

Shankara tries to mitigate the situation. He continues:

> But for those to whom knowledge dawns as a result of (good) tendencies acquired in past lives, as for instance to Vidura, Dharmavyadha, and others, the reaping of the result of knowledge cannot be withheld, for the result of knowledge is inevitable. This position is confirmed by the Smriti text, "One should read out to all the four castes (keeping the Brahmana in front)" (Mbh. Sa., 327:49), which declares the competence for all the four castes for the acquisition of the anecdotes and mythologies. But the conclusion stands that a Shudra has no right to knowledge through the Vedas.

So Shankara does try to ameliorate the situation by mentioning other scriptures, like the *Mahabharata* and

[5] *ibid*, Swami Gambhirananda (trans) *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Sri Shankaracarya*, pp. 233–234

Ramayana which can be read out to all the four castes, but still concludes it is only the first three classes who are eligible for vedic study. At this stage of his development, he finally accepts the conservative status quo.

In so many details, the developing teachings of Shankara went against narrow-minded materialist interpretations of the vedic religion, cutting at the root of caste distinctions. Shankara could not have written thus after meeting the chandala of Varanasi and accepting the challenge to apply atmabhava in his life. It does not correlate with the genuine feeling and conviction that he expresses in the *Manisha Panchaka* (which is partially translated in chapter 13) or with the sentiments in the teaching texts, the *prakaranas*.

Sannyasin outcastes

Shankara's appearance obviously annoyed the conservatives. Of course, sannyasins are themselves outcastes according to the in-castes. When, eventually, Shankara found the household of the famous Mandan Mishra, he was subjected to that worthy philosopher's scorn because he had shaved off the traditional tuft of hair kept by brahmins and was not wearing the yajnopavita, or conducting the daily rituals as per tradition.

From the first they engage in a war of words. Amusing as the taunts of Mandan and Shankara are, they are touching on important points. Shankara is about to start collecting more and more disciples, and his deliberate shaving of the tuft and throwing off of the sacred thread is an open declaration of war on the dogmatic interpretations of spiritual symbolism. The *Shankara Digvijaya* reports that Mandan Mishra was terribly annoyed by this and accused Shankara of not being willing to bear the burden of responsibility that these accoutrements symbolized. Shankara responded by likening householders to asses, willingly bearing the load of wives, etc.

This was a direct hit at Mandan Mishra, for he was a householder, married to Ubhaya Bharati. Kumarilla Bhatta,

Mandan Mishra and Ubhaya Bharati, are mentioned right at the beginning of the *Shankara Digvijaya* as being divine incarnations destined to aid Lord Shiva in alleviating the sufferings of earth and misinterpretations of the vedic culture. We see that Shankara, the guru, remembers his mission, but Mandan is completely involved in his life role.

The debate: Uttara versus Poorva Mimamsa

With Ubhaya Bharati as the umpire, Shankara begins by revealing the wisdom of the jnana kanda (the Upanishads), defining Brahman as the ultimate reality, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, which is the same as one's own atman.[6] Bound by ignorance, one is born again and again into the world of seeming differences, but when one becomes steady in wisdom, identifying with the witness rather than the 'doer', liberation from future births is assured.

Mandan argues that the part of the Vedas dealing with ritual actions and their effects is more important than the philosophical statements of the Upanishads, for such actions, and not mere philosophy, lead to moksha. Mandan's Poorva Mimamsa or Karma Mimamsa is based on the karma kanda of the Vedas, which consists of commandments or injunctions showing the correct way to act – in the sense of the correct rituals to perform. However, Shankara explains that those rules and prohibitions only apply to the material, phenomenal dimension and are only relevant until the knowledge of absolute truth arises. Furthermore, when rituals are to be performed, he argues they should be done with pure intent, not for personal agendas; otherwise they cause more karma and ensnare one in greater ignorance.

Shankara reconciled those texts concerning injunctions and prohibitions within Advaita Vedanta by affirming that they have a secondary significance, being valid from the standpoint of practical truth, *vyavahara satta*. He felt the

[6] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, pp. 87–88

religious observances of any religion are only needed until true knowledge dawns. Thus he encouraged respect for the different faiths, and also acknowledged different levels of reality in which people live. This meant he was able to reconcile the different practices and philosophies prevalent at different places.

Shankara's Uttara Mimamsa (Vedanta) believes that the ritual instructions of the karma kanda are valuable, but that the jnana kanda is the crown of the Vedas as its philosophies reveal the nature of reality, *paramartha satta*. Rather than the purpose of the Vedas being to teach a set of rituals that one can perform to achieve transient pleasures on earth and access to higher lokas after death, Shankara argues that the higher, *uttara*, purpose of the Vedas, is to give humankind a philosophy which when understood and experienced in life leads to *moksha*, liberation from the cycles of life and death entirely.

Different planes of reality

It is interesting to understand Shankara's views on the different perspectives offered in the Vedas. It is not that he dismisses the practical instructions relating to success in the material plane. He simply says that such knowledge can be got by other means too; however, for transcendental knowledge of the unity of existence, the sat guru and the Vedas are the only source. This enables him to reconcile contradictions in the scriptures and accept different lifestyles.

Although Shankara would argue many points of philosophy with the Buddhist and Jaina traditions, he had no trouble with their breadth of vision. It seems his effort to purify the Mimamsa tradition was the more difficult task:

> Shankara assimilated some of the good points of Buddhism. Never deploring the Vedic rites and rituals, he purified them by removing those parts which were misused.[7]

[7] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara the Missionary*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, India, 1978, p. 16 ff.

The vision of Shankara

The realization that each man has his own truth became integral to Shankara's philosophy as he matured. Over the years he met many groups worshipping one or other particular deity or even one aspect of one deity in opposition to another aspect.

Advaita Vedanta's acceptance of different levels of reality is actually a result of experiences during meditation, but it can also be seen as the basis for Shankara's work in reconstructing a society that can accept all religions. To integrate different religious persuasions he formulated the *Panchayatama* tradition, worship of the five main godheads. This worship of Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, Surya and Ganesha was aimed at overcoming narrow vision and exclusiveness. *Sakara* worship means the worship of God with form. Shankara accepted worship in any form as a step towards freedom.

He appreciated the power of ritual and incorporated the aspect of ritualism in the sadhanas that he refined; however, he wanted the rituals so important to Mimamsa to be oriented to Brahman, or to the divine in whatever form rather than to personal gain. He was concerned with purity of intention rather than outward form. In fact, in any ritual it is the state of mind rather than the act which is important:

> . . . the point now is, what is a ritual and what is not? Anything can be a ritual: religious, social, political, military, psychoanalytic, etc. The practitioner makes a ritual with or without his involvement; it is not the arrangement of objects and the externality, not just the replica of a given sequence of acts. The ritual goes on in the mind of the practitioner and only he can recognize it.[8]

[8] Luigi Fumigalli (Swami Suryapremananda Saraswati), *Mudras and States of Awareness: with particular regard to psychophysiological effects of head and hand mudras*, MA Dissertation, Bihar Yoga Bharati University, Munger, re: T.M. Bhagalpur University, India, 1999, p. 40

The essentials: sadhana chatushtaya

There is a tension between Shankara's metaphysical ideals and his ethical teachings. From the point of view of Advaita Vedanta, and his own developing philosophy, the castes, stages of life and rites are relevant to ignorant people only; after the rise of self-knowledge, their utility ceases. In his comments on *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (2:4:5) he says:

> The different castes such as the brahmana or the kshatriya, the various orders of life and so on – upon which rites depend and upon which consist of actions and their factors and results, are false, are objects of notions superimposed on the Self by ignorance, i.e. based on false notions like that of a snake in a rope.[9]

He was beyond the social conventions of his time but, of necessity, taught within them. In the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, Shankara upheld the view that performance of the rituals was limited to the three castes but on the other hand, his teachings took the decisive step of asserting that brahmins, kshatriyas and vaishyas were all qualified to follow the path of jnana and to participate in rituals. He insisted that any individual able to overcome *dvaita*, dualism, was a real sannyasi and could be enlightened. By emphasizing the jnana marga as the effective means to liberation he, in effect, liberated the spiritual seeker from the dominion of rituals and yajnas and released a profound force of change in society.

For Shankara the *sadhana chatushtaya*, the four essential requirements for spiritual knowledge, are *viveka*, discrimination; *vairagya*, non-attachment; *shadsampatti*, the six virtues or strengths, and *mumukshutva*, the intense desire for liberation. This he distilled from the Upanishads which repeatedly say that without these one simply cannot grasp or understand Brahma vidya.

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[9] P. George Victor, *Life and Teachings of Adi Shankaracharya*, D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, India, 2002, p. 143

> This Atman cannot be attained by study of the Vedas, nor by intelligence, nor by much hearing. He whom the Self chooses, by him the Self can be gained. To him this Atman reveals its true nature.
> But he who has not turned away from bad conduct, whose senses are not subdued, whose mind is not concentrated, whose mind is not pacified, can never attain this Atman by knowledge.[10] (*Kathopanishad* 1:2:23–24)

Yoga and the sannyasa lifestyle can help one to acquire the sadhana chatushtaya, for example, the shadsampatti are *sama*, equanimity of mind; *dama*, control of the senses; *titiksha*, endurance; *uparati*, sensory withdrawal; *shraddha*, faith in the guru, the shruti and oneself; and *samadhana*, concentration on reality.

> When the five organs of knowledge are at rest together with the mind, and when the intellect ceases functioning (becomes calm), that they call the highest state.
> The firm control of the senses, they regard as Yoga. At that time one gets careful, for Yoga is acquired and lost.[11] (*Kathopanishad* 2:3:10–11)

Shankara emphasized that the sadhana chatushtaya gives the real prerequisites for spiritual knowledge, not caste, gender, ashrama, religion and so on.

Motivation

Shankara was not attacking ritual or the worship of any form of God that a devotee might choose, but he wished to purify the worship to an experience of selfless devotion fuelled by shraddha and mumukshutva. His focus was on the motivation behind the ritualism of Poorva Mimamsa, as Swami Sivananda explains:

[10] Swami Sivananda, (translation & commentary) *The Principal Upanishads*, Divine Life Society, Tehri-Garhwal, India, 1st published 1942, 4th ed. 1998, p. 80

[11] *ibid*, Swami Sivananda, *The Principal Upanishads*, pp. 121–122

> Sacrifices give mundane fruit only when they are done with selfish motives, only when Kaama, or strong desire, is at the back of the Mantras. When they are performed with *Nishkama Bhava*, without selfish motives, they purify the heart and help to attain knowledge of the Self. Hence Karma Kanda itself, by teaching the worship of various deities becomes part of Brahma Jnana.[12]

Shankara himself regulated or installed ritual worship during his travels through the country and is said to have composed the following two slokas for the karma kanda rituals of Shiva as the Lord Mrityunjaya:

Mrityunjaya Manasik Pooja

Pade pade sarvatamonikrintanan
Pade Pade sarvashubhapradaayakam
Pradakshinam bhaktiyutena chetasaa
Karomi mrityunjaya raksha raksha maam.

Every step destroying darkness
Every step giving auspiciousness
I circumambulate, my consciousness united with you in devotion
O Lord Mrityunjaya (Conqueror of mortality) save me, save me.

Namo gaurishaaya sphatikadhavalaangaaya cha namo
Namo lokeshaaya stutivibudhalokaaya cha namah
Namah shri kantaaya kshapitapuradaityaaya cha namo
Namah phaalaakshaaya smaramadvinaashaaya cha namah.

Salutations to the Lord of Gauri (the fair one) whose limbs are white as crystal
Salutations to the Lord of the world, praised by all the beings of light

[12] Swami Sivananda (trans. & commentary), *Brahma Sutras*, 10th ed., Divine Life Society, UP, India, p. 22 (BS 1:1:4)

Salutations to the one with the lustrous throat, destroyer of the city of the demons
Salutations to the three-eyed one who destroyed the arrogance of Smara (the god of desire).

Incorporating atmabhava in ritual

Shankara wanted to establish *dharma*, a code of conduct for man, based on a system of thought which is universally applicable. He organized the wandering sannyasins and sadhus of India into the Dashnami tradition with the four maths, Kanchi Math, and the *upamaths*, smaller maths, as their basis. Those maths, even today, regularly practise the karma kanda rituals. Yajnas are performed on all auspicious occasions for spiritual aims and benevolent results in the world. It is this breadth of vision that allowed Shankara to move through different modes of expression in his own life, and to endow the Dashnami tradition with a similar ability to grow and adapt.

Today, as the practices of yoga have been re-incorporated in many countries around the world, disciples of gurus from Shankara's parampara have initiated women, foreigners and all castes in purificatory rituals, as a step towards expansion of consciousness. They are re-establishing the practices of yajna, consciously aligning humankind with divine forces in order to establish transformation of individual consciousness and the social lifestyle. Fundamental aspects of vedic dharma, such as the practice of yama and niyama, and an understanding of purushartha and the ashrama system, are being recognized as beneficial and appropriate to all traditions and cultures because they facilitate *atmabhava*, the perception of the same divine essence in all. The exclusiveness of the Poorva Mimamsans gave way to the unifying vision of Advaita Vedanta and tantra in Shankara's wake. And this transition is still happening.

Historical transformations

In the 1880s, Ishwarachandra Vidyasagar, a simple school teacher in Bengal, argued for the rights of women in society,

receiving encouragement from Sri Ramakrishna (guru of Swami Vivekananda, and an initiate of the Puri branch of the Dashnami tradition). His work was translated into law as the Hindu Widow-Remarriage Act Bill. In his wake came the fiery Swami Dayananda and the Arya Samaj. In *Light of Truth*, Swami Dayananda spoke out against social oppression in different forms accusing the pandits of wanting to keep kshatriyas and other classes illiterate in order to maintain their social power, which was often done by misquoting or misinterpreting the scriptures. He insisted that barriers to education be removed for both men and women:

> Both the rulers and the ruled should see that these objects are removed from the path of the students (male and female) of all Classes. In order to give their children a sound education, they should exert themselves to the utmost with all their hearts, all their souls and all their wealth.
> *Opponent* – Are even women and Shudras allowed to study the Vedas? What shall we do if they take to reading? Besides, there is no authority for their doing so. On the other hand, it is condemned by the Vedas thus – Shruti. 'Never should women and Shudras study.'
> *Arya Samaj* – All men and women (i.e. the whole of mankind) have a right to study. You may go and hang yourselves. As for the text you have quoted, it is of your own fabrication, and it is nowhere to be found in the Vedas or any other authoritative book. On the other hand, here is a verse from the Yajur Veda that authorizes all men to study the Veda and hear it read:-
> God says (*Yajur Veda* 26:2): 'As I have given this Word (i.e. the four Vedas) which is the Word of salvation for all mankind . . . brahmans, kshatriyas, vaishyas, shudras, women, servants, aye, even the lowest of the low, so should you all do, i.e., teach and preach the Veda.'[13]

[13] Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *Light of Truth*, Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi, Sabha, New Delhi, India, 1994

Last century, Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh began breaking the ostracism of women, shudras and outcastes from the spiritual tradition, initiating foreigners and women and men previously excluded by caste. Swami Chinmayananda, a highly respected scholar, remarks on how Shankara's views have been misunderstood. For example in *Vivekachudamani,* the second stanza is meant as a thanksgiving for achieving human birth and finding the spiritual path which culminates in spiritual liberation after many births:

> . . . a human birth is indeed rare; much more difficult is it to attain full manhood; rarer than this is a sattwic attitude in life.[14]

Yet, it is used as fuel for the condemnation of women as unfit for vedantic studies or self-realization. Swami Chinmayananda notes how strange such views are when so many scriptures have either been given by women or addressed to them directly by Lord Shiva or the rishis.

Swami Satyananda spoke in his support of women on the spiritual path as he followed the mandate of his guru, Swami Sivananda, touring the world, spreading yoga from 'door to door and shore to shore'. His tours began in 1956, and later his vehicle was the Bihar School of Yoga, which was established in 1963. Its teachings were simple systematic presentations of the traditional techniques and values, made available and relevant to people of any country, gender, age, religion or caste.

He dispensed with religious and ritualistic expressions of Hinduism. His 'integral yoga' consists of hatha yoga, karma yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga and other yogas within a non-religious simplified Advaita Vedanta philosophy. This proved very successful as an introduction. Then, in 1988 he returned to the traditional

[14] Swami Chinmayananda, *Talks on Sankara's Vivekachoodamani*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, India, 2001, p. 2

roots of sannyasa, and began to conduct large-scale yajnas on a yearly basis, and his disciple Swami Niranjanananda has continued and intensified this revival. Thus the guru and disciple tradition is still transmitting the experience preserved by Shankara and systematically facilitating the expansion of consciousness and energy.

Mimamsa today

Today, Mimamsa, in the sense of ritual worship is being revalued and sometimes reinstated by other spiritual traditions, including some branches of Christianity, and even by social groups around the world, who now honour transitions from one stage of life to another by 'rites of passage'. The Aborigines of Australia were considered savage pagans a hundred years ago, however, today academic books are being written about the value of their attitudes and rituals they have practised to maintain their connection with nature and the higher forces.[15] In the field of psychology there is also a growing acknowledgement of ritual as a potent force.

In the context of India, while rituals never went completely out of mode in the social system, there is now a movement to restore them to their original form, intensity and intention for the greater good. The Dashnami tradition has taken the lead, for example, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati has begun reviving 'lost' yajnas, such as the Pashupata Astra Yajna, and revitalizing the spirit of sannyasa traditions, such as Chaturmas sadhana, through Sannyasa Peeth.

Swami Niranjanananda was born as a result of special sadhana performed by his guru, Swami Satyananda, rather than due to karmic compulsion. He left home to live with his guru at the age of six. At the age of eleven, his first overseas posting was Belfast where bombings were a daily occurrence due to the hatred between different forces identifying

[15] Bernard Sullivan in collaboration with Dr Uncle Stan Grant Sr AM, *Yindyamarra Yambuman: Respecting Everything*, Bernard Sullivan's PhD at Charles Sturt University, Australia, 2016

themselves as Roman Catholics and Protestant Christians. This ensured an early understanding of the urgent need for religious tolerance in the world today. He continued touring the world, teaching yoga for forty years. Simultaneously, in Munger, Bihar, he was guiding the experiences of his disciples and residential students from around the world in yoga, Advaita Vedanta and tantric traditions.

Bihar School of Yoga has successfully propagated yoga in the last fifty years. This has freed him to establish Sannyasa Peeth and move deeper into the traditional sadhanas of sannyasa. An interesting aspect of the training Swami Niranjanananda's disciples have received is the revival of the Poorva Mimamsa traditions of yajna, with women and even foreigners performing the rituals. Simultaneously the yoga tradition continues to promote and explain the path of yoga as a fundamentally non-religious discipline and lifestyle suitable for the various peoples of the world.

In 2011 Swami Niranjanananda conducted a daily yajna to the chanting of *Durga Sahasra Naama*, the thousand names of Durga. From 2012 to 2014, there was a daily yajna to Katyayani, a benevolent form of Durga, as part of a three-year sannyasa training program being given to an international group of over one hundred aspirants. With the help of research by respected pandits, he has conducted the Sudarshana Homa, Narayana Astra Yajna, Brahma Astra Yajna and Pashupata Astra Yajna, which had not been performed for centuries. It has proved beyond doubt to the people involved, that the powerful rituals of the ancient teachings are still relevant today. The sadhana is very powerful, necessitating prolonged concentration, and resulting in a continual psychic cleansing process and an orientation towards divinity or, one might say, a tendency to see Ishwara pranidhana as the most practical and realistic way of dealing with life.

So would Shankara have approved of the new developments? The pure aspects of ritual have been retained; the aim is not to attain pleasures for oneself either here or in

heaven but rather to uplift humanity, protect the earth and ultimately to attain self-realization. Although the young Shankara who commented on Vyasa's injunctions may have objected, the Shankara who sang the *Manisha Panchaka* in praise of the chandala of Varanasi would have approved. In the introduction to the *Brahma Sutra*, Shankara says:

> The absolute Reality, that is the self . . . is beyond hunger and thirst, free from such differentiation as brahmana, kshatriya, etc., and is not subject to birth and death.[16]

In his teachings, Shankara emphasized the same atma in all and opposed strategies designed to keep divine grace in the hands of the privileged few.

The sannyasin is actually an outcaste, having renounced the symbols of varna and social commitment for devotion to guru and paramarthika satta. However, coming full circle from Shankara's early resistance to the rituals of Poorva Mimamsa, today we see gurus in his Dashnami parampara skilfully employing the complex rituals of Mimamsa and tantra to build a ferry across samsara, a raft for all humankind including, as Swami Dayananda would put it, "even the lowest of the low".

[16] P. George Victor, *Life and Teachings of Adi Shankaracharya*, D. K. Printworld, New Delhi, India, 2002, p. 143

10

What Did He Write?

Besides the biographies recounting Shankara's victories in all directions, the *Digvijayas*, we have also the autobiographies, the spontaneous testimonies to his life, personality and spiritual stance presented in his own written compositions. Which then are the texts and songs written by Shankaracharya? We can present various lists compiled and debated by the sannyasa tradition and by modern scholarship and look through them for traces of their author, like forensic scientists sifting subtle evidences of the vanished perpetrator.

From Pande and others we can form a timeline of works generally thought to be written by Shankara and we can now relate this to Shankara's life story.[1]

At home

- *Devi Bhujangam* (28 verses) – when nursed by the Devi, before five years of age.
- *Kanakadhara Stotram* – at about seven years, which invoked a rain of golden amalakas for a poor woman.
- *Bala Bodha Samgraha (Bala Bodhini)* – in his father's gurukul.
- *Achyutashtakam* – when rededicating a temple to Sri Krishna, at about ten years of age, before leaving home.

[1] Govind Chandra Pande, *Life and Thought of Shankaracharya*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, India, 1994, p. 109

- *Maya Panchakam (Vedanta Pancha Prakarani* or *Maya Vivarana)* – on the eve of his departure from home.

While with Guru Govindapada

- Four small poems: *Narmada Ashtakam*, *Pratah Smaranam*, *Upadesha Panchakam (Sadhana Upadesha Panchakam)*, *Yati Panchakam (Kaupina Panchakam).*
- Three popular philosophical works: *Vakya Vritti* (53 verses), *Vivekachudamani* (581 slokas explaining the fundamentals of Vedanta in a dialogue between guru and disciple), and *Dashasloki* (10 slokas).
- Also two prose works, *Atmanatma Viveka* and *Panchi Karanam* (which has a commentary attributed to Sureshwara).

While in the Himalayas

(Some of the following works would be allocated to his second lifespan.)

- *Shat Pada Stotram*, *Hari Stuti*, *Shata Sloki (Vedanta Kesari)*, *Svatma Nirupanam*, *Prapanchasara Tantra (Paramartha Sarasangraha)*, *Praudhanubhuti*, *Prakarana*, *Atma Pooja (Para Pooja)*, *Dakshinamurti Stotram*, *Dhanya Stotram (Dhanya Ashtakam).*

While in Kashi (Varanasi)

(Some of the following works would also be allocated to his second lifespan.)

- The vivarana on *Vyasa's Yoga Sutra Bhashya* shortly after meeting his guru. Then the commentaries were completed on: *Mandukya Upanishad Karikas (Gaudapada Mandukya Karikas)*, *Vishnu Sahasranama*, *Sanatsujatiya*.
- The *Prasthanatrayi:* (although he also worked on this in Badrinath, according to authorities there[2]) his commentaries on:

[2] *The Week*, Adishankara: Retracing a Great Journey, Dec 25 double issue, 2011, p. 26

1. The *Brahma Sutra*
2. The *Bhagavad Gita*
3. The ten principal Upanishads: *Isha*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Prashna*, *Aitareya*, *Taittiriya*, *Mundaka*, *Mandukya*, *Chhandogya*, *Brihadaranyaka*.

Also, though probably in the second lifespan: *Kashi Panchakam*, *Annapurna Ashtakam*, *Manikarnika Ashtakam*, *Kaala Bhairava Ashtakam* and the *Manisha Panchakam*.

Second lifespan

- *Atma Bodha* – for Sanandana.
- *Ganga Ashtakam*, *Prayaga Ashtakam*, *Yamuna Ashtakam*, *Lakshmi Narasimha Pancharatnam* and the *Vedasara Shiva Stotram* – on the route to Prayag.
- *Tattwa Bodha (Tattwa Upadesha)* – for Prabhakara, who was the father of Shankara's disciple Hastamalaka.
- *Guru Ashtakam* – on the death of his guru.
- *Eka Sloki* – for Udanka.
- *Saundarya Lahari* – received in the Himalayas from Lord Shiva.

Sifting the evidence

There are hundreds of written works that have been attributed to Adi Shankaracharya. The critical selection here makes an interesting list, and quite modest, including only sixty-four works. Even then, although Pande feels sure Shankara wrote the *Brihadaranyaka Bhashya* and the *Taittiriya Bhashya* (except for its introductory verses), because of the vartikas of Sureshwara on them, he thinks Shankara's authorship of the *Mandukya Upanishad Bhashya* and the *Mandukya Upanishad Karikas* is suspect.

Pande also notes that there are three commentaries on yoga attributed to Shankara[3], the *Raja Yoga Bhashya* on *Mandala Brahman Upanishad*, the *Vijrimbhita Yoga Sutra Bhashya*,

[3] Govind Chandra Pande, *Life and Thought of Shankaracharya*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, India, 1994, p. 110

and the *Yoga Sutra Bhashya Vivarana*. He states that this third is genuine, according to many, including Hacker and Mayeda (and Leggett). We have included it because Shankara was undoubtedly a siddha yogi. He feels there are no serious advocates of authenticity of the: *Uttara Gita*, *Shiva Gita*, *Brahma Gita*, *Lalita Sahasranama*, *Suta Samhita*, *Sandhya Bhashya*, *Gayatri Bhashya* and the *Lalita Trishati Bhashya*, but tantric practitioners feel the *Lalita Trishati* is definitely Shankara's.

Which are genuine?

Other sources give more texts. How to tell which are genuine? Swami Mukhyananda considers that all Shankara's major writing were completed by the age of twenty-four and refers to the *Shankara Grantha Ratnavali* in Bengali, which says 153 works are attributed to him. They are collected in three major categories:[4]

1. *Bhashya Granthas*	(Commentaries)	23
2. *Prakarana and Upadesha Granthas*	(Teachings)	54
3. *Stotra-Stuti Granthas*	(Hymns)	76

While his major commentaries have been subjected to the most rigorous analysis by modern scholars, most seem to ignore his small songs.

General guidelines are that those with anachronisms are not Shankara's, nor those with less than superb Sanskrit, nor are those that oppose his known lines of thought. This last guideline should be approached cautiously as Shankara modified his views and methods during the course of his training and mission, and this helps understand his training, character and mindset. Regarding Buddhism, for example, we should consider the implications of his writing the commentary on Gaudapada's *Mandukya Upanishad Karikas*.

In several disputed works, the Puranas are used as the sources, which is thought contrary to his normal practice.

[4] Swami Mukhyananda, *An Interpretation of the Life & Teachings of Shri Shankaracharya (Elucidatory & Reconciliatory)*, 2nd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Ernakulam, India, 1998, pp. 22–23

Normal? A skilful teacher would be teaching according to the levels and needs of his students and adapting his references as well as his style and language to the group and the region. Pande notes that the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* and the *Bhagavad Gita* are Shankara's most frequently quoted texts. He explains that the *Kenopanishad* has two bhashyas: *Vakya Bhashya* and *Pada Bhashya*, both pass Mayeda's test but *Pada Bhashya* has the better arguments where the two contradict each other. He doubts the commentaries on *Kaushitaki*, *Kaivalya*, *Maitriyanyiya*, *Gopalatapaniya*, *Maha Narayana*, *Paramahamsa Upanishad*, *Sakatayana* and the *Mandala Brahma Upanishad*.[5]

Recently, rigorous linguistic tests have been applied. Modern analysts have placed great emphasis on the particular meanings Shankara gives to certain words. Pande has great respect for Mayeda's analysis that Shankara has eight terms which he always uses in the same way and which are used differently by other teachers. On the basis of such considerations he concludes that the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, the *Brihadaranyaka Bhashya*, the *Taittiriya Bhashya*, apart from its introductory verses, and the commentary on the *Mandukya Upanishad Karikas* are certainly by Shankaracharya.

Bhashya on the Gaudapada Karika

The karika on the *Mandukya Upanishad* by Gaudapada is important because the relationship of Shankara and his guru's lineage is essential in understanding both his training and his mission. The oral tradition of the Dashnamis has no hesitation in defining Shankara as the disciple of Gaudapada, and naming him as the author of the brilliant sub-commentary. However, in modern scholarship this is still questioned.

Darling asserts that whoever wrote the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* also wrote the *Gaudapada Karika Bhashya*[6], and in this he is influenced by analysis based on linguistic factors,

[5] Govind Chandra Pande, *Life and Thought of Shankaracharya*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, India, 1994, pp. 105–107

[6] Gregory J. Darling, *An Evaluation of the Vedantic Critique of Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, India, 1987, p. 112 ff.

as are Alston, Hacker and Mayeda, who all assert Shankara wrote both the *Gaudapada Karikas* and the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*. Darling explains that Mayeda[7] bases his studies on Shankara's usage of eight particular terms: avidya, namarupa, maya, Ishwara, ananda, vivarta, Shiva and Vyasa, and claims that his works can be recognized by this criteria. It allows him to say confidently that the commentary on the *Gaudapada Karikas* is written by the same person who wrote the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*.

The Buddhist and the tantric traditions independently confirm the deep connection between Shankara, Gaudapadacharya and their traditions.

Mandan Mishra: Sureshwaracharya

Tradition says that Mandan Mishra lost in debate with Shankara, becoming Shankara's disciple Sureshwaracharya, and that Shankara then invited his newest and brilliant disciple to make several explanatory sub-commentaries, *vartikas*, on the major bhashyas and other works that he had written. Because the authorship of Sureshwara's books does not raise so much controversy as surrounds Shankara's, this is taken as firmer ground. The fact that Sureshwaracharya commented on a particular text has often been taken as confirming it to be genuinely written by Shankara. So what did Sureshwara write? He began a vartika on Shankara's bhashya, on the *Brahma Sutras*; but this project proved impractical due to the jealousy of other disciples. So Shankara asked him to write an independent treatise setting out the salient points of Advaita to prove that he understood and had sincerely adopted the Advaita Vedanta philosophy. This project was successfully completed, so he wrote:

1. The *Naishkarmya Siddhi*.
2. A vartika on Shankara's bhashya on the *Taittiriya Upanishad* of the *Krishna Yajurveda*.

[7] Sengaku Mayeda, 'On the Author of the Mandukyopanisad – and the Gaudapadiya-bhasya', *Adyar Library Bulletin* 31–32 (1967–68) p. 75

3. A vartika on his bhashya on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* of the *Shukla Yajurveda*.
4. A vartika called *Manasollasa* on the *Dakshinamurti Stotra*.
5. A vartika on the *Panchi Karanam*.
6. *Balakreeda*, a commentary on the *Yajnavalkya Smriti*.

We have an end date for Sureshwara, who is believed to be Mandan Mishra, the former disciple of Kumarilla and the author of such works as the *Brihadaranyaka Vartika*, since he was quoted by the Jain scholar Vidyananda, who probably lived in the second half of the eighth century (750–800 AD), in *Ashtasahasri* regarding Jinasena who wrote during 783–833 AD.

Shankara and tantra

Sir John Woodroffe firmly supports the antiquity of *Saundarya Lahari* and its probable authorship by Adi Shankaracharya, because it has got such a large number of commentaries in different parts of India and concludes:

> The earliest commentators, by their manner, leave us in no doubt as to the fact of Samkara's authorship.[8]

The prevalent view of the Dashnami tradition has no problem seeing Shankara a propagator of Advaita Vedanta and then becoming an intense bhakta of the Devi and a tantric siddha.[9] The Shankaracharyas today, usually accept as authentic the larger corpus of Shankara writings, whether the texts emphasize Advaita, bhakti or tantra. Shankara is in fact hailed by the tantric tradition as the founder of rituals and esoteric practices involving the Sri Yantra which he installed in many of the temples and maths around India, and *Saundarya Lahari* is intrinsically connected with Sri Yantra.

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[8] Sir John Woodroffe, *Is'opanisad also Wave of Bliss and The Greatness of S'iva*, Ganesh & Co., Madras, India, 1971, pp. 95–96

[9] W.A. Cenkner, *Tradition of Teachers; Sankara and the Jagadgurus Today*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, India, 1983, p. x

Saundarya Lahari is not the only tantric text attributed to him. Brooks accepts Shankara, along with his paramguru Gaudapada, as the leading figure in Sri Vidya, and therefore as the most likely author of several disputed tantric texts. Although he mentions the *Prapanchasara* may not be by the 'original' Shankara, he points out that most members of the Shakta tradition, as well as Shankara's own Dashnamis, believe he composed the *Prapanchasara Tantra*, as well as the *Lalita Bhashya* and *Saundarya Lahari*, and likewise attribute the *Srividyaratna Sutras* and *Subhagodaya* to Gaudapadacharya.[10]

The main objection to Shankara's authorship of *Prapanchasara* seems to be its acceptance of the theories of shabdabrahman, a position which Shankara rejects in his *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*. However, the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, although taken by many as definitive of who Shankara is, may be a composite work according to literary analysis. As we will discuss in Chapter 14, it has definitely been revised. Parts of it relate to the early Shankara, and parts after his early life expired, whereas his works on tantra come later in his development. Bhaskaraya uses the *Prapanchasara* to support his views on mantra, confidently assuming Shankara to be the author, and attributes a vivarana on it to Padmapada.

How much can one man do?

Did Shankara write the texts, dictate them, guide his disciples to write them, inspire them? Did someone write them independently, then sign Shankara's name? Did he write a basic text at one stage of his life and then review it later? There is no way to say finally what happened so long ago.

Although hundreds of compositions have been traditionally hailed as Adi Shankaracharya's, recent scholars have suggested that no one person could have written so

[10] Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Srividya Sakta Tantrism in South India*, Manohar, New Delhi, India, 1996, pp. 43–44

many texts. Nevertheless, within India, around one hundred and fifty texts are still strongly defended as his. We know he was travelling the length and breadth of India. From Kaladi to Omkareshwara is 1,675 km; from Omkareshwara to Varanasi, to Badrinath to Prayag is 3,033 km; from Prayag to Sri Sailam to Sringeri is 2,000 km; from Kaladi to Kanchi is 591 km. So that's 7,299 km just on documented major routes[11], not counting the numerous side trips and meandering village paths. Most of this was done on foot, or maybe bullock cart, elephant (and he is said to have flown using yogic siddhis when tending to his dying mother in Kaladi). He was probably teaching and writing instructional tracts, and definitely composing hymns and singing a lot of the time, so the fact that some works are not known as his all over India is also no argument for their being disqualified as his compositions.

More than one Shankara?

Various modern scholars ask us to consider that the ideas and conclusions in many of the smaller and less well known texts attributed to Shankara differ from his major works, also that the language and style varies. As a person, however, he was maturing, and as he learned and gained in experience, surely he would present different views from time to time according to the situation and the needs of the people he was addressing.

Still, we have to consider the following:

- All the heads of the maths are given the title 'Shankaracharya', so there could be genuine confusion.
- Some people may deliberately propagate their own ideas by claiming his authorship.
- As we know that he had deadly enemies, maybe some opponents composed works and attributed them to him to discredit him, or alternatively, claimed that some of his works are authored by others.

[11] *The Week*, Adishankara: Retracing a Great Journey, Dec 25 double issue, 2011

- We could accept that he is an avatara, taking birth from time to time and updating his work to complete the same mission of holding us on course, whenever the prevailing conditions demand it.

When we consider the depth and esoteric understanding revealed in the wealth of beautiful commentaries, original works, poetry and bhajans he is said to have composed at specific points of his life, we realize we are dealing with a siddha. It is difficult to believe a lot of different people had the ability to write them; such an enlightened being is rare. Also, if we look at saints such as Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, we find he authored hundreds of books and pamphlets, besides practising as a doctor, training disciples and touring India. The enlightened being has genius and siddhi and is capable of accomplishing the incredible.

On the other hand, would persons with the temperament and genius sufficient to write these works sign someone else's name to them? If so, why? Maybe persons with similar insight and stature of yoga siddhis wrote them and consigned them to the name of Adi Shankaracharya out of respect or from devotion? Perhaps someone 'composed' something beautiful but truly felt that it was a gift from the master, and that they had been just the medium? Well, in that case, who is to say they are wrong? Such transmission is part of the yogic tradition. When Shankara is said to be a yogi of such stature that he can revive and inhabit the body of a dead king, who is to say he cannot write through a disciple? Such authorship is as an accepted part of the tantric tradition:

> The Ramayana of Valmiki and the works of Kalidas were not results of human effort but of the divine hand of Shakti, who wrote those words after overpowering their minds.[12]

[12] Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati, *Sri Saundarya Lahari: The Descent*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 2008), p. 166

It is accepted that Vyasa incarnated in different yugas to continue his work (hence all his different names), maybe Shankara has incarnated several times in this yuga to continue his task.

Let us look, however, at a more detailed list of works generally considered to be his, and begin to get a picture of which texts are widely accepted as his, and which are more controversially assigned to him. The next three chapters will look at the three main categories of Shankara's compositions: philosophical, literary and teaching – his head, heart and hands.

11

The Commentaries

Shankara's *Bhashya Granthas*, commentaries on the major scriptures, are so revered by the tradition that the ten major Upanishads are so called because of his commentary on them. As we shall see, tradition says that he commented also on smaller texts. In this chapter, Shankaracharya's authorship of one of the more controversial texts, the vivarana on Vyasa's commentary on the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, which was recently found and championed by Leggett as being genuinely by Adi Shankaracharya, will be discussed in some detail. We will also look at a few of Shankara's ideas expressed in the commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*. These two texts have been chosen because they highlight a whole side of Shankara that we can relate to, which is relevant to the needs of today, and which has not been much discussed before: his connection with yoga.

The character of a person is revealed by their writing. Even in fiction, one gets a feel of the personality of the author from their works, whether it be a Bronte or a Baudelaire. Similarly, the person who wrote the commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, or the vivarana on Vyasa's *Yoga Sutra Bhashya*, and who is considered to be the Adi Shankaracharya, reveals his own character – his inner life, views, feelings and insights, which may have been 'inherited' or acquired due to external events that he lives through; it isn't just a matter of looking at the thought expressed in words.

What did he really write?

Many commentaries have been attributed to him by the sannyasa tradition. Whether they are genuinely by him is still a matter of controversy. The *Shankara Grantha Ratnavali*, written in Bengali is referred to by Swami Mukhyananda.[1] The 23 texts it lists as having *bhashyas*, commentaries, by Shankara, form the first column of the following table. Lists given by Swami Chinmayananda[2] and by P. George Victor[3] comprise the second and the third columns. Texts not in *Shankara Grantha Ratnavali* but mentioned by P.G. Victor are listed in alphabetical order within the table.

Texts with commentaries by Shankara

An Interpretation	***Sankara the Missionary***	***Life & Teachings***
lists 23 commentaries on:	*lists 17*	*lists 17*
1. *Aitareya Upanishad*	Yes	Yes
2. *Apastambhiya Dharma Shastra*		
Not listed		*Atharvashikha Upanishad*
Not listed		*Atharvashira Upanishad*
3. *Bhagavad Gita*	Y	Probably
4. *Brahma Sutra (Vedanta Sutras)*	Y	Y
5. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*	Y	Y

[1] Swami Mukhyananda, *An Interpretation of the Life & Teachings of Shri Shankaracharya (Elucidatory & Reconciliatory)*, 2nd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Ernakulam, India, 1998, pp. 155–57

[2] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara the Missionary*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, India, 1978, pp. 214–217

[3] P. George Victor, *Life and Teachings of Adi Shankaracharya*, D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, India, 2002, pp. 49–51

6. *Chhandogya Upanishad*	Y	Y
7. *Gayatri*		
8. *Hastamalakiya*	Y	Y
9. *Ishavasya Upanishad*	Y	Y
10. *Katha Upanishad*	Y	Y
11. *Kena Upanishad (Pada Bhashya)*	Y	Y
12. *Kena Upanishad (Vakya Bhashya)*		
13. *Lalita Trishati*	Y	
14. *Mandukya Up and Karika by Gaudapada*	Y	
15. *Mundaka Upanishad*	Y	Y
16. *Narasimhatapini Upanishad*	Y	*Y (Narasimhotta-ratapani)*
17. *Prashna Upanishad*	Y	Y
18. *Samkhya Karika by Gaudapada*		
19. *Sanatsujatiya Upanishad*	Y	
20. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*		Y
21. *Taittiriya Upanishad*	Y	Y
Not listed		*Vajra Suchya Up*
22. *Vishnu Sahasranama*	Y	
23. *Vivarana on Vyasa's Yoga Sutra Bhashya*		

We will look at two of these texts in greater detail: the recently found commentary on Patanjali, and the only recently challenged commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*.

I. VIVARANA ON VYASA'S BHASHYA ON THE YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

In the vast storehouse of philosophical works, commentaries and verses by Shankara, his *vivarana*, sub-commentary, on Vyasa's *bhashya*, commentary, on the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali had gone unnoticed until Trevor Leggett launched his thesis.[4] It is a vivarana on a topic thought not to be highly esteemed by Vedantins, perhaps because people interpret Shankara's words in the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* as a summary dismissal of yoga.

His major philosophical works such as the commentaries on the Upanishads and the *Brahma Sutras* have been examined meticulously and provide the basis of his reputation. In contrast, his vivarana on Vedavyasa's commentary on the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali received scant attention although it provides a wealth of information on Shankara's views on yoga, particularly raja yoga.

Leggett points out there is no reference to Vachaspati or his work in the vivarana, which suggests it must have been written before 850 AD; but, if we pause to think, this work could be much older. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* have been around for a long time. Legend places Patanjali amongst the mythological heroes of yoga way back before the birth of Christ, and so it could be Adi Shankaracharya who wrote this vivarana.

The full text of the commentary has been printed with an English translation by Leggett. He found the Sanskrit text printed in the form of a single manuscript, No. 94 in the Madras Government Oriental Series, 1952.[5] Its discovery and the ensuing debate raised a storm of controversy. The vivarana is cohesive with Shankara's philosophy and style, especially in his commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras* and the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. If the manuscript is genuinely by

[4] Trevor Leggett, *Sankara on the Yoga Sutras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, 1st Indian ed., Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, India, 1992

[5] Sastraratnakara Polakam Sri Rama Sastri & S.R. Krishnamurti Sastri (crit. ed.), *Patanjali-Yogasutra-Bhasya Vivaranam of Shankara-Bhagavatpada*, Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras, India, 1952, pp. vii–viii

Shankara, it challenges the view that yoga and Vedanta are incompatible and throws light on the attitudes to yoga that Shankara had at different stages of his development and is probably an early work reflecting his early yogic training and initial philosophical stance. It confirms the importance of yoga in Shankara's lineage.

Yoga and Vedanta

After Shankara, the Advaita Vedanta tradition split into two schools: the Bhamati school and the Vivarana school. Both of these admit that meditation is necessary for the vast majority of aspirants, but the Vivarana school holds that for a fully competent person, hearing the maha vakya is itself enough for immediate experience. The implication is that yoga practices are for lesser aspirants, and scholars therefore thought that Shankara was uninterested in yoga.

Perhaps this view that Shankara himself was uninterested in yoga initially caused people to doubt that the vivarana is genuinely his, but an investigation of Shankara's writings shows many positive references to yoga practices, besides the blistering criticisms he sometimes levelled at the accompanying Samkhya philosophy.

In the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, Vyasa's sutras are so terse that they are at times almost impossible to understand. It's like a code where the keys are missing to the average reader, and that is why it was necessary for Shankara to explain what Vyasa was referring to or intending to communicate. After refuting the Samkhyan philosophy, Vyasa merely says: *Etena yogah pratyuktah* – "Hereby is refuted yoga." (BSB: 2:1:3)

Shankara loyally follows Vyasa's lead in dismissing yoga, but in his commentary on this sutra he also explains the reason why Vyasa had to deal with yoga separately from Samkhya in *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* (2:1:3) – because of its usefulness:

> *Shankara's Vedantin says*: Because an additional doubt does crop up, Yoga having been enjoined in the Vedas as a means to realization of full illumination, as in 'The Self

> is to be realized – to be heard of, reflected on, and profoundly meditated upon.' (Br. II. iv. 5) . . . Moreover in the Shvetashvatara Upanishad we come across an elaborate injunction about Yoga, comprising the arrangement of seat and the rest, which commences with the verse, 'Holding the body in balance, with the three limbs (chest, neck and head) erect' (II. 8). And thousands of Vedic signs indicative of Yoga are met with, as in, 'The holding of the senses and organs unperturbed and under control is called Yoga by the adepts' (Ka. II. iii. 11), 'Getting fully this knowledge (of Brahman) and the process of Yoga' (Ka. II. iii. 18), and so on. (BSB: 2:1:3)

So here Shankara definitely steps in to make it clear this is a philosophical dismissal and not a repudiation of yoga as an aid to enlightenment: he actively defends yoga from being dismissed along with Samkhya. In the debate he distinguishes between the Samkhya-based yoga philosophy and yoga practice, and emphasizes that the practice of yoga is enjoined by the scriptures, quoting at length from the Upanishads.[6]

So in the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* it is not the actual practices of yoga that Shankara objects to, for they culminate in meditation (on the pranava, *Aum*, for example) which is advocated in the *Mandukya Upanishad* and other Upanishads. Rather, he objects to the Samkhyan framework in which they are expressed. And in the vivarana, the most significant original contributions erupt in the discussion of Aum.[7] The places at which extra explanations are given significantly enlarge the role of Ishwara and the meditation on Aum. The stress placed on meditation with *Aum* is firmly based on the teachings of the Upanishads. For example, the whole *Mandukya Upanishad* is devoted to the explanation of *Aum*.

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[6] Swami Gambhirananda (trans.), *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Sri Shankaracarya*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, India, 1993, p. 305

[7] Swami Yogakanti Saraswati, *The Contemporary Position of Yoga in the Dashnami Tradition of Sri Adi Shankaracharya*, M. Phil. Thesis for Sydney University, Australia, 1996, p. 72

Such instructions are repeated in *Maitri Upanishad* (6:3) – "Meditate on the Self as *Aum*", *Taittiriya Upanishad* (1:8) – "*Aum* is Brahma" and (2:23:3) – "*Aum* is indeed all this".

The Panchadashi loophole

In the *Panchadashi*, Vidyaranya makes it clear how the philosophy of Samkhya (and yoga in Patanjali's sutras) can be made compatible with Advaita Vedanta:

> The Vedantins will accept the doctrines of the followers of Sankhya and Yoga provided they give up the doctrine of the existence of distinctions in Atman, the doctrine of the reality of the world, and the doctrine of Isvara being a separate and special Purusa.[8]

The discussion of Ishwara takes up one-third of the total vivarana. This definitely reflects the interests of its author because devotion to Ishwara is not part of the Samkhyan philosophy, and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* cover the whole topic in only seven sutras:

> Or from devotion to the Lord (Ishwara, asamprajnata samadhi can be attained).
> Ishwara (God) is a special soul (Purusha) untouched by afflictions, acts, their traces and their fruit.
> In Ishwara there is the seed of limitless omniscience.
> Not being limited by time He is the guru of the earliest gurus.
> Aum is the word denoting Ishwara.
> That (the word Aum) should be recited repeatedly while dwelling mentally on its meaning.
> From that practice the consciousness turns inward and the obstacles are overcome.[9] (YS 1:23–29).

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[8] Swami Swahananda, *Pancadasi of Sri Vidyaranya Swami*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1980, p. 210

[9] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Four Chapters on Freedom: Commentary on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 1976), pp. 78–87

In the commentary on sutra 1:25, the vivarana fulfils the third of Vidyaranya's criteria. In debate against opponents who would place limits on Ishwara as though he was just one purusha among many, it defines Ishwara as an omniscient, omnipotent being.

Actually, the description of Ishwara in the vivarana seems to equate Ishwara and Brahman. The style is very similar to other texts by Shankara, quoting various Upanishads to describe Ishwara.[10] The very same passage from *Katha Upanishad* (2:21) – "Without a body, in all the bodies" – is quoted by Shankara in *Upadesha Sahasri* (v. 37) in order to describe Brahman, the Supreme Self, as identical with one's true self. One of the most striking features of the vivarana is that it uses quotations from the Upanishads to a much greater extent than Vyasa's commentary. The quotations particularly favour the *Brihadaranyaka* and *Chhandogya Upanishads*, as well as the *Bhagavad Gita*. And these texts are the ones most often referred to by Shankara in other works.[11]

Aum: Ishwara and Brahman

For Shankara, Brahman, Ishwara and atma are all one. The lack of difference between the jiva, Ishwara and Brahman is the experience obtained in samadhi, for in that state there are far less fluctuations of the mind to obscure the underlying state of awareness. Vyasa's commentary on the *Yoga Sutras* investigates the relationship between *Aum* and Ishwara:

> Does the power of expression of this syllable Om arise from conventional usage, or is it something fixed, like the relation between a lamp and its light.[12]

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[10] Trevor Leggett, *Sankara on the Yoga Sutras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, 1st Indian ed., Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, India, 1992, p. 107 ff.

[11] W. Cenkner, *A Tradition of Teachers: Shankara and the Jagatgurus Today*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, India, 1983, pp. 31–32

[12] Trevor Leggett, *Sankara on the Yoga Sutras– A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, 1st Indian ed., Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, India, 1992, p. 132

Vyasa's conclusion is that it is fixed. The author of the vivarana goes to some lengths in his commentary on Patanjali's sutra (1:27) to support this point quoting *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (5:1:1) – "Aum space is Brahman", *Taitiriya Upanishad* (1:8:1) – "Brahman is called Aum", the *Bhagavad Gita* (17:23) – "Aum is That Truth (or Existence)" and the first mantra of *Vishnu Sahasranama* – "Aum Vishnu is all".

By emphasizing the importance of the sadhanas given in the *Yoga Sutras* involving Aum and Ishwara, and giving an interpretation that equates Aum, Ishwara and Brahman, the vivarana disarms many of the arguments against yoga which arise from its association with Samkhya.

One major point of discord between Shankara and Samkhya is not actually represented in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*: the atheism of Samkhya. Certainly Patanjali is not preaching or defending Samkhya in his *Yoga Sutras*, but simply using that ancient philosophy as a structure from which he can explain the methodology of yoga and the results of yoga sadhana: its side effects, the vibhootis, and the progression through the samadhis until liberation from samsara is achieved. Feuerstein comments:

> One ought to consider seriously the possibility that Patanjali's firm adherence to theism could well have its roots in the actual inner experience of the yogins.[13]

Then there is the assumption that the world is real. Samkhya philosophy may hold this position, but the third and fourth chapters of Patanjali detail how a yogi can transform the world through samyama. Shankara and his gurus are traditionally recognized as siddhas in the yogic and tantric traditions. That means they were known to be able to change empirical reality. It makes Shankara uniquely capable

[13] G.A. Feuerstein, *The Essence of Yoga, A Contribution to the Psycho-history of Indian Civilization*, Rider & Co., London, UK, 1974, p. 90

of understanding and explaining the issue of reality.[14] The vivarana on Vyasa's bhashya on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* also clearly combines tenets from Advaita Vedanta with such an intimate knowledge of yogic techniques.

The missing link

So, although the vivarana was not easily accepted as being genuinely one of Shankara's commentaries when Leggett first brought attention to it, it is now fairly widely accepted. Pande argues:

> Shankara cannot be said to have been really hostile to Yoga. In fact, he refers to the *Yogashastra* at several places in the *BSB* respectfully. He points out that the Vedantic rejection of yoga is partial, not total . . . The fact is that the *Vivarana* is not written from an orthodox Sankhya-yoga point of view. It questions the concept of *Pradhana*, as well as the plurality of the Selves. It modifies the Yoga concept of Ishvara. Thus the *Vivarana* appears to be an attempt to understand the Yogashastra in conformity with Vedanta.[15]

The southern tradition of yoga also hails Shankara as a great teacher of yoga, and T.K.V. Desikacharya, speaks confidently of Shankara having commented on the *Yoga Sutras*.[16]

We have noted that Shankara's deep knowledge of yoga was inherited as part of his guru's lineage; Gaudapada and Govindapada both being widely acclaimed as yogins of the Patanjali school. Shankara's commentary on Gaudapada's *Mandukya Karika Bhashya* could be the link between Shankara the yogi and Shankara the Vedantin. Not only does the vivarana specifically lay aside some of the main objections

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[14] Swami Yogakanti Saraswati, *The Contemporary Position of Yoga in the Dashnami Tradition of Sri Adi Shankaracharya*, p. 76

[15] Govind Chandra Pande, *Life and Thought of Shankaracharya*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, India, 1994, p. 111

[16] T.K.V. Desikacharya, *The Heart of Yoga: Developing a Personal Practice*, Inner Tradition, Bombay, India, 1995, pp. xvi–xvii

of Vedanta to yogic philosophy, it also echoes Shankara's known lines of thought and style. One could argue that one of Shankara's disciples wrote the vivarana on Patanjali, not necessarily Shankara himself, but it has now been analyzed linguistically as well as philosophically, and Paul Hacker's linguistic tests show it could well be an authentic work of Shankara's. Indisputably, it shows the way a siddha yogi of the Patanjali tradition has fully adopted Advaita Vedanta.

The vivarana gives us the missing link in Shankara's personality; the bridge between the philosopher whose Dashnami tradition still works within restrictions of caste and gender (although propagating Advaita Vedanta) and the one who advocates yoga and tantric practices in order to experience the ineffable realties that they transmit. This vivarana is an example of how the techniques of yoga have been adapted into a philosophy distinct from Samkhya by a very talented commentator. Roger Bodman argues that the Yoga Upanishads are probably creations of Shankara's maths:

> Yoga came to be incorporated as a comprehensive system within the tradition of the Upanishads through the creation of the Yoga Upanishads. There was most likely a conscious effort to maintain this tradition of learning and scholarship and to keep the teachings of Vedanta relevant and current as yoga developed.[17]

Rewiring the brain

Although Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* are primarily aimed at mind management – so that one can transcend it and enter samadhi – his ashtanga yoga begins by building up habitual self-restraints, and advocates regular, prolonged practice of yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara and different sadhanas of hatha and karma yoga. Such practices establish

[17] Roger Bodman, *Yoga and the Upanishads*, Thesis for BA (Hons), La Trobe University, Australia, 2005, p. 10

the essential qualities of the sadhana chatushtaya in the personality of the yoga sadhaka.

In teaching texts such as *Aparoksha Anubhuti*, Shankara confirms this preoccupation with endless practice. Practising awareness and behavioural disciplines along with physical techniques is known to produce particular changes in perception, attitude and world view. This is the foundation of yoga, and the blossoming of neuroscience has led to startling verifications of the principles underlying yoga sadhana.

In *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain*, we hear of research on mice that were allowed to run in a wheel, and ones that weren't able to:

> At the 2004 annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience, Brian Christie of the University of British Colombia found that individual neurons in the wheel-running mice "are dramatically different" from those in more sedentary mice . . . "In effect we are showing that there are structural reasons for the enhanced learning and memory capacity that we and others have observed in animals that exercise." The experiments, he said, "lay the foundation for establishing exercise-induced changes in brain structure as a viable (way) to combat the deleterious effects of aging" and might explain the beneficial effects on brain function of leading an active life.[18]

If a balanced yoga sadhana is regularly practised, the brain can be resculpted, more neuronal information can be transmitted and retained, improving clarity of mind and memory. This improved connection between the brain cells increases dramatically, which in turn benefits health and creativity.

This new perspective also makes it clearer why Shankara, who we think of as a jnani, doesn't only advocate nididhyasana. He also admits to the efficacy of the doctrine of action – karma

[18] Sharon Begley, *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain*, Ballentine Books, New York, USA, 2007, pp. 68–69

yoga – and not only in the sense of performing yajna and related rituals, but also living an active, engaged, dynamic lifestyle performing nishkama karma yoga while maintaining vairagya and self-control. Maybe it also explains why people over fifty were advised to leave the comforts of home and go to the forest or go on pilgrimage to the sacred places of India.

Masters have to explain what is happening to students who undergo sometimes dramatic, frightening or exhilarating shifts in perception and perspective. Because yoga is now being practised quite widely by people from cultures with very little background in what to expect, the gurus of today have to reassure practitioners about the 'reality' of their new perceptions. When Sri Swami Satyananda was asked, "Is it normal to hear voices talking to us when doing meditation? Schizophrenics hear voices. What is the difference?" he answered:

> The inner voice is heard by everybody, so schizophrenics also hear the inner voice. In my opinion, you may not agree of course, schizophrenics have more developed human minds, though because of this, they are not able to adjust to the idiosyncrasies of our society. If the saints and saviours, including Jesus Christ, were born during this century, and if they were exposed to the psychologists, they would probably be called schizophrenics.
>
> When you hear the inner voice, that means that your mind is operating on a very high frequency scale. Our mind and our senses are regulated and adjusted for a certain frequency. Our ears can hear only within a certain range, not above and not below, and so with the eyes and so with the mind. But when you do certain yogic and tantric practices, you change the capacity of the mind and the senses . . . Even now many waves are passing through, maybe laser, radio, electromagnetic waves, but you can't see them. There are many astral, non-physical things that are around us but we don't know . . . You can't tune in until you refine and expand your capacity.

> But if you can tune your mind like the radio, you can hear the music . . . If you have trained your mind, and if you have control over the faculties of mind, then you are not schizophrenic.[19]

Yoga today

In this century, besides counselling and psychological intervention, chemical drugs are marketed to manipulate the brain directly (sometimes with inadequate testing of long-term effects), or in extreme situations surgeons actually remove part of the brain. The yogis manipulate the brain through much subtler techniques, honed over centuries, and they, like the rishis who wrote the ancient texts, monitor the result carefully on many levels over extended periods of time. In yoga we are aiming to unite with the *atma*, the immortal spirit beyond life and death, and definitely beyond the mind. In order to directly attain that experience and then integrate that experience in life, we have to rewire the brain through sadhana. This begins with hatha yoga and then the yama and niyama of raja yoga, which transcend knowledge relying on the senses and the intellect, strengthen self-restraint, and increase intuitive and creative abilities. Shankara comments on Patanjali's yamas and niyamas:

> . . . following the restraints and observances is the basic qualification to practise yoga. The qualification is not simply that one wants to do yoga, for the holy text says, 'But he who has not first turned away from wickedness, who is not tranquil and subdued, and whose mind is not at rest, he can never obtain the Self (even) by knowledge' (Katha 1.2.24).[20]

Shankara is known as a philosopher and a propagator of Advaita Vedanta, but this is an oversimplification of the man.

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[19] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Teachings of Swami Satyananda, Vol. III*, Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar, India, 2012 (first pub 1984), p. 15

[20] Trevor Leggett, *Sankara on the Yoga Sutras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, 1st Indian ed., Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, India,1992, p. 260

In the Dashnami parampara, Shankara is also acknowledged as a yogin, a tantric, a bhakta and a karma yogi who worked unceasingly to uplift the spiritual traditions in India and unite opposing schools of thought. We can see this effort continuing to the present day in the Satyananda tradition where Swami Niranjanananda specifically sets out to present the yamas and niyamas as systematic sadhanas suitable for sadhakas today.

Vairagya impossible without bhakti

Desikacharya notes that the need to live vairagya in order to understand or experience Advaita Vedanta cannot be over-emphasized:

> . . . no amount of yoga or spiritual practice can substitute for taking action to eliminate attachments to unhappy circumstances or habits of response that are creating obstructions in the body and mind.[21]

This is in line with Shankara's combination of philosophy, actual experience, and the lifestyle of sannyasa in his teaching itinerary. The *Yoga Sutras* teach that vairagya is not just freeing oneself from attachment to sense pleasures, and so forth. The higher form of vairagya is renunciation of the gunas or Prakriti due to intense identification with the Purusha or Ishwara, Brahman or the Self. A sincere surrender of any thought or action to God (Ishwara) is said to transform it into a practice of yoga.

Practically speaking, yoga is a set of techniques which lead any practitioner to experience new perspectives. Philosophers and religious leaders at different times have adopted yoga techniques wholescale into their world vision and accompanying 'philosophy'. This phenomenon is still a continuing process today. It is not a matter of whether devotion to God, or steadfast practise of a technique, is logical,

[21] T.K.V. Desikacharya, *The Heart of Yoga: Developing a Personal Practice*, Inner Tradition, Bombay, India, 1995, p. xix

but of understanding that if one prevails, the psyche becomes concentrated and evolves to a higher state of consciousness and awareness. Swami Niranjanananda further expands:

> Dharana can never be complete without the development of faith in a higher reality. In fact, it is the acceptance of a higher reality which awakens the state of dharana. For this reason the yogic and tantric texts talk about Ishwara pranidhana, surrender to God or the eternal reality. Pratyahara and dharana are synonymous with *Ishwara pranidhana* in the sense that making sincere effort in meditation indicates that one is aware of the association with the higher reality. Only when one becomes aware of one's association with the transcendental reality is there an urge to go towards that by overcoming the vikalpas of body, senses and mind.[22]

II. COMMENTARY ON THE BHAGAVAD GITA

To begin with, it is significant that Shankara broke with the tradition of commenting on every verse; instead he began at Chapter Two, verse eleven, where the spiritual teaching of Sri Krishna to Arjuna begins.

The first chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* sets the scene for the teachings of Lord Krishna. Arjuna is in despair because any action he takes will lead to pain, dishonour, death and destruction. He knows he is in the trap of samsara. He decides not to fight in the war (engage in the external situations of *pravritti marga*), but instead to ignore his duty as a warrior and retreat to *nivritti marga* (renouncing the world).

Because Sri Krishna's teachings lead Arjuna to maintain his duties, Feuerstein draws a distinction between the 'life-affirming yoga' of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the 'life-negating

[22] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, Satsangs on *Vijnana Bhairava Tantra*, in Nasik, India, 2002

mythic yoga' of the Upanishads.[23] His mythic yoga is maintained to this day in the Dashnami tradition, where sannyasins renounce the fruits of action and shift their involvement with the external world to the inner life, but within this tradition there are different skeins of belief. At some stages of an individual's sadhana, isolation and tapasya are seen as necessary. At other times, active involvement in the world is called for, but it is still a sadhana, and should be practised with *vairagya* and *viveka*, detachment and discrimination.

The broad perspective of yoga given in the *Bhagavad Gita* confirms the view that yoga is not only a philosophy but a lifestyle that enables us to balance our external and internal life. It generates a sense of perspective towards the way we do things. It is interesting that the *Bhagavad Gita* is thought of as 'the essence of the Vedas' yet uses the Samkhyan scheme of man's place in the universe and devotes each chapter to a different form of yoga.

Pravritti and nivritti

In his introduction Shankara says the aim of the *Bhagavad Gita* is the complete cessation of *samsara* or transmigratory life and its cause.

> The aim of this famous Gita-Sastra is, briefly, the Supreme Bliss, a complete cessation of samsara or transmigratory life and its cause. This accrues from that Religion (Dharma) which consists in a steady devotion to the knowledge of the Self, preceded by the renunciation of all works.[24]

For this we think the nivritti marga is necessary, but for the whole of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna is encouraging Arjuna to fight and not forsake his duties; he seems to be urging Arjuna to follow the pravritti marga. Shankara's

[23] G.A. Feuerstein, *The Essence of Yoga, A contribution to the psycho-history of Indian civilization*, Rider & Co., London, UK, 1974, pp. 147–153

[24] A. Mahadeva Sastri (trans.), *The Bhagavad Gita with the commentary of Sri Sankaracharya*, V. Ramaswamy Sastralu & Sons, Madras, India, 1961, p. 4

point is, Arjuna had to fight without wanting the triumphs for himself, simply fighting for what is right, for the dharma of each situation, while surrendering it all inwardly to the Lord.

The world that we are in demands that we act according to dharma. Until the dawn of self-realization we just have to follow the light of goodness. To rouse Arjuna from his despair, Sri Krishna points out that an inappropriate retreat into nivritti marga will not give the correct results in the external world and will not aid in the path to liberation. Instead he offers a role model, a hero, the *sthitaprajna*, the one who has steady wisdom, and is always balanced internally and externally.

Sthitaprajna

In his introduction to the *Bhagavad Gita*[25], Shankara makes another point which he must have felt particularly significant. He differentiates vedic dharma into two kinds: pravritti dharma relating to vyavahara reality, where action, caste, stages of life, etc., are relevant, and nivritti dharma relating to moksha. Shankara holds the basic aim of life lies in maintaining balance between the pravritti and nivritti paths, one's external and inner life. His hero is the one established in wisdom: the *sthitaprajna* of the *Bhagavad Gita* who has attained the characteristic attributes of an enlightened being and lives by them. Such a person may live in any fashion but has no desire for possessions, fame, power, children, or anything of the world; remaining absorbed in the search for truth beyond the projections of maya. Shankara's own life reflects these qualities.

For the sthitaprajna, pravritti marga and nivritti marga combine to give a harmony of action in inaction – selfless action dedicated to God. To begin with, one has to spend time in sadhana that enables good health, right thinking,

[25] V. Panoli Vidyavachaspati, *Gita in Shankara's Own Words – Chapters one to eight*, revised 2nd ed., The Mathrubhumi Co. Ltd., Calicut, India, 1989, pp. 7–8

inner balance and clarity. Then one must actually express it through pravritti marga, right action in harmony with other living beings on earth. With practice, broad-mindedness and magnanimous actions become the normal response rather than action stemming from limited perception and lack of perspective – and this is what we need today:

> . . . one of the major problems that increasingly confronts us is that the predominant mode of thinking keeps us firmly on this wrong path. When people talk about things like an 'environmental crisis' or an 'economic crisis' what they are actually describing are the consequences of a much deeper problem which comes down to what I would call a 'crisis in perception'. It is the way we see our world which is ultimately at fault. If we simply concentrate on fixing the outward problems without paying attention to this central, inner problem, then the deeper problem remains, and we will continue casting around in the wilderness for the right path without a proper sense of where we took the wrong turning.[26]

Yogic techniques not only work at the level of thoughts but also affect the physical structures which support attention. When practised faithfully and regularly for a long time without a break, sadhana affects our perceptions of the world and our role in it. Shankara's commentay on the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:27) says:

> Identification of the Self with the aggregate of the body and senses constitutes egoism. The man whose antahkarana (mind) has been deluded in various manner, i.e. the one who attributes to the Self all the characteristics which the body and senses possess and identifies oneself with them, regards due to ignorance that all actions are

[26] HRH The Prince of Wales, Tony Juniper & Ian Skelly, *Harmony: A New Way of Looking at our World*, Blue Door (Harper Collins), London, UK, 2010, p. 6

in the Self and also thinks with reference to each action, 'I am the doer'.[27]

Balance the brain

It does require time to adjust the brain, as it is physically based, but it is certainly possible. Swara yoga, for example specializes in highlighting one or other of the brain hemispheres and eventually balancing them.[28] This has very interesting results, as noted by the ancient rishis and also by modern science. According to McGilchrist's research on the brain, aided by studies on split-brain patients, the right hemisphere of the brain (which yoga accesses through ida nadi) attends to the entire visual field, the left hemisphere (which yoga accesses through pingala nadi) attends only to the right side of the visual field. Patients who have only the left hemisphere functioning can (surprisingly) function quite well but will ignore even the left side of their own bodies.[29]

Most of us still have the whole brain potentially available, but Gilchrist points out that actually it is the attention of our sensory equipment and the brain which brings the world into being for us to experience. Different 'realities' are presented by the brain hemispheres. This should emphasize for us the importance of maintaining the attitude of a witness in relation to our senses, external objects and events, our mental states and beliefs, and even our own motivations.

> The left hemisphere is always engaged in a purpose: it always has an end in view, and downgrades whatever has no instrumental purpose in sight. The right hemisphere, by contrast, has no designs on anything. It is vigilant for whatever is, without preconceptions, without a predefined

[27] V. Panoli Vidyavachaspati, *Gita in Shankara's Own Words – Chapters one to eight*, revised 2nd ed., The Mathrubhumi Co. Ltd., Calicut, India, 1989, pp. 179–180

[28] Swami Muktibodhananda, *Swara Yoga, The Tantric Science of Brain Breathing*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2008 (first pub 1984)

[29] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, UK, 2010, pp. 44 ff.

purpose. The right hemisphere has a relationship of concern or care (what Heidegger calls *Sorge*) with whatever happens to be.[30]

What you pay attention to is what you see or understand, other aspects of the world do not really exist for you.

This is true not only in relation to our sensory equipment and brain, but also our conditioning, the vrittis which modify our mind. If four people walk down a beach together, the mother would be concerned about her two-year-old and his safety, the fisherman would be watching the seagulls and trying to detect the currents affecting the waves, the ecologist would be in despair about the eroding sand dunes, and who knows what the child would see? Shankara's insistence on witnessing and transcending personal limitations results in an expanded awareness which respects all aspects of creation. Atmabhava leads to empathy, a feeling for the inter-connectedness of everything, a broad and balanced, healthy attitude:

> The animal bodies are the sustaining cause of the human and divine, serving as beasts of burden, as givers of milk, and for sacrifices, etc. And the human bodies, by sacrifices and by domestication, serve the divine and animal respectively; so too the divine sustains the other two by providing the cold and hot and rainy seasons.
>
> Similarly all classes and stages of life are causes of sustaining each other by helping. The whole world is upheld by mutual co-operation.[31]

McGilchrist has also found that, although generally speaking the hemispheres can 'fill in for each other', it is the right hemisphere which facilitates empathy and most

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[30] *ibid*. Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary*, p. 174

[31] Trevor Leggett, *Sankara on the Yoga Sutras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, 1st Indian ed., Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, India,1992, p. 260

emotions, although anger is based in the left hemisphere. Through cultural and historical analysis he demonstrates that not only individuals but also cultures appear to be dominated by one or other of the hemispheres at different stages of development:

> . . . the world we actually experience, phenomenologically, at any point in time, is determined by which hemisphere's version of the world ultimately comes to predominate. Though I would resist the simplistic idea of a '(left or right) hemisphere personality' overall, there is evidence (that) . . . On those occasions where the 'wrong' hemisphere does get in first, and starts to take control, at least for not very demanding tasks, it will most probably continue to trump the other hemisphere, even if the other hemisphere would have been a better choice at the outset . . . such winner-takes-all effects may still be individually small, however, a vast accumulation of many small effects could ultimately lead to a large bias overall.[32]

Such insights explain why Shankara insists we remain a balanced witness of the mind and don't identify with it too much. Rather than just adopting and acting out, or manifesting, any perception, emotion or thought that passes through the brain, one should maintain the attitude of a sthitaprajna. Commenting on the *Bhagavad Gita* (3:28), Shankara says:

> . . . he who knows the truth about . . . the fact that the qualities in the form of senses act on the qualities in the form of sensory-objects, and not the Atman, forms no attachment.[33]

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[32] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, UK, 2010, p. 10

[33] V. Panoli Vidyavachaspati, *Gita in Shankara's Own Words – Chapters one to eight*, revised 2nd ed., The Mathrubhumi Co. Ltd., Calicut, India, 1989, p. 180

Otherwise, we are being inexorably driven by forces we are not aware of and may end up like Duryodhana, who remarked to Sri Krishna, "I know what's good, I know what's right, but I'm impelled to behave otherwise."

Not just psychotic people; business people, politicians, everyday people, you and me, sometimes know a particular stance is wrong, but cannot shake it. So there are a couple of steps. First we have to develop the witnessing attitude of the drashta and take the sattwic nivritti marga. Then, when we express ourselves in life, driving down the pravritti marga, we have to work to maintain that inner balance, rather than being at the mercy of our equipment and surroundings. Just like when learning to drive a car, to begin with it can be a sweaty, shaky, tense experience, but with practice the skills are established and one can experience much greater freedom and efficiency with full relaxation.

We can see Shankara considered two vehicles for attaining this balance between pravritti and nivritti to be the varna and the ashrama systems. He did not, however, drive these two vehicles along the generally accepted roads. Or we could say his interpretation of the road rules led him into direct conflict with the established authorities and many of the other road users. It is true he wrote this commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* at a very young age to be so adamantly revising the traffic code, but in order to live the realizations of Advaita Vedanta as he saw them, various strengths of character have to be developed by a spiritual aspirant and once they are there, they have to be expressed. Shankara's life story demonstrates that he himself had those qualities and that he taught others to imbibe them and live by them. From a very young age, he was in fact the Traffic Authority.

Varna

For example there is his attitude to caste. For many, Shankara is an unpopular figure because he quotes the smritis' injunctions against shudras which Vyasa refers to in the *Brahma Sutras*. He agrees that the shudras and others are

excluded from the performance of rituals; it was a matter of fact. It is still a matter people feel so strongly about that they will burn themselves (or others) to death to register their desperate concern. Swami Satyananda comments:

> Just as the code of Manu is questionable today, in the same way, any code of justice which developed for a society existing in a particular age is only relevant for that age. Justice is related to the values of right and wrong existing in the social conditions of the time . . . consider for example, the issue of women. Here in India, women have always been neglected and designated to an inferior class. Whether in property documents, wills of succession or whatever, they have always been regarded as second grade. A man may do whatever he likes and nobody raises a finger. However, if a woman does anything, fingers are raised. If a man is widowed he can remarry, but a widowed woman cannot. This happens everywhere because society thinks like this. Until now, nobody has challenged or opposed this social code. Nobody has raised a question for centuries, but today it has become a big social issue . . .
>
> How can you say that if a man of low caste does this, then punish him in this way, but if a man of high caste does the same then punish him in another way? In this age, it appears to us that Manu was crazy, because our beliefs, social codes and values have reached a different point after centuries of evolution, but in those times his code was justified. In Greece and some other countries, a widowed woman was put under lock and key. If she happened to meet a man secretly and was found out, then both of them were stoned to death in public. It was a common practice at the time of Jesus. Mary Magdalene was about to be stoned to death when Jesus saved her by saying, "Let he amongst you who is without sin cast the first stone."[34]

[34] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Bhakti Yoga Sagar Vol 3*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2007 (first pub 1997), pp. 97–98

Shankara did continue to support the varna system, but the crucial question is, how did he interpret it after his meeting with the chandala in Varanasi? In relation to *varna*, caste, Shankara ultimately moved over to the big picture. He was able to see past the grasp on the familiar which is the domain of the left hemisphere and status quo thinking; he was able to see past the social conditioning of his varna and age to the *sanatana dharma*, the correct conduct in any situation.

The *shrutis*, the Vedas and the Upanishads, speak of the sanatana dharma, of what is eternally righteous; the *smritis* are only social codes protecting social interests. Shankara's commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* supports varna not as a justification for repressing others, but as a practical acceptance of one's duties according to one's role in society until freed from that role by the dawning of a completely different state of consciousness. When he presents his own teachings in the prakaranas and upadesha granthas, we see Shankara is speaking from a different perspective. In sutra 10 of *Atmabodha*, he explains his understanding of how we come to experience samsara, and refers to varna as an *upadhi*, an illusory equipment, which may be necessary in life, but is not part of sanatana dharma:

> A god-realised person, however, is ever-attuned to the Brahman even while he experiences the things and beings of this manifested world. He is like a goldsmith seeing only gold in different ornaments made of the metal . . .
>
> Like all-pervading space, the infinite Reality appears to be diverse on account of its association with various types of equipments (upadhis) and becomes one on their destruction . . .
>
> Only on account of the diverse equipments caste, colour, stage etc., are imposed on Atman just as different flavours, colours etc. upon water.[35]

[35] A. Parthasarathy, *Atmabodha: Knowledge of the Self*, by Sri Adi Shankaracharya with translation and commentary of A. Parthasarathy, Vedanta Life Institute, Bombay, India, 1990, sutras 9–11 pp. 19–22

Definitely, Shankaracharya is not recruiting people to be his sannyasin disciples. Although he has a mission, he is a reconciler rather than a missionary, encouraging people to practise the dharma appropriate to them, and to support society – but from a sattwic perspective, rooted in atmabhava. He encourages people to fulfil the duties of their varna and to live full lives incorporating all the stages of life, *ashramas*.

Ashrama

Though in his own life he was a sannyasin from childhood, Shankara knows immediate recourse to the nirvritti marga cannot be successful for most people. His commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* states that although all the scriptures enjoin renunciation of all karma for those seeking liberation, this is best achieved by a gradual passage through the ashramas rather than a sudden jump to the last stage of sannyasa. Gurus of the Dashnami tradition today continue to give specific guidelines on how to live a full life while developing the sattwic qualities that lead to an understanding of dharma.

> The gunas of tamas and rajas guide the pravritti path. Sattwa . . . guides the nivritti path . . . When tamas and rajas are predominant, your behaviour and mind are also rajasic and tamasic, aggressive, manipulative, seeking power, trying to control and manipulate, trying to protect yourself . . . You have to find out how you can free yourself from the rajasic and tamasic vrittis and make room for sattwic vrittis in your life . . . If you can do this, then despite walking the pravritti path, you will be able to create a sattwic way of thinking, behaviour and attitude . . . that is possible when sadhana is incorporated into one's life.[36]

[36] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *The Paths of Pravritti and Nivritti (Yogadrishti Series)*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 2011), pp. 20–22

Shankara emphasized *nishkama*, desireless, *karma*, or action, in his commentary on *Bhagavad Gita* (4:19) to guide the actions of people of the first three orders of life (the ashramas). He explains it is nishkama karma that enables a person to do the necessary actions resulting from taking birth in a body without becoming more deeply enmeshed in the wheels of karma. It is only if we act selfishly due to ahamkara that our own ambitions and self-interest stamp us with the karmic consequences of the action, and our self interest is added to our karmic bank account.

Nishkama karma yoga is work done without personal desire or attachment to its fruit, whether ritual or labour. This makes the possibility of purification through nishkama karma yoga accessible to any caste or culture, including participation in powerful ceremonies, mudras and chants preserved in vedic rituals designed to influence external and internal states. It also makes the benefits accessible to people without the means (through lack of material wealth) to practise yajna.

Karma

We live, die and transmigrate according to karma accrued from our actions, attitudes in past lives, and our karma is modified or added to in this life also. What constitutes positive or negative action – what frees us from, or ties us to, the wheel of karma – is therefore a central topic for Shankara. When Sri Krishna warns Arjuna about the inevitability of the law of karma in *Bhagavad Gita* (2:47), Shankara comments:

> You are qualified for the path of works, not for the path of knowledge. And, while working, don't desire its rewards under any circumstances whatever. If you do want the results, you will get them. Therefore don't let harvesting the fruits of your action be your motive. When one performs work (or conducts yajnas) thirsting for the results of those efforts, then one will be subject to rebirth as the result of those actions.

Whether we are speaking about the performance of yajna or the actions of daily life, it is our own orientation towards vidya or avidya that determines the degree of our attachment. So the degree of our bondage or liberation is due to our own nature, not the partiality of God. Shankara enlarges on Sri Krishna's terse statement in *Bhagavad Gita* (4:11):

> I reward men by granting them the things they desire just in accordance with the way in which they seek Me; for they do not seek for moksha. One cannot indeed pursue pleasure and at the same time seek for moksha. Wherefore, I reward seekers of fruits by securing to them their selfish ends; I reward the unselfish, who do their prescribed duties and seek for moksha, by granting them knowledge; I reward men of knowledge who have renounced the world and seek for moksha, by granting them moksha; similarly I reward men in distress by relieving them of distress. Thus do I reward all, just in the way they seek me. But never do I reward any from affection or aversion, or from delusion.[37]

The reality one experiences is influenced by one's intent. The Anekantavada of the Jainas (remember the four blind men and their understanding of the elephant?) explains that no matter what we observe, it is always relative to our frame of reference which may differ from other people's. It also implies that we have to be aware of different frames of reference to get meaningful understanding about events we observe.

We can say Shankara's Advaita Vedanta went a step further, pre-empting quantum physics where the very presence of an observer has been shown to affect the situation being observed. He teaches that when we become the drashta, and remain aware of the polarities of the mind, our reality changes. With control of the senses and mind, while simultaneously maintaining a balanced attitude and

[37] A. Mahadeva Sastri (trans.), *The Bhagavad Gita with the commentary of Sri Sankaracharya*, V. Ramaswamy Sastralu & Sons, Madras, India, 1961, p. 123 on Ch 4:11

enlightened intent (viveka, vairagya and mumukshutva) we can explore those new dimensions.

Karma as ritual

Swami Sivananda explains that action and intention form destiny:

> In a broad sense *Karma* means action. It also means duty which one has to perform according to his caste or station of life. According to the followers of the Karma Kanda of the Vedas (the Mimamsakas) Karma means the rituals and sacrifices prescribed in the Vedas. It has a deep meaning also. It signifies the destiny or the storehouse of tendencies of a man which give rise to his future birth.[38]

Shankara does not deny the efficacy of ritual, he argues that when *karma*, rites or other actions, is done for gratification of the senses, pleasure and power, it will only achieve its material purpose but will not lead one to liberation, rather, by adding to the storehouse of karma, it ties one into samsara.

This point has been misunderstood. In Christianity, for example, a similar perception led to some sections of the Church condemning the use of rituals and chants even when performed with purely devotional motivation. It has been taken to mean that no rituals should be performed. However, it is not the ritual actions rather the motivation for personal power, ego gratification, and so forth, which should be forsaken.

In India, the knowledge of these subtle techniques has survived. *Mudras*, psychophysical techniques to induce specific states of mind, and mantra anusthanas to invoke and involve specific powers, are regularly performed in homes, as well as in temples. The knowledge of yajna, a subtle means of working with nature, is still healthily preserved by a whole

[38] Swami Sivananda, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 10th ed., Divine Life Society, UP, India, 1995, p. 42 on 2:47

caste of people who base their livelihood on conducting sacrificial rites for various purposes. Not only this, it has been preserved by a whole host of people willing to pay for these services because they are convinced, and have been convinced through generations of observation, that they work.

By karma yogis, Shankara is referring mainly to those who engage in ceremonies of yajna, havan, and so on, either performing them or having others perform them on their behalf in order to attain specific sankalpas. In the context of his opposition to Poorva Mimamsa, although such people are following the detailed injunctions of the scriptures, Shankara relegates their efforts to a secondary role compared to those seeking self-knowledge and destruction of the barrier of ahamkara, that is, those who are performing internal sacrifice. Shankara was a tantric adept, and ritual is at the heart of tantra, but for him the correct purpose of ritual, whether of the vedantic or tantric tradition, is liberation. Otherwise one is simply using vedic tools for mundane purposes and remains a samsarin.

The second misunderstanding on this point is when karma has been taken to mean work in the sense of labour. People think Shankara was saying that sannyasins and serious spiritual aspirants should not be involved with work; that one should shrug off duties as a type of attachment. However, it is not the work or duty, but the selfish motivation behind its performance that has to be renounced. Shankara was a tireless nishkama karma yogi in the sense that he worked continuously to establish vedic dharma. If we believe in the legend, he only came here in the first place, to save Mother Earth and all her children and to uplift human consciousness, not because of any need on his part.

The karma yogis referred to by Shankara are not primarily the karma yogis in an ashram, who are encouraged to work selflessly: to clean the toilets, take classes, tend the gardens or engage in any other physical or mental labour for the good of others, without desiring the fruits of the actions for themselves. Nevertheless, such karma yogis are practising

to gain immunity from karma and to learn to witness and manage the plays of mind and the ego.

Shankara distinguishes between three types of people: one type enslaved by the senses; a second type who identifies with the body and the material universe and performs actions with definite aims within that realm; a third type who has wisdom concerning the true nature of the Self. Respectively, the terms *samsarin*, *karma yogi* and *Samkhyan* refer to these three developments of buddhi at different stages of the spiritual journey.

Karma for the enlightened (Samkhyan)

Shankara can be scathing about the people dedicated to the life of the senses. In many of his commentaries and songs he is playful about their follies, but at other times he seems quite harsh in his ridicule or condemnation. Shankara's view is that one cannot be established in self-knowledge and still identify oneself as the doer: one who is enlightened does not act as a separate being acting for individual gain. One knows work will benefit oneself, one knows karma yoga will benefit oneself, but that's not why a sthitaprajna engages in it.

Shankara's teachings follow Sri Krishna's in that the enlightened sage does not need the instruction of the Vedas as detailed in the karma kanda, because those instructions are for the samsarins or yogis still entrapped by the three gunas. An enlightened sage first becomes established in sattwa, and then transcending that, becomes completely free from the gunas.

We need to understand the person we are looking at, and to look deeply at ourselves in order to act in the various situations of life, performing the duties which are uniquely our own with the attitude of a sthitaprajna. As Swami Sivananda explains, the samsarins, whose major reality is the world of the senses and the society they are born into, can benefit by following the guidance of the smritis and dharma shastras:

> Karma is the performance of religious rites and the strict adherence to one's duties as enjoined by the Dharma

> Shastras . . . The heart is purified by the performance of such Karmas unselfishly and divine light or wisdom dawns in a pure heart.[39]

The sthitaprajnas, who have balanced understanding, and who experience atmabhava, are not bound by the same laws, according to Shankara, because their motives, ideas, actions, lives and destinies are completely different:

> In the case of those who think of the Self as the doer of actions, there will necessarily arise the idea that he has this or that thing to do. A man who possesses this sort of knowledge is qualified for actions and on him actions are enjoined. Such a man is unenlightened . . . Hence it is that Lord Narayana distinguishes the enlightened Sankhyas from the unenlightened followers of works, and teaches them respectively two distinct paths.[40]

The *Bhagavad Gita* and Shankara's commentary upon it consistently point out that an enlightened being never acts from personal desire or in a way which might lead others deeper into delusion. Therefore they are free of karma and their actions can be termed non-actions.

Freedom from the matrix

Shankara is saying the apparent reality of the sensorial dimension is a projection from a hidden source that most people do not even realize exists, but which can be accessed. This insight into the Source releases an enlightened being from the matrix of phenomenal reality and then the universe is a mere dream to the sage. Shankara comments on the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:69):

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[39] Swami Sivananda, *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, Divine Life Society, UP, India, 1996, pp. 70–71

[40] A. Mahadeva Sastri (trans.), *The Bhagavad Gita with the commentary of Sri Sankaracharya*, V. Ramaswamy Sastralu & Sons, Madras, India, 1961, p. 45 on Ch. 2:21

What is night to all beings, therein the self-controlled one is awake. Where all beings are awake, that is the night of the sage who sees.

Shankara: . . . When he has learnt to look upon all this dual world as a mere illusion, as though it were night, when he has realized the Self, his duty consists not in the performance of action, but in the renunciation of action.[41]

Jnana yoga

So the pravritti marga leads eventually to the path of jnana yoga. Shankara had to explain the high regard of the *Bhagavad Gita* for karma yoga. Resorting to his background in raja yoga he could explain karma yoga as a stepping stone to dharana, dhyana, chitta shuddhi and their insights. His awareness of the necessary and subtle benefits of dhyana is made clear in various places as, for example, his passing reference (7:27) to the importance of overcoming *raga* and *dwesha*, attraction and repulsion which tie us to the world of duality and suffering. He points out that while we are even slightly under the influence of desire and aversion there can be no real appreciation of things as they are – much less when we are influenced by strong passions – so how can we know ourselves?

Shankara as an adept in *samyama*, systematically moving the consciousness between dharana, dhyana and samadhi, bases his explanations on the experiences he himself has gained of these practices. Reading him and studying what he means leads to an acceptance of human beings as voyagers through a multidimensional reality beyond logical boundaries. Until recently this would have been scoffed at by the infant sciences of the West, but now their findings are 'confirming' the insights of the rishis. For example, the understanding of the role of the brain hemispheres in

[41] *ibid*., A. Mahadeva Sastri (trans.), *The Bhagavad Gita with the commentary of Sri Sankaracharya*, pp. 77–78 on Ch. 2:68–9

our world view underlines the importance of Shankara's teaching of 'I am not the doer'. It explains the importance of witnessing our own senses, thoughts and condition, and the need to learn restraint.

We should also consider Shankara's unshakeable conviction that an enlightened being with a mission, and even a person with some attainment, can transmigrate more consciously between dimensions. Shankaracharya tells us what the tools or vehicles for such travel are, and how to use them. He also tells us such upgraded travels are only for those who strive earnestly to know Brahman, overcoming the distractions of the senses and mind and focusing on dharma.

> It was when discrimination was overpowered by grief and delusion that Arjuna, who had himself been engaged in battle as the duty of the warrior caste, abstained from fighting and proposed to lead a mendicant's life, which was the duty of a different caste. Accordingly, all creatures whose intelligence is swayed by grief and delusion and other evil influences, naturally abandon their proper duties and resort to those which are prohibited. Even if they are engaged in their duties, their conduct in speech, thought and deed is egoistic and is prompted by a longing for reward. In their case, then owing to an accumulation of merit and demerit, of dharma and adharma, the samsara, which consists of passing through good and bad births, happiness and misery, becomes incessant. Grief and delusion are thus the cause of samsara.[42]

The jnani who focuses on nirguna Brahman doesn't have to travel any more, one merges in the universal consciousness.

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[42] *ibid*., A. Mahadeva Sastri (trans.), *The Bhagavad Gita with the commentary of Sri Sankaracharya*, pp. 22–23 on Ch. 2:10

Bhakti yoga

But why would we want to leave the pleasure of the senses to focus on the inner light? Because we are promised more pleasures in some other dimension? But then why would we want to stop travelling? Why would we want to merge in Brahman or Shiva or Ishwara, the highest consciousness?

There are many vehicles of yoga mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita*. In his commentary, Shankara argues that they are all viable, though jnana yoga, the path of self -knowledge, is the only one that can take you the whole way. His commitment to this belief, at the time, can be seen by the way his bhashya on the *Gita* strenuously argues that this same view is held by Sri Krishna, although in the last chapter the secret of secrets relates to love and bhakti yoga.

We may wonder at this, but there has always been a deep respect for the bhakti tradition in India. And Shankara does say, in relation to *Bhagavad Gita* (2:50):

> . . . apply yourself to devotion with equanimity. For devotion is a power – devotion being the equanimity of mind in success and failure on the part of him who is engaged in the performance of his own duties, his mind resting on Isvara all the while. It is indeed a power because works which are of a binding nature lose that nature when done with evenness of mind. Therefore be equanimous.[43]

It is bhakti that keeps one going through the mountains and valleys of pravritti marga and the deep space of meditation. We may call it shraddha or even mumukshutva – but that transforming element is essential for us to break free. And we see that by the end of his life Shankara's opinion has changed. *Saundarya Lahari* is not so much the utterance of a jnani as of a bhakta. Shankara's life story journeys past jnana to bhakti.

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[43] *ibid*., A. Mahadeva Sastri (trans.), *The Bhagavad Gita with the commentary of Sri Sankaracharya*, p. 65 on Ch 2:50

12

Teaching Texts

The next important group of texts are the *prakarana* and *upadesha granthas*, smaller independent philosophical writings and texts or leaflets intended for teaching. Different authorities have various opinions on which texts should be included in this group, as many of his most popular hymns contain profound insights.

The following chart presents scholarly opinions concerning which teaching texts are genuinely Shankara's. Although the three authorities may not definitely support all the texts listed, they include them for consideration.

The *Shankara Grantha Ratnavali* lists 54 texts, and Swami Mukhyananda (in the first column of the following table) names 52 of them.[1] Swami Chinmayananda lists 23 of these as teaching texts and others as hymns (as shown in the second column).[2] P. George Victor lists 37, and the 'new' ones he includes can be found listed alphabetically in the table.[3] The texts range from *Eka Sloki* with one verse to *Prapanchasara Tantra* with 2,464 verses.

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[1] Swami Mukhyananda, *An Interpretation of the Life & Teachings of Shri Shankaracharya (Elucidatory & Reconciliatory)*, 2nd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Ernakulam, India, 1998, pp. 155–57

[2] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara the Missionary*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, India, 1978, pp. 214–217

[3] P. George Victor, *Life and Teachings of Adi Shankaracharya*, D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, India, 2002, pp. 49–51

Teaching texts by Shankara

An Interpretation	***Sankara the Missionary***	***Life & Teachings***
lists 52	*lists 23 (and others as hymns)*	*lists 37*
1. *Advaitanubhuti* (86 slokas)	Yes	Yes
2. Ajnanabodhini (prose)		Y
3. *Amanushtaka* (10)		
4. *Anatmashri Vigrahana* (18)	Y	Y
5. *Aparoksha Anubhuti* (44)	Y	Y
6. *Atma Bodha* (68)	Y	Y
7. *Atmajnanopadesha Vidhi* or *Drigdrishyaviveka*		Y (*Triputi*)
8. *Atmanatma Viveka* (prose)		Y
9. *Atma Panchakam or Atma Shakta* or *Advaita Panchakam* or *Advaita Pancharatnam* (6)	Hymn (*Sopana Panchakam*)	Y
10. *Atma Pooja* or *Para Pooja* (11)		
Not listed		*Bala Bodha (Samgraha)* or *Bala Bodhini*
11. *Bodhasaranusandhanam* (56)		
12. *Brahmajnanavali Mala* (21)	Y	Y
13. *Brahmanuchintanam* or *Atmanuchintanam* (29)	Y	Y
Hymn	Hymn	*Dakshinamurti Stotram*

14. *Dasha Sloki* or *Nirvana Dashakam* or *Siddhanta Bindu* (10)		Y
15. *Dhanya Ashtakam* (10)	Hymn	Y
16. *Eka Sloki* (1)	Hymn	Y
17. *Gurvashtakam* (10)	Hymn	Y
18. *Jivanmukta Anandalahari* or *Anubhava Anandalahari* (18)	Hymn	
19. *Jnanagangashatakam* (100)		
20. *Kevalo'ham* (8)		
21. *Laghu Vakya Vritti* (18)	Y	
22. *Maniratnamala* (32)		
23. Manisha Panchakam (9)	Hymn	Y
24. *Maya Panchakam* (5)	Hymn	Y
25. *Math Amnaya* (65)		
Not listed		*Maya Vivarana*
26. *Mohamudgara* (16)	Y (*Bhaja Govindam*)	
27. *Nirguna Manasa Pooja* (33)	Hymn	
28. *Nirvana Manjari* (12)		Y
29. *Nirvanashtakam* or *Atma Shatkam* (6)	Hymn	Y
30. *Panchi Karanam* (prose)	Y	Y
31. *Prabodha Shudhakara* (257)	Y	
32. *Prapanchasara Tantra* (2,464)	Y	Y (*Paramartha Sara*)
33. *Prashnottaramalika* (67)	Y (*Prashnottara Ratnamalika*)	

34. *Pratah Smarana Stotram* (4)	Hymn	
35. *Praudhanubhuti* (17)	Y	Y
Not listed	*Sadachara Anu-sandhanam*	Y
36. *Sannyasa Paddhati* (prose)		
37. *Sara Tattwa Upadesha* (3)		
38. *Sarva Siddhanta Samgraha* (546)		
39. *Sarva Vedanta Siddhanta Sara Samgraha* (1,006)	Y (*Sarva Vedanta Sara Sangraha*)	
Not listed		*Shankaracharya Dvadasha Ratna*
40. *Sharpata Panjarika* (17)		
41. *Shata Sloki* or *Vedanta Kesari* (101)	Hymn	Y
42. *Svatma Nirupanam* (154)	Y	Y
43. *Svatma Prakashika* (68)	Y	Y
44. *Tattwa Upadesha* (87)	Y (*Tattwa Bodha*)	Y
45. *Upadesha Panchakam* or *Sadhana Panchakam* (6)	Hymn	
46. *Upadesha Sahasri* (prose/verse)	Y	Y
47. *Vakya Shudha* (46)		Y (*Drik Drishya Viveka*)
48. *Vakya Vritti* (53)	Y	Y
49. *Vijnana Nauka* or *Svarupanusandhanam* (9)	Y	Y

50. *Vivekachudamani* (58)	Y	Y
51. *Yati Panchakam* or *Kaupina Panchakam* (5)	Hymn	Y
52. *Yoga Taravali* (29)	Y	Y

Fingerprints

One reason for the differences is that some of the compositions are listed as both hymns and upadesha granthas by the same school. Another reason is that they are listed as hymns by one school but are thought of as being primarily teaching texts, by another. For example, in this book we will deal with *Dakshinamurti Stotram*, *Dasha Sloki*, *Manisha Panchakam* and *Mohamudgara* as hymns, although they also appear in the above list of upadesha grantha. This choice does not throw doubt on their profundity, it is just because they are so beautiful to sing.

Then there is the cultural outlook. K. H. Potter only accepts the *Upadesha Sahasri*, as being written by Shankara, whereas there are up to 76 accepted as Shankara's according to Kaviraj. Pande comments that when we look at the prakaranas attributed to Shankara, only 39 are accepted by Upadhyaya, and only one by western critical opinion (by which he means they have passed Hacker & Mayeda's linguistic tests) and that is the *Upadesha Sahasri* which is quoted by Sureshwara.

Belvalkar thinks only five to be definitely genuine, though he feels eight more may be given the benefit of the doubt:

1. *Upadesha Sahasri*: which we will look at in more detail.
2. *Aparoksha Anubhuti*: we will look at this in more detail also (144 stanzas in anushtubh metre, quotes extensively from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*).
3. *Atmabodha*: failed by Hacker because it speaks of Brahman as *ananda*, bliss, and avidya as being *anadi*, beginningless, and *anirvachiya*, inexpressible, but these thoughts are supported in the *Brahma Sutras* also, so Hacker is at risk.

4. *Panchi Karanam (Panchi Karanam Prakriya)*: a short prose text with eight brief paragraphs (he includes it because of a vartika on it by Sureshwara).
5. *Shata Sloki*: a philosophical poem consisting of 100 verses, it has a commentary by Anandagiri plus a doubtful last verse.

The eight others considered possible by Belvalkar are:

1. *Atmajnanopadesha Vidhi*, because it has a commentary by Anandagiri.
2. *Maya Panchakam,* five verses on Maya.
3. *Upadesha Panchakam,* five instructive verses.
4. *Laghu Vakya Vritti,* a short form of Vakya Vritti.
5. *Vakya Vritti*: 53 verses explaining how one can be enlightened from the maha vakya *tat tvam asi.*
6. *Vakya Shudha (Drik Drishya Viveka)*: although Brahmananda Bharati thinks this is by Vidyaranya.
7. *Vivekachudamani*: which is a very popular teaching text; passed by Hacker, but failed by Mayeda, translated by Ramana Maharshi.
8. *Eka Sloki*: one beautiful poetical sloka on an idea from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.*

Pande includes as possibles:

1. *Anatmashri Vigrahana*, which disdains the achievements of the world and is famous for its refrain *tatah kim?*
2. *Jivanmukta Anandalahari (Anubhava Anandalahari)*, as being full of poetical exultation – but are even occasional grammatical mistakes possible with Shankara?
3. *Nirvana Manjari*, a short poem exulting in the experience of what one is.
4. *Prabodha Shudhakara*, which has 257 arya verses on Krishna bhakti rather than jnana.
5. *Praudhanubhuti*, a fluent expression of advaitic experience in 17 sragdhara verses.
6. *Svatma Prakashila (Svatma Prakashika)*, which uses the word 'vivarta' technically.

Pande reluctantly notes that the *Vedanta Sara Sangraha (Sarva Vedanta Siddhanta Sara Sangraha)*, although elegant,

clear and consistent with both the *Brahma Sutras* and the *Vivekachudamani*, fails some tests – and lists as not genuine: *Advaitanubhuti*, *Brahmanuchintanam (Atmanuchintanam)*, *Prashnottararatnamalika*, *Sadachara Anusandhanam*, *Tattwa Upadesha (Tattwa Bodha)*, *Brahmajnanavali Mala*, *Svatma Nirupanam* and *Prabodha Shudhakara*.

The *Prapanchasara Tantra* or *Prapanchasaram* is a text held in great esteem by practitioners of the tantric upasanas. They generally affirm that it is by Shankara.

What can we learn?

For the purposes of this study we are noting, but not necessarily acquiescing, to the conclusions of grammatical tests – after all, Shankara himself says not to rely too much on grammar in his song *Mohamudgara*.[4] Rather, we are interested in gaining insights on the nature and aim of Shankara from works traditionally attributed to him. Scholars such as Pande have also been deeply influenced by the force of the personality shining through the words:

> Among these prakaranas it may be noted that the style and theme show much variation . . . It would seem that Shankara was not only capable of writing logical philosophy in prosaic verse but also of writing elegant or sparkling philosophical poetry expressive of spiritual experience. It would be unfair to the traditional memory of Shankara and to the evidence of the works which are traditionally ascribed to him to limit his authorship only to versified logical philosophy. He has also been remembered as a great religious and spiritual leader, not merely as a philosophical commentator.[5]

So, besides the biographies, the *Digvijayas*, we have also the autobiographies in the form of hymns, commentaries

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[4] See Appendix 3

[5] Govind Chandra Pande, *Life and Thought of Sankaracharya*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, India, 1994, pp. 120–121

and, most importantly, the independent teachings of Shankara.

The prakaranas and upadesha granthas seem to reveal more of the personality of Adi Shankaracharya than his philosophical commentaries do. They are precise insights into his direct perceptions and aims, and often stress the importance of jnana yoga whether in poetry or prose, for example in *Atmabodha* (v. 2):

> Of all the spiritual disciplines, knowledge of the Self is verily the direct means for liberation just as fire is for cooking. Liberation cannot be attained without knowledge of the Self.[6]

In this chapter we will just look at two works from this genre that are fairly well established as being his: *Aparoksha Anubhuti* and *Upadesha Sahasri*. They have been chosen so we can undertake a more detailed study of Shankara as a teacher; his requirements, methods and aims, and because they highlight his attitude towards yoga, which is very relevant when we come to consider the impact of his teachings in today's world.

I. APAROKSHA ANUBHUTI

We can refer to the *Aparoksha Anubhuti* for the spiritual guidelines that Shankara gave directly to his disciples. It gives the foundations for spiritual life as being vairagya, viveka, abhyasa and other requisites. From this we can see Shankara's philosophy and life-view has close links with Rishi Patanjali's as expressed in the *Yoga Sutras*. It would be interesting to do a detailed cross study of the views here with those expressed in the vivarana we looked at in Chapter 11.

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[6] A. Parthasarathy (trans. and commentary), *Atmabodha: Knowledge of the Self, by Sri Adi Shankaracharya*, Vedanta Life Institute, Bombay, India, 1990, p. 5

Many topics covered in Shankara's teaching can be gleaned from a summary of the points in the *Aparoksha Anubhuti*. He says:

1. The central issue is the identity of the *jivatman*, individual self, and *paramatman*, the universal self.
2. This identity is realized by enquiry, *vichara*.
3. There are necessary disciplines for one to conduct such enquiry.
4. People have experienced this identity, and their lives are known.
5. *Prarabdha*, unavoidable karma, forms one's life and ties one to *samsara*, the cycle of life and death, but is destroyed by realization.

Necessary qualifications – the sadhana chatushtaya

It becomes clear that Shankara not only advocated Advaita Vedanta philosophy but also its lifestyle. The necessary four qualifications for one to undertake this journey of self-exploration are the famous *sadhana chatushtaya*:

1. *Vairagya*, non-attachment or dispassion
2. *Viveka*, discrimination
3. The *shat sampatti* or six treasures: shama, dama, uparati, titiksha, shraddha and samadhana
4. *Mumukshutva*, the intense desire for liberation.

Today, however, it is not generally realized that they are a necessary foundation for jnana to flourish, that they are to be imbibed, and that one can do so by systematic yogic practices linked with a natural lifestyle.

Actually, according to the third sloka of *Aparoksha Anubhuti*, these four preliminary qualifications are best acquired by respecting the Lord, practising austerities and performing the duties natural to one's *varna*, inner nature, and *ashrama*, stage of life:

> The four preliminary qualifications (the means to the attainment of knowledge, such as Vairagya (dispassion)

and the like, are acquired by men by propitiating Hari (the Lord), through austerities and the performance of duties pertaining to their social order and stage in life.[7]

This is advocating *karma yoga*, the performance of whatever actions are appropriate for one's life with the attitudes of viveka and vairagya, as the primary way of preparing oneself for the spiritual journey. We may wonder if this applies equally to ritual action and nishkama karma yoga. Well, yes. His definitions of viveka and vairagya clarify that the path he advocates has no regard for the fruits of action in the phenomenal world. He wants to unplug from maya and plug into a completely different matrix.

In sloka 4, he colourfully explains *vairagya* as the indifference with which one treats the excreta of a crow – and when that indifference is applied to all the transient objects of this world that is pure vairagya. In sloka 5 he explains *viveka* as the steady conviction that the witnessing atma is real, as distinct from the transitory things that are experienced.

In order to actually maintain this attitude while living in the world with enough conviction for it to permeate one's personality and daily life, one needs to cultivate the six allies or strengths of character, the *shat sampatti*, which ensure success in sadhana. Slokas 6–8 describe these:

1. *Shama*: abandonment of desires at all times
2. *Dama*: restraint of the external functions of the organs
3. *Uparati*: turning away completely from all sense objects
4. *Titiksha*: patient endurance of all sorrow or pain
5. *Shraddha*: implicit faith in the words of the Vedas and the teachers
6. *Samadhana*: concentration of the mind on the one reality: *Sat* (Brahman).

These definitions in *Aparoksha Anubhuti* accord with his own experience. By looking at his life, we can see that from

[7] Swami Vimuktananda, *The Aparokshanubhuti or Self Realization of Sri Shankaracharya*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Pithoragarh, Himalayas, India, 1989, p. 3

his childhood he was exhibiting or building these virtues in himself. We can also see the whole effort of his life fuelled by the desire for liberation, *mumukshutva*, described in sloka 9:

> Oh Lord! When and how shall I be free from (births and deaths) which bind me to this world – such a burning desire is called mumukshutva.

Shankara is convinced that only one endowed with, or able to cultivate through sadhana, the four qualities known as the sadhana chatushtaya, can practise constant reflection and attain self-realization.

Reality related to karma and consciousness

In slokas 11–40 Shankara discusses the path of enquiry, *vichara*. Slokas 41–50 discuss how worldly phenomenal reality is also real although in a different dimension from the reality of the atman. Then, interestingly, slokas 51–55 explain how there is really no difference between phenomenal and transcendental reality. He explains this perception in slokas 56–65 by discussing the different realities in relation to the four different states of consciousness, and the importance of *sakshi*, the one who witnesses all the different levels without being affected in any way.

In slokas 66–86 he repeatedly gives examples of how cause and effect are confused. For example, sloka 66:

> (Unknowingly) people perform all their action in and through Brahman, just as through ignorance people don't know that earthenware pots, etc., are nothing but earth.

He completes this section in slokas 87–99 where he discusses prarabdha karma.

Fifteen steps to self-realization

Shankara then details the yogic path as he sees it. This teaching is still referred to and employed in the Dashnami

tradition today. By doing so, the present-day masters are taking yoga, which has become popular as a way of enhancing everyday life, back to its roots in the Upanishads.

We might assume that following Patanjali's eightfold path of *ashtanga yoga*, and becoming reasonably adept in samadhi would be part of the preparation for becoming an aspirant who Shankara considers eligible for the teachings for final emancipation. Leggett[8] points out that Shankara prescribes skill in samadhi as a preparatory qualification for spiritual purification in *Upadesha Sahasri* (I:17:23), *Brihadaranyaka Bhashya* (4:4:23) and in his *Gita Bhashya* (4:38). Also, Shankara repeatedly follows Vyasa's definition, "Yoga is samadhi."

In *Aparoksha Anubhuti* slokas 100–126, Shankara gives fifteen steps to self-realization. They do parallel Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* and require detailed treatment; however, we can see that he has detailed the upanishadic system which emphasizes lifestyle far more than Patanjali's teachings do (slokas 102–103):

> *Yami, hi niyamastyaago, mounam deshasya kaalataa*
> *Aasanam, moolabandhashcha dehasaamyam cha driksthitih*
> *Praanasamyamanam chaiva pratyaahaarashcha dhaaranaa*
> *Aatmadhyaanam samaadhishcha proktaanyangaani vai kramaat.*

> The limbs of yoga are described as follows: control of senses, control of mind, renunciation of mind, silence in any (space and time situation), asana, moolbandha, steadiness of vision, perfect balance of prana, pratyahara, dharana, meditation on the Self and complete absorption.

Shankara explains each of the fifteen steps pithily and with a rather sardonic humour (slokas 104–124), and his interpretation of these 'well known' aspects of yoga definitely shows that a siddha is speaking:

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[8] Trevor Leggett, *Sankara on the Yoga Sutras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, 1st Indian ed., Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, India, 1992, pp. 26–27

1. *Yama*: restraining all the senses due to the knowledge, "All this is Brahman", which should be practised again and again.
2. *Niyama*: the continuous flow of one-pointed thought, excluding all other thoughts, is to be regularly practised.
3. *Tyaga*: abandoning the illusory universe, knowing it to be the all-conscious atman is honoured by the great, as it leads to immediate liberation.
4. *Mouna*: being one with that silence from which words together with the mind turn back. (Silence by restraining speech is taught for the ignorant.)
5. *Desha*: space or solitude, wherein the universe does not exist in the beginning, end or middle, but whereby it is pervaded at all times.
6. *Kaala*: time, the non-dual blissful (Brahman) which, in the twinkling of an eye, brings all beings into existence.
7. *Asana*: a posture in which meditation on Brahman flows spontaneously and unceasingly.
8. *Moolabandha*: That (Brahman) which is the root of all existence and on which the restraint of the mind is based.
9. *Dehasamyama*: equipoise through absorption in Brahman, not mere straightening of the body like a dried-up tree.
10. *Drishti*: transforming the ordinary vision into realizing the world as Brahman, seeing That alone where all distinctions of the seer, sight and the seen cease. That is the highest vision, and not that which is directed to the tip of the nose.
11. *Pranayama*: restraining all the modifications of the mind by regarding all mental states as Brahman alone. Exhaling, *rechaka*, is the negation of the phenomenal world. Inhaling, *puraka*, is knowing 'I am Brahman', and holding the breath, *kumbhaka*, is being steady in that awareness. This is the real pranayama, whereas the ignorant only torture the nose.
12. *Pratyahara*: absorbing the mind in the Supreme – being aware of the atman in all objects, it should be practised by the seekers after liberation.

13. *Dharana*: wherever the mind goes, keeping it steady through realization of Brahman.
14. *Dhyana*: remaining independent of everything, being established in 'I am Brahman', this produces supreme bliss.
15. *Samadhi*: being beyond all thought by making it changeless and then identifying it with Brahman; this is knowledge.

Becoming established

So instead of the eight limbs of Patanjali's ashtanga yoga, Shankara's has fifteen limbs. Both teachers, however, regard arriving at samadhi as only the starting ground. The point is that becoming established in this state of consciousness – so that it is our basic manner of perceiving what is going on, even when experiencing the sensory matrix of embodiment – takes time. A lot of repeated practice is necessary to transform the occasional experience of samadhi, received through grace or good fortune, into our standard operational mode which enables us to always deal wisely with the phenomena met during life, and thus end prarabdha karma.

Once one has achieved samadhi, the next step is crucial. Shankara explains that one should carefully practise until that blissful state arises spontaneously as soon as one summons it. Once this level of perfection is reached, no further effort is required. In slokas 125-126 he says:

> The aspirant should carefully practise this (meditation) that reveals his natural bliss until, being under his full control, it arises spontaneously, in an instant when called into action.
>
> Then he, the best among Yogis having attained to perfection, becomes free from all practices. The real nature of such a man never becomes an object of the mind or speech.[9]

Aparoksha Anubhuti ends with slokas 127–144 which deal with obstacles to samadhi and how to overcome them.

[9] Swami Vimuktananda, *The Aparokshanubhuti or Self Realization of Sri Shankaracharya*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Pithoragarh, Himalayas, India, 1989, slokas 125–126

Patanjali lists the obstacles and accompanying obstructions in Chapter 1, verses 30–31 of the *Yoga Sutras* and offers different solutions in Chapter 1, verses 32–40.

> Disease, dullness, doubt, procrastination, laziness, craving, erroneous perception, inability to achieve finer states and instability are the obstacles. (30)
>
> Pain, depression, shaking of the body and unrhythmic breathing are the accompanying symptoms of mental distraction. (31)[10]

Shankara's list differs somewhat from Patanjali's, but they are recognizably talking about the same experience (slokas 127–128):

> Obstacles, such as lack of enquiry, idleness, desire for sense-pleasure, sleep, dullness, distraction, tasting of joy, and the sense of blankness.

He says that to acquire knowledge of Brahman one should slowly get rid of these obstacles as they unavoidably appear while practising for samadhi.

Finally, Shankara recommends that one should think constantly of Brahman because if one continuously thinks carefully about something, one eventually becomes that. Beginning with the visible universe, and moving into greater and greater areas of subtlety, one should realize all as Brahman and therefore identify with Brahman as the cause of everything (slokas 140–142). The final slokas assure us that this path to bliss and illumined consciousness can be followed, and success is assured for those devoted to guru and Brahman.

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[10] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Four Chapters on Freedom: Commentary on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 1976), pp. 88–90

II. UPADESHA SAHASRI

The *Upadesha Sahasri* dovetails neatly with the teachings of *Aparoksha Anubhuti*, sometimes repeating the same points, as is necessary in teaching, and sometimes focusing on more subtle points which were not dealt with in detail in *Aparoksha Anubhuti* but simply mentioned in passing. Also, rather than focusing on the fifteen steps for the disciple, in *Upadesha Sahasri* we find seven steps designed as teaching guidelines for the guru.

Upadesha Sahasri is the upadesha grantha most universally accepted as an authentic text of Shankara's. It is in two parts: a prose and a metrical section. It has been commented on by many established scholars as well as leaders of the sannyasa tradition. Just like Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, the *Upadesha Sahasri* begins with the word *atha* often translated as 'now', which is itself both a blessing and an indication that much has gone before. The requirements for eligibility are rigorous, implying a great deal of prior work and refinement of the aspirant, perhaps the fifteen steps of yoga outlined in *Aparoksha Anubhuti* are part of the preparatory work.

The *Upadesha Sahasri* begins (1:1):

> We shall now explain a method of teaching the means to liberation for the benefit of those aspirants after liberation who are desirous (of this teaching) and are possessed of faith (in it).[11]

The 'means to liberation' referred to here is self-knowledge. The two main qualities necessary for an aspirant to become a disciple are given as *mumukshutva*, intense desire for liberation, and *shraddha*, faith. These two qualities transform one's whole life into a search for knowledge, and it is that search for knowledge – and the effort to transmit it effectively and accurately which defines the life and teachings of Shankara.

[11] Swami Jagadananda (trans.), *Upadesa Sahasri of Sri Shankaracarya*, 9th impression, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1941, p. 1 verse 1:1

In *Upadesha Sahasri* Shankara says that the knowledge which is a means to liberation should be explained repeatedly until it is clearly understood, to a disciple who demonstrates he has acquired the necessary requisites, the sadhana chatushtaya (1:2):

> That means to liberation, viz. knowledge, should be explained again and again until it is firmly grasped, to a pure Brahmana disciple who is indifferent to everything that is transitory and achievable through certain means, who has given up the desire for a son, for wealth and for this world and the next, who has adopted the life of a wandering monk and is endowed with control over the mind and the senses, with compassion etc., as well as the qualities of a disciple well-known in the scriptures, and who has approached the teacher in the prescribed manner, and been examined in respect of his caste, profession, conduct, learning and parentage.[12]

The first requirement for effectively teaching the means to liberation is evidently an attribute of Shankara himself, for his many books endlessly repeat the same truths, never tiring of answering the incisive or hair-splitting questions and doubts of his adversaries and students.

Humility

Does the reference to caste in this list of requirements indicate that this is an early work before the humbling incident with the chandala of Varanasi? Or is it a statement of his mature conclusions that caste actually refers to a person's inner quality and is not an inherited factor? If one looks at the following teaching guidelines, it seems clear he is referring to *swabhava*, one's inner nature. Shankara emphasizes humility in *Upadesha Sahasri* (1:5), explaining it as the means to knowledge:

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[12] *ibid*. Swami Jagadananda, *Upadesa Sahasri of Sri Shankaracarya*, p. 2 verse 1:2

He should also thoroughly impress upon the disciple qualities like humility, which are the means to knowledge.

Nine qualities of a guru

The qualities Shankara lists in a true guru in *Upadesha Sahasri* are (1:6a):[13]

1. Being able to explain the pros and cons of an argument.
2. Understanding questions and remembering them.
3. Possessing tranquillity, self-restraint, compassion and a desire to help others.
4. Understanding and having a wide knowledge of the scriptures.
5. Being unattached to gross and subtle enjoyments.
6. Being established in knowledge of Brahman.
7. Upholding the correct rules of conduct.
8. Being clean of impurities like self-importance, pride, deceit, cunning, jugglery, jealousy, falsehood, egotism and attachment.
9. Having the one aim of helping others, specifically by imparting the knowledge of Brahman.

Seven steps as teaching guidelines

He then gives seven steps a guru should follow while instructing the disciple, with many quotations from the Upanishads for reference:

1. Teach the shruti texts establishing the oneness of the self with Brahman.
2. Teach the definitions of Brahman and atman, proving the innermost self is beyond transmigratory existence and is not different from Brahman.
3. Ask the disciple, "Who are you?"
4. If answered "I am the son of so and so . . ." the teacher is then to ask, "Then how do you hope to get beyond

[13] Swami Jagadananda (trans.), *Upadesa Sahasri of Sri Shankaracarya*, 9th impression, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1941, p. 4, verse 1:5

transmigratory existence as your body will be eaten up after death?"

5. If answered, "I am different from the body, I have given up so many of them during countless lives and now long to be free from the wheel", the teacher is then to ask, "Good, then why did you wrongly say you are the son of a brahmin, identifying yourself with lineage, and so forth?"
6. If answered, "How is this body with its characteristics of lineage and so forth, different from the self . . ." the teacher is then to point out the definitions of the self, and encourage the student to remember them.
7. This encouragement comes in the form of tattwa jnana. The guru should explain that just as foam arises on clear water, so the name and form of *akasha*, space, arises on the pure self. From akasha arose the other tattwas, such as air, fire, etc., which form material existence, including body and mind. Thus the mind-body arises from the self. It is created and inhabited by the self.

How deep can we go?

The guru is to diagnose the depth of understanding of the disciple. Mere intellectual understanding of the concept of enlightenment, or even having some experience of dhyana and savikalpa samadhi is not enough. The illusory nature of the physical body and one's connection to it must be experienced profoundly and the sense of identity with Brahman firmly established. The conundrum is that you get taught only if you are a male brahmin, due to the presumption that only the brahmins had the learning and the capability, by virtue of their genes, to reach the understanding of points 5 & 6 above, but to pass the exam . . . see questions 5 & 6 above!

In the materialistic-scientific mindset that we are just coming out of, Shankara's explanation of our true nature sounded rather fey, but today he has got quantum physics and neurological research on his side. Research into the neurophysiology of the 'missing limb' syndrome backs up

Shankara's conviction that the human body-mind is just a projection of a deeper reality.

People who are missing fingers or limbs often report feelings of pressure, itching, pain, heat or cold in the limb as though it is still there – and they are unable to scratch or relieve the sensation because it is only in the nerves and brain. After researching the neurological mechanisms for this experience, Professor V. S. Ramachandran, MD, PhD, Director of the Center for Brain and Cognition at the University of California at San Diego concludes:

> These experiments . . . have helped us understand what is going on in the brains of patients with phantoms . . . But there's a deeper message here: Your own body is a phantom, one that your brain has temporarily constructed purely for convenience . . .
>
> For your entire life you have been walking around assuming that your 'self' is anchored to a single body that remains stable and permanent at least until death. Indeed, the 'loyalty' of your self to your own body is so axiomatic that you never even pause to think about it, let alone question it. Yet these experiments suggest the exact opposite – that your body image, despite all its appearance of durability, is an entirely transitory internal construct . . . merely a shell that you've temporarily created.[14]

The publisher of the above reference points out that in his summary, Dr Ramachandran quotes Shankara's *Viveka-chudamani*: "You never identify your self with the shadow cast by your body, or with its reflection, or with the body you see in a dream or in your imagination. Therefore you should not identify yourself with this living body either."

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[14] Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of Christ Within You: A revelatory commentary on the teachings of Jesus, Vol. 1*, Self-Realization Fellowship, Los Angeles, USA, 1st ed., 2004, reprinted 2007, pp. 248–249 (footnote re. Professor V. S. Ramachandran, *Phantoms in the Brain: Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind*)

The guru is to continue challenging and correcting false conditionings about the nature of reality and the self at progressively subtler levels until *chitta vritti nirodhah* is attained. Once the modifications of the consciousness are halted, the ensuing experience of nirbeeja samadhi can be established.

This may all sound beyond our scope, but having an aim improves the vision at all levels. Shankara concludes this section by saying that an ignorant person (such as we) can neither discriminate what is really desirable and how to attain or realize it, nor what is actually harmful or undesirable, and how to avoid that. Still, he assures us that gradually, by understanding and applying the guidelines in the scriptures as given by the guru, we free ourselves from helpless bondage to transmigratory existence.

The question and the question

Shankara then expounds on the knowledge of the changeless and non-dual self, and gives insights into the sort of relationship advocated between teacher and aspirant. One interesting aspect is the teaching method. Shankara shows questioning is to be encouraged and even provoked until the disciple answers his own questions. For the student to express doubts regarding the teacher's viewpoints and explanations is part of the attempt to adjust personal experience. Paramahansa Yogananda from the Giri branch of the Dashnamis explains:

> He is not a guru who leads his followers into blind subjugation. Teachers who slavishly control their students after a dogmatic pattern destroy in them the power of free will . . . The God-sent guru has no selfish interest, only the highest interest of the disciple. Everyone needs a psychological mirror in order to see the blemishes that have become an accustomed and favored part of the acquired personality of one's second nature. The guru serves as this mirror. He holds up to the devotee a reflection of his perfect soul-image over which are superimposed the flaws of the ego that yet mar perfection. In ways both open and

> subtle the guru brings to the fore in the disciple lessons to be learned that perhaps for incarnations have lain shelved in the dusty corners of the consciousness. [15]

Teachers who control their students and expect a slavish obedience destroy their spontaneity, creativity and self-confidence. One of the main requisites in a guru, according to Shankara, is that their motivation is only to help the disciple. Holding up a mirror in which one can see the conditionings and problems of the personality sounds fairly harmless. However, the guru highlights both gross and subtle faults that have been accepted as part of our self-image and never before questioned – to be subtly (or not at all subtly) informed that these are indeed just ego and excess baggage is painful. It is natural therefore – inevitable perhaps, that eventually the disciple will have had enough and will begin to discover soul-searching questions.

Where is the line between healthy questions and useless dispute? Between the despairing questions of an Arjuna and those of one lacking the necessary qualities? Well, does the dispute point at one's own ego or something else? Are we using viveka and vairagya? Are we being driven by mumukshutva or something else?

Let us begin

The opening verse of Chapter 2 of *Upadesha Sahasri* gives the student's question:

> How can I become free from this transmigratory cycle where I feel pain whether waking or dreaming, and it starts again as soon as I wake from sleep? Is this inevitable? Is this the natural order of things? Or is there hope of liberation?

The guru assures the disciple that it is possible to break free, and gives instructions in Advaita Vedanta, so we have

[15] *ibid*. Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming, Vol. 1*, p. 192

a dialogue between the guru and disciple. Once more, the steady patience of the teacher who goes over the same ground again and again is apparent (2:45–50): The disciple asks three questions:

1. What is the cause of all this?
2. What will end it?
3. What is my true nature?

We can see the resemblance to the Buddhist questions on the nature of suffering and how to end it. The guru explains that the cause is ignorance, and therefore it can be ended by knowledge. This provokes another three questions:

1. What is that ignorance?
2. What is its cause?
3. What is the knowledge that will illumine my own nature?

And the teacher gives three answers:

1. You are actually the Supreme Self, but you ignorantly think you are liable to transmigration.
2. You are not the doer, but you mistake yourself to be so.
3. You are eternal, but mistake yourself to be non-eternal.

So far so good, but the disciple cannot accept this because his understanding of the word 'ignorance' is bound up with ignorance of things at the material dimension. The way in is to concentrate on point two first, "You are not the doer or even the experiencer, but you mistake yourself to be so".

There follows a lengthy argument where the teacher's steadfastness of vision prevails when he rounds on the student with his own question (2:69): "Are you different from the consciousness of pain and pleasure and from what I say or not?"[16]

After all this debate, the disciple is cornered and unwillingly, admits, "Well, I can't say that I am not different from them. They are objects of my knowledge like pots and other things. If I were not different, I couldn't know them. But I do know them – so I am different from my experiences."

[16] Swami Jagadananda (trans.), *Upadesa Sahasri of Sri Shankaracarya*, 9th impression, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1941, verse 2:69, p. 45 ff.

Can we accept our Self?

Yet another long argument follows because the student cannot accept as his own the characteristics of the Supreme. Again, the adamantine conviction of the teacher prevails.

The disciple then asks more humbly about the fluctuating states of consciousness that formed part of his original question – maybe becoming really aware that these questions set him on the path of knowledge (2:86–91):

"If I am absolutely changeless, why do I go through states of sleep, dream and wakefulness?"

The guru points out, "But you just experience those states. They come and go like clothes you wear – but they're not your own nature, otherwise they would be continuous like the consciousness which is witnessing them. Pure consciousness, the Self, never ceases to exist."

The disciple says, timidly, one supposes (2:92): "But there's an exception here, I have no consciousness in deep sleep."

Now listen to this! (2:93): "No, you contradict yourself."

"How?"

"You say you are not conscious while asleep but actually you are."

"But," the disciple continues uneasily, "I was never aware of consciousness or anything else while asleep."

"You are so conscious in deep sleep! You can deny knowledge of the existence of objects while you're in deep sleep, but not the existence of knowledge. Your consciousness is nothing but knowledge. It's your self, your consciousness, your knowledge saying, 'I was conscious of nothing'."

Now here, the teacher is exhibiting his own experience and thus Shankara reveals to some degree the extent to which he is a master of introversion. We struggle with distractions from the senses and instincts in order to be the witness of our actions, thoughts, feelings and subtler motivations even in the waking state. He is witnessing deep sleep; aware of a state where even the subtle traces of mental impressions have subsided, where nothing is disturbing the pure space of the consciousness.

Repetition

Chapter 3 of *Upadesha Sahasri* is a short chapter on repetition; as it is essential for the student to imbibe the teachings deeply. It is not enough to understand intellectually. The teachings must become ingrained as a part of the personality. We can further understand the power of repetition if we remember the findings of neuroplasticity; experiences can become hardwired into the actual physical structure of the brain with sufficient repetitive practice.

The frontal lobes of a human being contain a high proportion of white matter, the sheath of myelin: a phospholipids layer which in some neurons surround the axons of the nerve cells. A repeated thought, like a repeated action, can form an attitude, a part of the character, because in the brain such habitual messages are stabilized and facilitated by myelin sheathing.

The tools for correct perception are present in the brain but lie dormant, as we do not yet have conscious access to the higher faculties which connect them to our awareness. So we have to continuously practise yogic techniques and the vedic mantras and affirmations of truth, such as the maha vakyas, which open awareness of what is happening inside to the witnessing consciousness.

The teachings of Advaita Vedanta are food for the spirit, and just like food for the body must be eaten and absorbed again and again for the healthy growth of the disciple. Hence the first verse begins by saying repetition is necessary for tranquillity of the mind because it destroys accumulated sins and virtues. Today, on the basis of brain research, we could say it reforms the accumulated patterning of connections in the nervous system and the brain. But Shankara had reached the same conclusions a long time ago through introspection.

Pratyahara

In raja yoga, *pratyahara* means the ability to look within, to follow the mind within, to master the senses and internalize and perceive our thoughts, conditioning, etc. This yoga

practice begins by simply improving the everyday situation: giving insight and balance, skill in deciding aims and focusing on them without attachment. But, for Shankara, all this is just more conditioning, it serves to keep our attention on the vyavahara reality rather then the real nature of the self. Thus he describes the advaitic method of pratyahara in the fifteen steps – focusing continually on atma/Brahman – so that there may be a cessation of all this.

Shankara, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Satyananda and modern brain research all speak repeatedly about the need to prepare the structure that we are living in – the body-mind – at a cellular level in order to sustain the high-energy-realization aspects of evolution. Sharon Begley points out that attention is the directing agent for neuroplasticity. In Mike Merzenich's experiments with monkeys there was repeated stimulation of their finger tips while music played. Some monkeys were taught to pay attention to the music, some to the tactile sensation. According to where their attention was directed different parts of the brain expanded – either in the auditory cortex or in the somatosensory cortex – up to three times. In 1996, Mike Merzenich said in a letter:

> The patterns of activity of neurons in a sensory area can be altered by patterns of attention . . . Experience coupled with attention leads back to physical changes in the structure and future functioning of the nervous system. This leaves us with a clear physiological fact . . . moment by moment we choose and sculpt how our ever-changing minds will work, we choose who we will be the next moment in a very real sense and these changes are often left embossed in physical form on our material selves. [17]

True we are not mice or monkeys, but are we fully human beings? If we are, do we have sense control and a clear

[17] Begley, Sharon, *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain*, Ballentine Books, New York, USA, 2007, pp. 158–159

sense of direction? Have we purified or sculpted our subtle physiology? Do we really wish to improve? Surely these are relevant questions for today as we search for a clear vision of where we are and where to direct our energy, consciousness and lives. We have to be able to overcome the conditionings of the society and our karma, which affect the very structure of the body and brain, and therefore even the experiences that we can perceive as a basis for choosing our reality.

So now we can understand that Shankara is speaking about changing not just thoughts but the mental and physical structure. Correct teaching and sustained effort in sadhana are necessary so that physiological and psychological adaptation can take place. One has to practise daily in order for sadhana to become established and, according to tradition, practising around dawn when the mental states are naturally more peaceful and one can maintain attention is an important point. The type of attention we give our sadhana is important in actually moulding our nervous system and laying down the patterns for future interactions.

Shankara states in philosophical language the difference between oneself and the five senses and then gives an affirmation for the seeker to repeat (3:114–115):

> When distressed by sound and other experiences, the knower of Brahman will repeat:
> 'I am Consciousness, not attached to anything, changeless, immovable, imperishable, free from fear. I am extremely subtle and cannot be affected by sound because I am unattached. Music, pleasant praise, or false, terrible, insulting words – where is the loss or gain due to sound – what can it do to me? Sound glorifies or injures an ignorant man due to attachment and lack of discrimination. But it cannot affect me, a man of knowledge, even slightly.'[18]

[18] *op cit*., Swami Jagadananda, *Upadesa Sahasri of Sri Shankaracarya*, for original Sanskrit, verses 3:114–116

His teaching on how to overcome the senses continues in this way for each of the senses, and now we can understand what he meant when he defined pratyahara as "absorbing the mind in the Supreme – being aware of the atman in all objects", in the fifteen steps of *Aparoksha Anubhuti*.

This section of prose teachings in *Upadesha Sahasri*, concludes (3:116):

> The real reason I am unattached is that nothing really exists except the self. As there is no duality, the teachings of the Upanishads on the oneness of the self should be studied very closely.

Again – but in poetry

Part 2 of *Upadesha Sahasri*, the metrical section, repeats, yet again, many of the previous points! Why? Like music, poetry speaks to the emotions. It uses silence and rhythm to encourage participation by the intuitive part of the mind. Poetry and metrical writing in general evokes the nuances and the depth that a mere logical progression of words in a narrative style falls short of. We have to experience the teachings really, so he repeats them again using a different, more intimate medium. In the final teachings of *Upadesha Sahasri*, Shankara uses poetry to lay his insights before us. Similarly, as a child, he often spontaneously expressed himself in song.

He reiterates arguments that the path of action can only take us so far; it is no longer appropriate or even possible for a man of knowledge because he has no ego (verse 12). When there is no individual self to experience suffering and its two hands, attraction and repulsion, *raga* and *dwesha*, there is no samsara, as duality is necessary to the continuance of samsara. He only performs action free from selfish motivation, *nishkama karma yoga*, and is therefore free from karmic consequences.

Do we want to be free?

Then comes a series of very short chapters repeating and explaining further the points that were made in the prose

section of the book. The last verse of Chapter 4 of the metrical section concludes (4:5):

> The knowledge that one really is the pure self begins by disposing of the idea that the body-mind vehicle is our real self – and a person is set free *even against his will* when that knowledge becomes as firm as his belief that he is a human being.[19]

The wording seems strange? Why would someone not want this freedom? The next chapter explains that due to errors in understanding, because they are ignorant of the true nature of the self, people do not want to receive self-knowledge due to fear that it will destroy their duties. Or for the hedonists of today the fear may be that it will destroy our pleasures and plunge us into a fearsome unknown. Or it may just be that we like earth and want to come back to dip our pot into the waters of samsara again and again like a waterwheel.

Indeed, the texts of Shankara often read like science fiction, translated from the journals of a space traveller. This is because he knows that essentially he, his disciples and all beings, are something that ignorant human beings have lost contact with: the immortal witness. He says, (10:3–5a):

> I am unborn, deathless, changeless – I will not grow old. I am immortal, self-effulgent, all-pervading and non-dual. I am pure, beyond cause and effect, contented and blissful. I am free. Yes.
>
> All the unreal perceptions the painful series of body, mind and senses from waking, dream or sleep states have no independent existence, they are not me, they are illusory projections. I am the self, beyond these three and therefore called the fourth, the seer of all the three states.

[19] *ibid*., Swami Jagadananda, *Upadesa Sahasri of Sri Shankaracarya*, for original Sanskrit throughout metrical section

And he continues describing the nature of the witness in the next chapter, emphasizing repeatedly that the real self is other than the body-mind and its experiences and fluctuations, and that we can read all about it in the Vedas. These teachings are consistent with the views expressed in his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*. Only actionless action, free from doership or any attachment to fruits remains for one established in wisdom. Action in any way connected with the ego, or feelings of 'I' or 'mine', is not possible for the enlightened one because no ego remains.

We may feel at times that we have grasped the truth and have made substantial progress on the spiritual path, but here is Shankara's acid test.

> He who thinks he sees the (one) self in all beings yet still feels he has enemies believes fire can be made cold. (14:32)

Read sloka 14:32 again, reflect upon it; it presents a mirror, simple and plain. It reflects our state of consciousness without room for self-flattery, and offers clear insight regarding the depth of our realization, and on how we should conduct our lives. And, as freedom is one's real nature, its realization is not restricted to the waking state only. *Atmabhava*, the realization of the one self, is not a matter of merely controlling the conscious thought process. Atmabhava extends through all levels of consciousness; even dreams and the memory are purified along with our interaction with the world.

No difference

And finally, Shankara speaks clearly of the notion of caste being false, along with the egoistic notions of particular duties as one's right: (15:8–11)

> A wise man should always remember his real nature as revealed in the scriptures, disregarding incompatible identification with caste or stage of life, which causes the notion of associated duties.

> The same self is in all beings, and they are in it, just as they are all in space and are pervaded by space. Everything is pervaded by the one self, which is considered to be pure and consists of the light of pure consciousness. A person like Vasudeva, who speaks of the same self residing in a peepal tree and in his own body, knows the (one) self to be the same everywhere and has the highest understanding of Brahman.

Shankara is speaking of the experience of union with other life forms that one reaches in samadhi. He is teaching that we should not identify with any notion of ego, or with the states of waking, dream or sleep, or life and death, which the fluctuating consciousness undergoes. Instead one should deepen the identification of oneself as the constant witness, and see that witnessing self reflected back in the eyes of all the living beings too.

Shankara also gives a different understanding of death and rebirth, which removes fear:

> Discard ignorance, which is the root of all superimposition and transmigratory existence, and know oneself to be Brahman, always free and fearless. (16:17)

Shankara concludes by reiterating the qualities gained when a disciple is able to imbibe the training, follow the teachings of the guru and acquire right knowledge (16:71–72):

> This knowledge is the supreme purifier, acquiring it one becomes free from all the merit and demerit accumulated through ignorance in many past lives. Like space, one doesn't get attached to actions in this world.
> This knowledge should only be given to one whose mind is peaceful, whose senses are controlled, who is free from faults and has discharged the necessary scriptural duties, who has imbibed the necessary good qualities, is always obedient to the teacher and wants liberation and nothing else.

13

Songs: Stotra and Stuti Granthas

Shankara did not stop at philosophy's dry boundaries. Alongside the penetrating intellect and intuition he employed in his commentaries and teachings, he had outstanding skill in Sanskrit compositions and debate. He must have had a beautiful voice, both speaking and singing, as he enchanted kings with his songs. Shankara is known for writing a wide range of poetic chants and esoteric literatures which reveal a great depth of devotion and bliss. He was a *guru*, an enlightened being, a *siddha*, a perfected yogi, a tantric, a devotee of Devi, Shiva, Vishnu and other saguna manifestations of that attributeless Brahman of Advaita Vedanta. The Dashnami sannyasins of India found no problem with that; they revel in his benevolence:

> By his hymn of Kanaka-Lakshmi he brought prosperity to a poor family; by his hymn Soundaryalahari he has revealed the unique glory of the Divine mother; by his Siva-bhujanga he has produced a cure for the obsession of fear in men.[1]

This is a key in answering the question of who Shankara is. The scholarly debates lack true recognition of his spon-

[1] Madhava-Vidyaranya, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, translated by Swami Tapasyananda, p. 67

taneity. He was born a natural genius; he did not have to work at it. According to legend and according to written record, he repeatedly expressed himself by spontaneously composing, singing and causing to be sung the most beautiful *bhajans*, devotional songs, *stotras,* and *stutis*, hymns of praise, and other miscellaneous chants inspired by different experiences of his life.

Shankara is said to have completed the study of the four Vedas by eight years of age, of all the arts and sciences by twelve, and then travelled through India searching for his guru. Throughout this period he was spontaneously writing hymns of great beauty. We have to keep this in mind when we begin to look at his early writings and the stories connected with them.

People speak of him as though he set out from childhood to organize institutions, restructure the orders of sannyasa, establish Advaita Vedanta as the standard philosophy, and write intricate intellectual commentaries on the major philosophical works of his time. That he was born with such a destiny is clear, but as a child who had just found his guru after long searching, his song on the nature of atma was not composed to prove his philosophical understanding of the question "Who are you?" More likely the beautiful and profound words spilled full-fledged with a boy's yearning to open his heart before the famous guru he had travelled so far to find and longed to live and study with.

Which are Shankara's hymns?

There is the usual scholarly debate on whether each of the songs traditionally assigned to him are really Shankara's. A chart is offered to make the extent of the debate a little clearer.

The *Shankara Grantha Ratnavali*, written in Bengali, was referred to in the charts of his commentaries (*bhashya*) and teachinig texts (*upadesha grantha*). It says that Shankara wrote 76 stotra-stuti-granthas, including two versions each of *Achyutashtaka*, *Krishnashtaka* and *Yamunashtaka*. To simplify things, the basis of this chart is the list of 72 hymns and meditative verses attributed to Shankara by

Swami Chinmayananda.[2] The second and third columns are from Govind Chandra Pande,[3] who cites Belvalkar and H.R. Bhagavat. Some from this list are also thought of as upadesha granthas and have been marked so (UG). Some of these beautiful and inspiring hymns have already been referred to while discussing Shankara's life and teachings, now we will look at them in more detail.

List of hymns

Shankara the Missionary	***Life & Thought (Belkavar)***	***Life & Thought (Bhagavat)***
1. *Achyutashtakam*		
2. *Advaita Pancharatnam* or *Atma-Panchakam* (UG)		Yes
3. Ananda Lahari	Yes	
4. *Annapoorna Stotram* or *Annapoorna Ashtakam*		
5. *Ardha Nari Nateshvara Stotram*		
Not listed		*Atmastakam*
6. *Bhagavat Manasa Pooja*		
7. *Bhavani Bhujangam*		
8. *Bhramana Amba Ashtakam*		
Not listed	*Carpata Panjarika*	Y
9. *Dakshinamurti Ashtakam*		
10. *Dakshinamurti (Varnamala) Stotram* (UG)	Y	Y

[2] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara the Missionary*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, India, 1978, pp. 215–217

[3] Govind Chandra Pande, *Life and Thought of Shankaracarya*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, India, 1994, p. 123

11. *Dasha Sloki* or *Nirvana Dashakam* (UG)	Y	
12. *Devi Bhujangam*		
13. *Devi Shashti Upachara Pooja Stotram*		
14. *Dhanya Ashtakam* (UG)		Y
15. *Dwadasha Linga Stotram*	Y (*Dwadasha Panjarika*)	Y
16. *Eka Sloki* (UG)		
17. *Ganesha Bhujangam*		
18. *Ganga Ashtakam*		
19. *Gauri Dashakam*		
20. *Govinda Ashtakam*	Y	
21. *Gurvashtakam* (UG)		
22. *Hanumat Pancharatnam*		
23. *Hari Stuti* or *Harim Ida Stotra*	Y	Y
24. *Jagannatha Ashtakam*		
25. *Jeevanmukta Ananda Lahari* or *Anubhava Ananda Lahari* (UG)		
26. *Kaala Bhairava Ashtakam*		
27. *Kalyana Vrishti Stavam*		
28. *Kanakadhara Stotram* or *Kanaka Dhavastava*		
29. *Kashi Panchakam*		Y
30. *Lakshmi Narasimha Karunarasa Stotram*		

31. *Lakshmi Narasimha Pancharatnam*		
32. *Lalita Pancharatnam*		
33. *Manikarnika Ashtakam*		
34. *Manisha Panchakam* (UG)	Probably	Y
35. *Mantra Matrika Pushpamala Stavam*		
36. *Maya Panchakam* (UG)		
37. *Minakshi Pancharatnam*		
38. *Minakshi Stotram*		
39. *Mrityunjaya Manasa Pooja Stotram*		
40. *Narmada Ashtakam*		
41. *Navaratna Malika*		
42. *Nirguna Manasa Pooja* (UG)		Y
43. *Nirvanashtakam* or *Atmashtaka* (UG)		Y (*Nirvana-manjari*)
44. *Panduranga Ashtakam*		
Not listed		*Parapuja* or *Atmapuja* (UG)
45. *Pratah Smarana Stotram* (UG)		
46. *Sarada Bhujangam*		
47. *Saundarya Lahari*		
48. *Shata Sloki* (UG)		
49. *Shat Padi Stotram*	Y	Y
50. *Shiva Aparadha Kshamapana Stotram*		

51. *Shiva Bhujangam*	Probably	
52. *Shiva Kesadi Padanta Varnana Stotram*		
53. *Shiva Namavali Ashtakam*		
54. *Shivananda Lahari*		
55. *Shiva Padadi Kesanta Varnana Stotram*		
56. *Shiva Pancha Akshara Nakshatra Mala Stotram*		
57. *Shiva Pancha Akshara Stotram*		
58. *Sri Ganesha Pancharatnam*		
59. *Sri Krishna Ashtakam*		
60. *Sri Rama Bhujangam*		
61. *Sri Vishnu Padadi Kesanta Varnana Stotram*		
62. *Subramanya Bhujangam*		
63. *Suvarna Mala Stuti*		
64. *Tripurasundari Ashtakam*		
65. *Tripurasundari Manasa Pooja Stotram*		
66. *Tripurasundari Vedapada Stotram*		
67. *Uma Maheshwara Stotram*		
68. *Upadesha (Sadhana) Panchakam* (UG)	Probably (*Sopana Upadesha Panchakam*)	Y
69. *Vedasara Shiva Stotram*		

Not listed		*Vijnana Nauka* or *Swarup-anusandhanam* (UG)
70. *Vishnu Bhujangam*		
71. *Yamuna Ashtakam*		
72. *Yati Panchakam* (UG)		Y (*Kaupina Panchakam*)

Now, as with the bhashyas and prakaranas, the sheer number of his hymns has caused much controversy. Could any one person have composed them all?

How do they sound to you?

The short list of compositions accepted by various modern authorities largely rests on 'objective' linguistic tests comparing the usage and frequency of words in stotras as being the best gauge for their authenticity. Pande[4] brings in many factors. His analysis looks at broader issues, philosophical and poetic factors, and takes into account the traditional respect paid to these works. He dismisses the *Yati Panchakam* as coming after the Muslim rule. He defends *Harimide* because he feels Shankara could have referred to the Vaishnava tradition for some points expressed there, and points out that commentaries on it are attributed to Vidyaranya, Swayamprakash and Anandagiri, which suggests Shankara is indeed the author. *Shatpadi* has six commentaries, one supposedly by Shankara himself, and is praised as 'one of the most beautiful prayers addressed to Vishnu' for its poetry and rhythm as well as its combination of Advaita Vedanta and bhakti. The *Shivabhujanga Stotra* is traditionally believed to have been for his mother when he returned to help her through death. The beautiful *Manisha Panchaka* connected with meeting the chandala on the streets

[4] Govind Chandra Pande, *Life and Thought of Shankaracarya*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, India, 1994, pp. 120 ff.

of Varanasi is important from a biographical point of view and also seems genuine.

What do they reveal?

The hymns traditionally said to be written by Shankara can give a clear picture of who he was at different stages of his life and also give insight into the society of his times and the people he was addressing. The hymns can also convey who he was as a teacher, as the humour, beauty and love that shines through them is itself a teaching. Even if written in part by his disciples, or if he or others changed them over the centuries, they can give information on who Shankara was thought to be, the ideals and sentiments he epitomized. More than that, they give satsang; we enter into the presence of a master. *Saundarya Lahari* is one of the last teachings that Shankara left us; esoteric understandings are the very thread from which the hymn is composed, though at first one may see only the picture woven as a design. It is a complete sadhana of Sri Vidya.

Our attempt to perceive the living Shankara through the footprints of complex, structured observations made in his commentaries, the fingerprints of his teaching style, and the fragrance of his hymns, is a holistic endeavour. We cannot limit him to a rigid set of beliefs; it just doesn't fit. This is one of our main discoveries as we continue to study the hymns that have recorded Shankara's long journey.

Therefore we propose to give here a selection of the stotras that are generally acknowledged to be his. They are transliterated so that one can taste the flavour of the words, feel and hear the rhythms and rhymes. Each has also a loose translation which aims at transmitting something of the beauty of the original inspiration. In the oral tradition associated with Shankara, the beauty of his voice is often remarked on, both as a speaker and when chanting or singing.

Music and silence – heart and brain

We may wonder why so many of Shankara's works are in poetry, or designed to be chanted or sung. Often the most

telling insights are expressed in a few lines of a song, and they are made unforgettable by the beauty of the music accompanying them. Even today it seems a love of music is the essential heart of one's spiritual activity and association with the spiritual guru. Modern research is pointing to the idea that music actually predated the development of speech as we know it today, and this explains the power of intonation, rhythm and gesture in communication.

The significance of these songs for a true understanding of Shankara's character should not be overlooked. He may have composed some of his songs as a solitary child lost in the wonder of a temple. Equally, however, he used song to bind together his disciples, as with the chorus, *Bhaja Govindam*. Or even to express a deep and socially alien conviction of the heart as does *Manisha Panchaka*.

Music and mantra play an integral role in yajna, festivals and other rituals. In the tradition of Shankara it is an activity that one is trained in, not just something one listens to passively. It is a natural expression of developing atmabhava. One may argue intellectually about the authorship of the songs attributed to Shankara, but it is much more helpful to learn them by heart, to sing or chant them regularly as a sadhana, and just be aware of the resulting feeling. Music, poetry and chanting are an intrinsic and important part of the teachings of Shankara. This medium is particularly effective, reaching beyond the power of words or intellect, because music communicates beyond the conscious mind and insists on experience. Additionally, it has a direct relation to activating brain hemispheres. Roughly speaking, while the left hemisphere speaks, the right hemisphere sings and understands silence:

> The right hemisphere specializes in non-verbal communication. It deals with whatever is implicit, where the left hemisphere is tied to 'more explicit and more conscious processing'. Subtle unconscious reactions that govern our reactions are picked up by the right hemisphere. For

example, it is the areas around the fusiform gyrus of the right hemisphere that is dominant for unconscious reading of facial expressions . . .

Music, being grounded in the body, communicative of emotion, implicit, is a natural expression of the nature of the right hemisphere . . . Given that intonation of the voice and the emotional aspects of experience are its special concern, it is to be expected that music would be a largely (though not exclusively) right-hemisphere phenomenon.[5]

It is inspiring to sing and chant Shankara's songs oneself. It isn't that we should just reflect on their philosophical insights, or what role they played both in Shankara's life story and in the continuation of the Dashnami tradition; they are instruments for transformation. We can and do participate in transformative sadhana every time we chant.

I. KANAKADHARA STOTRAM: A CHILD SINGS TO LAKSHMI

As referred to previously, young Shankara visited a pious old woman who was so poor she could only give him a small gooseberry-like fruit, an *amalaka*, and her blessings. Deeply moved, he spontaneously composed and sang the *Kanakadhara Stotram*, 'the rain of gold', to the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, who responded to his devotion by showering the woman with golden amalakas.

The prayer Shankara sung to the goddess Lakshmi was composed from compassion. If this is the child Shankara, or if this is how he is perceived and remembered by the tradition, then here is a person who, from birth, saw the heart of a person and spoke to the heart. He was not a mere intellectual or social reformer. Here we see an

[5] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, UK, 2010, pp. 71–72

essential characteristic of the spiritual guru: the ability to see within, to the heart of the matter, and the capacity to respond spontaneously, like a rain-bearing cloud, to relieve suffering.

> A master responds not to the words of people but to their thoughts, not to any psychological inference but to actual perception of their inner self . . . by being one with their life.[6]

In this early hymn there is also a foretaste of the innocent yet vividly visual spirituality that characterizes his later profoundly complex and symbolic hymns, such as the *Saundarya Lahari*. A short selection of verses follows. Also, because this prayer is the first hymn showing him as a *siddha*, or enlightened one, as a very young child, it is printed in full with a translation in Appendix 1.

Kanakadhaaraa Stotram

Angam hareh pulaka-bhooshanamaashrayantee
Bhringaanganeva mukulaabharanam tamaalam.
Angeekritaakhila-vibhootirapaangleelaa
Maangalyadaa'stu mama mangaladevataayaah. (1)

> On being gazed at by his wife Lakshmi (and appearing beautiful), (Lord Vishnu) Hari's whole body gets horripilated – the hair rising on his limbs – like a black Tamala tree with an abundance of blue buds surrounded by female bees. Just her glance is capable of bestowing all sorts of prosperities. May that grace of the auspicious goddess bless me with all good things.

Vishvaamarendra-padavibhramadaanadaksham
Aanandaheturadhikam madhuvidvisho'pi.
Eeshannisheedatu mayi kshanameekshanaartham
Indeevarodara-sahodaramindiraayaah. (3)

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[6] Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of Christ Within You: A revelatory commentary on the teachings of Jesus, Vol. 1*, 1st ed., Self-Realization Fellowship, Los Angeles, USA, 2004, reprinted 2007, p. 235

Just her playful glance is capable of showering wealth on one like Indra. Even to Lord Vishnu, the destroyer of Madhu, she gives immense pleasure through her gaze. May her eyes (Indra's sisters) turn towards me just for a second to bless me.

Dadyaaddayaanupavano dravinaambudhaaraam
Asminnakinchana-vihangashishau vishanne.
Dushkarmadharmamapaneeya chiraaya dooraam
Naaraayanapranayinee nayanaambuvaahah. (8)

Oh beloved of Lord Narayana, like a fledgling bird (fallen from the nest) I am really suffering due to my evil actions which have taken me away from you. Let your glance, like water-laden clouds driven by favourable winds, rain on me your merciful wealth.

Shrutyai namo'stu shubhakarmaphalapradaayai
Ratyai namo'stu ramaneeya-gunaarnavaayai
Shaktyai namo'stu shatapatraniketanaayai
Pushtyai namo'stu purushottama-vallabhaayai. (11)

May I offer salutations to you, the embodiment of the Vedas and the giver of the fruits of good actions. You are Rati, the ocean of fine qualities. May my salutations be to you, the personification of Shakti who dwells in the lotus flower. You are the strength of humankind and the consort of Lord Purushottama. My salutations are to you.

There is also an alternate tradition stating that Shankara, moved by the generosity and poverty of a young mother while touring in Kerala years later, sang the original hymn and then invited his four most learned disciples to compose a verse each.[7] This is also a possibility. Similar claims have been made about *Mohamudgara*. It would be an example of the sort of inspired teaching that Shankara

[7] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara the Missionary*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, India, 1978, pp. 107 ff.

is credited with time and again. The song itself, however, shows Shankara's one-pointed devotional tendency; whoever he worshipped received his full-hearted devotion. We can understand that he founded the traditional worship of five gods not as a diplomatic ploy to unite religions, but because in his heart he was truly able to revere all the different aspects of divinity.

Years later, as Shankara travelled on foot through India, a distraught father brought his son, thought to be a witless mute, to Shankara for blessings. When Shankara met the child, he asked him, "O Boy, who are you? What is your name? From where did you come? Where are you going? What do you wish to have?" In response, the boy revealed his true state of blissful union by spontaneously composing and singing a hymn on the nature of reality which demonstrated his direct perception of truth.

The incident with that good-hearted old woman must have come to mind, for Shankara named the boy *Hastamalaka*, 'the amalaka in the hand', implying the boy saw reality as clearly as one sees an amalaka in the palm of one's hand. He became one of Shankara's most devoted and simple disciples. His hymn, the *Hastamalakeeyam*, was so profound that Shankara composed a commentary on it himself.

II. DASHA SLOKI: THE CHILD PRODIGY MEETS HIS GURU

Dasha Sloki is usually accepted as genuinely Shankara's and is praised by respected scholars in the tradition. It also passes Hacker's linguistic criteria. When Shankara finally tracked his guru, Govindapadacharya down to his cave on the banks of the Narmada, where he was deep in meditation, the other disciples would not grant the boy entry, and the resulting arguments disturbed the guru whose first words to the boy were, "Who are you?" Thrilled by this first teaching, Shankara spontaneously composed the *Dasha Sloki*.

This ten-versed hymn shows the author was deeply established in wisdom, even though he was requesting initiation in Brahmavidya from Govindapada.

Dasha Sloki

Na bhoomirnnatoyam na tejo na vaayuh
Na kham nendriyam vaa na teshaam samoohah
Anaikaantikatvaat sushuptyekaasiddhah
Tadeko'vashishtah shivah kevalo'ham. (1)

I am neither earth nor fire, nor wind. I am not space, nor sense organs, nor the aggregate of these. My existence is that of atman, (seen) through the experience of deep sleep. I exist as atman – I am Shiva.

Na varnaa na varnaashraamaachaaradharmah
Na me dhaaranaadhyaanayogaadyo'pi
Anaatmaashrayaam mamaadhyaasahaanaah
Tadeko'vashishtah shivah kevalo'ham. (2)

I have no barriers of castes or its binding rules. I don't even do the practices of yoga – concentration, meditation. The deluded 'I' and 'mine' experiences are only from the non-self and they can be destroyed by the real knowledge of the self. Hence I am that auspicious and pure Shiva.

Na maataa pitaa vaa na devaa na lokaah
Na vedaa na yajnaa na teertha bravanti
Sushuptau nirastaatishoonyaatmakatvaat
Tadeko'vashishtah shivah kevalo'ham. (3)

I have no mother or father. For me there are no gods or other dimensions, Vedas, sacrifices or pilgrimage centres. In deep sleep also, the self alone exists – not shoonya (the non-existent). So I am that Shiva, pure and auspicious.

Na saankhyam na shaivam na tat paancharaatram
Na jainam na meemaamsakaadermatam vaa
Vishishtaa'nubhootyaa vishudhaatmakatvaat
Tadeko'vashishtah shivah kevalo'ham. (4)

The teachings of the scriptures like Samkhya, Shaivism, Pancharatra, Jainism or Mimamsa do not give me real knowledge. As I remain a realized soul with a special anubhuti (experience), I am that Shiva, auspicious and pure.

Na shaastaa na shaastram na shishyah na shikshaa
Na cha tvam na chaaham na chaayam prapanchah
Svaroopaa'vabodho vikalpaa'sahishnuh
Tadeko'vashishtah shivah kevalo'ham. (7)

I am neither a teacher to anyone, nor are there scriptures or their teachings. You, me, this world – none of these are real. I am interested in the oneness in all through the self and not in separation. So I am that pure self, the Shiva.

Na jaagrat na me svapnako vaa sushuptih
Na vishvo na vaa taijasah praajnako vaa
Avidyaatmakatvaat trayaanam tureeyam
Tadeko'vashishtah shivah kevalo'ham. (8)

I am not in the waking, dream or sleep states and I do not adorn the accompanying stages – vishva, taijas or prajna, which are subject to ignorance – I am of the fourth stage. So I am that pure consciousness, the Shiva.

Api vyaapakatvaaddhi tatvaprayogaat
Svatah siddha bhaavaadananyaashrayatvaat
Jagat tuchchhametat samastam tadanyat
Tadeko'vashishtah shivah kevalo'ham. (9)

The self alone is all-pervasive, capable of real favour, and it is established due to itself (not by any other means) and is independent. This whole universe, which is other than the real self, is totally unreal. So I remain ever as the pure self, Shiva.

Na chaikam tadanyam dviteeyam kutah syaat
Na vaa kevalatvam na chaa'kevalatvaam
Na shoonyam na cha ashoonyamadvaitakatvam
Katham sarva vedaantasiddham braveemi. (10)

> There is nothing other than this self so where can there be a second? The self is absolutely non-dual by nature: neither absolute nor non-absolute, and neither void nor non-void. So how can I speak of that self which is well established in all the Upanishads?

One may ask why Shankara needed to be initiated by a guru at all – as he sings one can gather he had already experienced enlightenment. This level of accomplishment at such a young age explains why the sannyasa tradition and the Digvijayas describe him as not just enlightened, but as an avatara. In the East, where the concept of avatara has been studied intensely, this is no problem. The avatara, Sri Rama, was initiated by Rishi Vasishtha, and the Christian tradition relates that Jesus Christ was initiated by John the Baptist although he was known to be the Son of God, and therefore already perfected:

> Where did Jesus learn yoga? It is not inconceivable that he learned the techniques of the yogas in the Near East where He lived. Jesus as an incarnation did not need to learn yoga from anyone . . . Spiritual practices become evident in the life of an incarnation. It is true that an incarnation sometimes goes to a teacher to learn certain spiritual practices; but He also proves that without going to a teacher He knows these things directly and immediately.[8]

III. MANISHA PANCHAKA: REALIZATION EXPLODES

A *chandala*, an outcaste scavenger, according to caste rules, is regarded as 'untouchable'. He must use a separate water source and must not allow even his shadow to pollute a brahmin with its touch. Shankara, or his entourage,

[8] Swami Akhilananda, *Hindu View of Christ*, Philosophical Library, New York, USA, 1949, p. 96

roughly told a chandala to get out of the way when they met him and his dogs in a narrow alley of Varanasi. Swami Chinmayananda comments:

> One day, after a cool and refreshing bath in the Ganges at Kashi, Aadi Shankara, along with his disciples, was on his way to the sacred temple of Shree Visvanath. Shankara saw a dirty, low caste sweeper coming along with his professional instruments under his arm, and four dogs on leash. Everyone is a creature of the powerful social values of his age. The Brahmin in the Acharya, coloured by the traditional custom prevalent at that time, cried: 'Go, go: Move, move.'
>
> The sweeper countered the words of the Acharya with a few questions of profound import, which made Shankara realize that irrespective of birth, status or occupation, the same consciousness illumines all, and he acknowledges the sweeper as his guru.[9]

Shankara was brought up with such deluded notions rife in his society. They were officially thought of as divinely sanctioned. They were commonly expressed, and upheld with violence if necessary. Though not officially sanctioned by secular law nowadays, a lot of us still think our superiority is divinely sanctioned, and consciously or unconsciously we fight to retain our superior privileges.

It must be part of the primitive brain structure, a pack instinct geared to survival in a different setting; after all, the human frontal lobes have evolved as an addition to the brain – they have not replaced the older parts of the brain that are still dominant in most animals. Unless one has been able to become aware of, purify, restrain and integrate those primitive areas of the unconscious, one is not fully human. One's behaviour often remains a slave to the

[9] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara the Missionary*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, India, 1978, p. 161

unacknowledged instinctive drives that accompany even the most refined soul, once incarnate.

There are experiences in everyday life, and especially in the course of sadhana, or when interacting with an enlightened being, when preconceptions suddenly explode. The vision of the world that selects what we see and how we see it is shattered or transformed; and that blows the mind. Swami Satyananda points out the need for this process of uplifting the consciousness of humankind for ongoing civilization:

> What happened to those people who called themselves civilized two or three thousand years ago? What happened to the Romans, to the Greeks, to the Babylonians, to the Egyptians? Why were all those ancient civilizations destroyed? Because they could not evolve within the realm of consciousness. They evolved within the realm of matter. Instead of travelling by bullock cart, they may be travelled by plane or train. But the consciousness remained the same, static.
>
> How does this conscious move? Movement in the finer particles of consciousness takes place when the images blow. That blowing of consciousness comes in the form of experience, in the form of colours, in the form of sounds, in the form of music, in the form of unseen fear, in the form of many, many things. That is not empirical, not material, not concrete, it is more than that.[10]

One of the hymns most widely accepted as authentically Shankara's, this one, inspired by the enlightened chandala, records such an experience. It is central to understanding who Shankara is. The *Shankara Digvijaya* gives great significance to this meeting. It marks a turning point like a new birth. The understanding and realization of the outcaste

[10] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Teachings of Swami Satyananda, Vol. V*, Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 1986) p. 203

was so fine that it made a deep impact on Shankara and a veil between him and self-realization lifted. In *Shankara Digvijaya* Shankara says:

> I am Thy servant when I am conscious of myself as the body. I am Thy part, O Three-eyed one, when the awareness of Jiva dawns on me. And when the Atman consciousness becomes established, I recognize myself as one with Thee. Such, indeed, is the teaching of all scriptures.[11]

Shankara recognizes Lord Shiva in the chandala and, if we refer back to the account of the pre-birth bardo and why he beamed down in the first place, this means he remembers himself. These inspired verses reveal the dawning of Shankara's capacity to override stultifying aspects of the orthodox tradition and to transcend the limitations acquired along with human birth. Faithfulness to this vision extends his mission from philosophical disputes with Poorva Mimamsa about the tuft and sacred thread to heart issues of human relationships. The orthodox strictures regarding untouchability, and so on, melt before a *jagat guru*, a guru with the world as his family.

Challenging untouchability was one of the breaks from brahminical traditions that had already popularized the Buddhist movement. Objecting to the degraded aspects of the caste system was an avenue that allowed Islam, Christianity and the British Raj to appeal to an oppressed people throughout the centuries. However, the sincerity of the *Manisha Panchaka* makes it clear that Shankara arrived at his convictions through his own personal realization. He changed, not because of political, religious or popularist agendas, but because he realized he had been wrong. A few verses follow. The hymn begins with the ironic and profound questions of the chandala and continues with Shankara's response.

[11] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, p. 61

Manisha Panchaka

Annamayaadannamayamathavaa chaitanyameva chaitanyaat Dvijavara dooreekartum vaanchhasi kim broohi gachha gachheti. (1)

Oh best among twice-born, by asking me to move away, do you wish to separate the physical body (matter) from you or the spirit? Which one do you want to move away?

Kim gangaambhuni bimbate'mbaramanau chandaalavaatee payah
Poore vaantaramaasti
kaanchanaghateemritkumbhayorvaambare
Pratyamvastuni nistarangasahajaanandaavalodhaambudhau
Vipro'yam shvapacho'yamityapi mahaankoyam
vibhedabhramah. (2)

If the reflection of the moon at night is reflected in the pure waters of the Ganga or in a river flowing through a slum, is there a difference in the reflection? What difference do you observe in the space contained in a dazzling golden pot or in an ordinary mud pot? In the ocean of the everlasting blissful self devoid of thought ripples, how can this delusory distinction exist of, "This is a brahmin" or "This a dog-eater"?

Jaagrat svapna sushupti sphutataraa yaa sanvidujjoombhate
Yaa bhramaadi pipeelikaantatanushu protaa jagatsaakshinee
Saivaaham na cha drishyavastvati dridaprajnaapi yasyaasti chet
Chaandaalo'stu sa tu dvijo'stu gururityeshaa maneeshaa mama. (3)

The pure self-consciousness is the clear experience in all the three states: waking, dreaming and sleep. This self alone is present in all: from Brahma to an ant. If one has the clear and firm witnessing attitude, 'I am the self, not the creation', then whether he be an outcaste chandala or a learned brahmin, certainly he is my guru, and this is my firm desire and conviction.

Brahmaivaahamidam jagachcha sakalam chinmaatra vistaaritam
Sarvam chaitadavidhyayaa trigunayaa'shaisham mayaa kalpitam
Ittham yasya dridaa matissukhatare nitye pare nirmale
Chaandaalo'stu sa tu dvijo'stu gururityeshaa maneeshaa mama. (4)

I am that supreme Brahman. The rest of me, the world, is simply nothing but the outcome of my ignorance (*maya*) due to the combination of the three gunas: sattwa, rajas and tamas. He who understands this clearly and focuses on that pure ultimate self, whether born as a chandala or a brahmin of noble family, certainly he is my guru. This is my conviction and wish.

Shashvannashvarameva vishvamakhilam nishchitya vaachaa guroh
Nityam brahma nirantaram vimrishataa nivyaarjashaantaatmanaa
Bhootam bhaavi cha dushkritam pradahataa sanchinmaye paavake
Praarabdhaaya samaarpitam svavapurityeshaa maneeshaa mama. (5)

This entire world is subject to destruction and is impermanent–with this thought, which has come out of continuous contemplation of the guru's teachings, one always lives with a free and peaceful mind. This seeker destroys the fruits of evil deeds of past and present in the fire which is nothing but the knowledge of Brahman (*Brahmajnana*) and is firmly ready to give his body in this life for prarabdha karma, but without attachment. Such is my guru, this is my prayer.

IV. DAKSHINAMURTI STOTRAM: A MATURE VISION?

Sastri has devoted a whole book to the *Dakshinamurti Stotra* and the vartika called *Manasollasa* in which Sureshwarananda

attempts to make his guru's words more accessible.[12] In keeping with the poetic mysticism of the stotra he explains its origin. The four *manasaputra* of Brahma, sons born of his mind, were not interested in continuing the line of creation. Intent on returning to the source, they found themselves in the presence of Lord Shiva in his manifestation as Dakshinamurti, immersed in a blissful state of samadhi which they imbued in silence. Shankara was present at that time, say the legends. Perhaps he actually was, or perhaps he had a specific uplifting experience of the whole incident in sadhana. He realized the teachings and expressed that silence of compassionate knowledge in the *Dakshinamurti Stotram*; a selection of verses follows.

Dakshinamurti Stotram

Vishvam darpanadrishyamaananagaree tulyam
nijaantargatam
Pashyannaatmani maayayaa bahirivodbhootam yathaa nidrayaa
Yassaakshaatkurute prabodhasamaye
svaatmaanamevaadvayam
Tasmai shreeguruoortaye nama idam
shreedakshinaamoortaye. (1)

This world is fully unreal like the reflection of a city seen in one's sleep, due to the impact of maya. But when one wakes up one realizes the real non-dual self – not the unreal city seen in the dream. May I offer salutations to that Dakshinamurti, who is the form of the guru.

Yasyaiva sphuranam sadaatmakamasatkalpaarthakam
bhaasate
Saakshaat tattvamaseeti vedavachasaa yo bodhayatyaashritaan
Yassaakshaatkaranaabhavenna
punaraavrittirbhavaambhonidhau
Tasmai shreegurumoortaye nama idam
shreedakshinaamoortaye. (3)

[12] Alladi Mahadeva Sastry, *Dakshinamurti Stotra of Sri Shankaracharya & Dakshinamurti Upanishad with Sri Sureswaracharya's Manasollasa & Pranava Vartika*, Samata Books, Madras, India, 1987 (1st edition 1978)

He whose state is always that of the true self, and who also shines like the unreal world, who illumines his followers with the vedic quotation, "You are That" (*Tat twam asi*) – realizing which there is no return journey to this ocean-like samsara – may my salutations be to that guru, Dakshinamurti.

Naanaachhidraghatodarasthita-mahaadeepan
prabhaabhaasvaram
Jnaanam yasya tu chakshuraadikaranadvaaraa bahih
spandate
Jaanaameeti tameva bhaantamanu bhaatyetat samastam jagat
Tasmai shreegurumoortaye nama idam
shreedakshinaamoortaye. (4)

This whole world functions through limited sense organs only because of that self-illumined consciousness which is functioning outwardly, like a lamp inside a pot with many holes. It is only by his grace. So may I worship that great Dakshinamurti, who is in the form of the guru.

Deham praanamapeendriyaanyapi chalaam buddhim cha
shoonyam viduh
Stree baalaandhajadopamaastvahamiti bhraantaa bhrisham
vaadinah
Maayaa shakti vilaasa kalpita maha vyaamoha samhaarine
Tasmai shreegurumoortaye nama idam
shreedakshinaamoortaye. (5)

Women, children, the blind or idiots, or those who connect themselves with their body, prana, sense or buddhi, are fully ignorant and are under the influence of maya. The guru destroys the power of this maya and removes the great delusion caused by maya *(moha)* from us – may we offer our salutations to that great lord, Dakshinamurti.

This is thought of as a more mature work of Shankara's which rests in the realizations of samadhi according to various respected critics, none of whom, we may assume, are 'women, children, the blind or idiots', as referred to above.

We are viewing Shankara as a living, learning person whose literary style would change with his teachings as he matured, as he looked critically at the beliefs his society had ingrained in his psyche, and became more tolerant of different people, beliefs and lifestyles. Although it is possible for him to have written *Dakshinamurti Stotram* after being humbled by the chandala of Varanasi, surely it was written before Shankara's encounter with Ubhaya Bharati, which necessitated Shankara's search for a less constricted field of expression and the emergence of tantra in his lifestyle. Shankara's meeting with the chandala removed one type of blindness, but the reference to others expressed here – if this is genuinely a stotra composed by Shankara and not an interpolation – shows it must have been written fairly early in his development.

To clarify the point we can look at *Manasollasa*, Sureshwarananda's vartika on the *Dakshinamurti Stotram*. As he was a direct disciple of Shankara's and previously married to Ubhaya Bharati, his explanation of this condescending reference to women is interesting. He says (5:13–14):

> *Mama dehoyamityevam streebaallndhaashcha manvate*
> *Dehohamiti naavaiti kadaachidapi kashchana*
>
> May they be female, a child, or even a blind man, they all say "This is my body", they don't ever say "I am the body".

This is more in line with Shankara's mature teachings. Sometimes there are interpolations, or subtle misinterpretations of the original words of spiritual texts to suit the ruling powers of society.

V. MOHAMUDGARA: BHAJA GOVINDAM

A few verses from *Mohamudgara* are translated and discussed here, although it may be classified either as a teaching text or as a hymn. It is irresistible simply because it is so fresh, laughingly pointing out the snares which entrap a sannyasin, and it is so evocative of the spirit of sannyasa which the

Shankara of legend exemplifies. (See Appendix 3 for a full transliteration and translation of *Mohamudgara)*

Mohamudgara has attained wide popularity and has had a whole book devoted to it by the Chinmaya Mission.[13] It is a simple but moving poem exhorting dispassion from the attachments of the world in thirty-one verses. *Moha* means delusion, *mudgara* means hammer, *dukrinkarane*, refers to 'grammatical rules' here symbolizing all secular knowledge. Although it is addressed to an old grammarian he met in Varanasi, it seems to have been intended as a marching song for Shankara's group of wandering sannyasins. A selection of verses follows, the chorus is:

Bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam mudamate
Sampraapte sannihite marane nahin nahin rakshati dukrinkarane
Bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam

Seek Govinda, seek Govinda, seek Govinda oh careless minded fool!
When the appointed time (death) comes, grammatical rules will surely not save you. Seek Govinda, seek Govinda.

Mohamudgara
Moodha jaheehi dhanaagamatrishnaam kuru sadbuddhim manasi vitrishnaam
Yallabhase nijikarmopaattam vittam tena vinodaya chittam. (1)

Oh fool! Give up the thirst to possess wealth. Create in your mind thoughts of reality devoid of passions. Entertain your mind (be satisfied with) whatever you get as a reward for the past. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

Naareestanabharanaabhinivesham drishtvaa-maayaa-mohaavesham

[13] Swami Chinmayananda, *Adi Shankaracharya's Bhaja Govindam*, revised ed., commentary by Swami Chinmayananda, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, India, 1965, 2002

Etanmaamsa-vasaadi-vikaaram manasi vichintaya baarambaaram. (2)

Don't get trapped by the full bosom of a young maiden, and her navel – do not fall prey to maddening delusion. 'After all, the body is just filled with flesh and fat', keep this thought in your mind again and again. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

Nalineedalagatasalilam taralam tadvajjeevitamatishaya chapalam
Viddhi vyaadhyabhimaanagrastam lokam shokahatam cha samastam. (3)

The water drop playing on a lotus petal has an extremely uncertain existence, so also is life ever unstable. Understand that this world is completely riddled by disease, pride and pangs of suffering. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

Yaavat-vitta-upaarjana saktah taavat nija parivaaro raktah
Pashchaat dhaavati jarjara dehe vaartaam prichchhati ko'pi na gehe. (4)

As long as you have the ability to earn and save, all your dependants are attached to you. Later on, when you have an old infirm body and become dependant, no one cares to share a single word with you, even at your own house. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

Guru-charana-ambuja-nirbhara-bhaktah samsaaraat-achiraat-bhava muktah
Sendriya-maanasa-niyamat-evam drakshyasi nija-hridayastham devam. (31)

Oh! Only by becoming an ardent and fearless devotee at the feet of the Guru may you become liberated from this dense samsara. It is only through disciplining the senses and the mind that you come to experience the being of light who lives in your own heart. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

Who am I?

For the scholars, Shankara is the one who wrote the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, the bhashyas on the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Principal Upanishads*. For the sannyasins, whoever, wherever and whenever he is, he is the one who travelled on foot throughout India, living simply, defeating opponents in philosophical debate, organizing the maths and the Dashnami tradition. For the simple person, he is the one who composed the beautiful, concise, rhythmical and lyrical songs, hymns and poems.

He is the one who knew how to handle his disciples, who bowed at the feet of a chandala on the streets of Varanasi, who threw aside all convention to keep a promise to his dying mother, and got waylaid in the harem of a king while establishing himself as the master of all knowledge. He is the one constantly contemplating the nature of reality.

I am sure he sang with his disciples to a rhythmic beat as they all walked along; and tradition says that after spontaneously composing the first dozen or so verses of this, and other, hymns himself, he challenged his disciples to make up other verses on the spot.

Shankara has proved himself capable of inspiring people across continents and centuries to keep their minds fixed on the Truth in this world of joy and suffering. He is the one who can help us to reflect on things clearly while maintaining a sense of humour, style and compassion.

All the traditions say he wrote many songs. Despite scholarly debate, he is famous for his songs, just as much as his major philosophical works and his organizations. The hymns are clear pools reflecting 'Adi Shankaracharya': *Adi*, the true original source; *Shankara*, auspicious; *acharya*, teacher – dedicated to maintaining the awareness of the highest reality.

14

Tantra

We may ask who is eligible to practise tantra? Traditionally, for the Dashnami parampara and the four maths that uphold it, besides the four spiritual qualifications of the *sadhana chatushtaya* (viveka, vairagya, shat sampatti and mumukshutva), one also has to be male and belong to the correct varna to be eligible for spiritual training in Advaita Vedanta, not to speak of becoming a *dandin*, a staff-holder, of high authority.

So what about women who comprise half of the world's population? What about the rest of the men? What about the rest of the world? As a jagat guru, Shankara had to face such questions. He must have mused, 'What vehicle could a sincere sadhaka, disqualified by the social systems, use for self-purification?' As Shankara's personal experience and devotion increased, he moved deeper into the bhakti marga and especially Sri Vidya: Shakti tantra puts aside rigid concepts of inherited caste and understands initiation by the guru as constituting the 'second birth' into spiritual life.

The need for guru

Today, masters within the Dashnami tradition are teaching women, people from lower castes, and even foreigners are being initiated into sannyasa. It is understood that the world needs peace and the broad vision and benevolence of a higher consciousness to survive. But is initiation of previously

disqualified people into the spiritual-highway techniques of tantra, such as kundalini yoga and kriya yoga actually going to help? A warning comes from C.G. Jung:

> One often reads and hears about the dangers of yoga, particularly of the ill-reputed kundalini yoga. The deliberately induced psychotic state, which in certain unstable individuals might easily lead to a real psychosis, is a danger that needs to be taken very seriously indeed. These things are really dangerous and ought not to be meddled with in our typically Western way. It is a meddling with fate which strikes at the very roots of human existence and can let loose a flood of sufferings of which no sane person ever dreamed.[1]

Given the society that he was living in at the time, it was very sane of Jung to have such fears. Time and again in his writings, Jung stressed that although yoga opens up such wonderful possibilities, he did not feel it would be safe for the society which he himself lived in at that time to acquire them.

> The Indian . . . not only knows his own nature, but he knows also how much he himself is nature. The European, on the other hand, has a science of nature and knows astonishingly little of his own nature, the nature within him . . . The power of the yogi operates within limits acceptable to his environment. The European, on the other hand, can blow up mountains, and the World War has given us a bitter foretaste of what he is capable of when free rein is given to an intellect which has grown estranged from human nature. As a European, I cannot wish the Europeans more "control" and more power over the nature within and around us.[2]

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[1] C.G. Jung, 'Psychological Commentary on The Tibetan Book of the Dead', *Collected Works of C G Jung, Vol. 11* (trans. R. F. C. Hull), Princeton Uni Press, USA, 1980, p. 520

[2] C.G. Jung, 'Yoga and the West', *Collected Works of C G Jung, Vol. 11* (trans. R.F.C. Hull), Princeton Uni Press, USA, 1980, pp. 533–534

So we can see here why the original concept of *varna*, of people not being equal, but having very different inner qualities, came into being. And we should acknowledge that it is very helpful to come from a spiritual family and culture. If one is going to look into the subconscious and unconscious areas of the mind, it is necessary to have the correct *sattwic samskaras*, balanced impressions, embedded there. Otherwise, when powerful repressed fears and complexes come up, one doesn't know what to do.

The guru's understanding of one's samskaras and karma, and knowledge of how to prescribe sadhanas and negotiate the vrittis, is essential. This is well known in authentic traditions, but is often ignored by people learning of these sciences only through reading books or patronizing commercial teachers. The danger of strong sadhana unbalancing the mind, and the accompanying dangers of the power of sadhana being in the hands of unbalanced people is acknowledged in both ancient and modern schools:

> Sufism, then, emphasises continually the dangers of greed, of experimenting without guidance; that to want something for oneself before one has reached the stage of being able to see oneself as part of something greater, and which must grow as a whole, is self-defeating. Man is not alone; is not a glorious individual – or not in the way he thinks. His 'personality', what he ordinarily knows of himself, is an assembly of shadows, of conditioned reflexes; his real individuality is hidden and will emerge slowly during the process of learning.[3]

So this is why, in Shankara's tradition of tantra, the spiritual qualifications are still required as laid down in the sadhana chatushtaya. Although they may not be set out explicitly in branches such as Sri Vidya, they clearly state the level of awareness and self-restraint needed before the

[3] Doris Lessing, *Time Bites*, Harper Perennial, London, UK, 2005, p. 259

techniques for expanding consciousness and liberating energy are beneficial. Then there are specific requirements for introductory techniques.

Speaking to women

The Shankara of Vidyaranya's *Sankara Digvijaya*, and the one we meet in his early writings, was speaking almost exclusively to the men of his society. To be fair, at that time, that's how it was; it could not be otherwise. Shankara used his skill in debate as a practical means to establish his views, often over large schools of people because the person defeated, along with their followers, would become disciples of the victor. So when defeated by Shankara, Mandan Mishra had to take sannyasa, becoming his disciple. This left his wife a virtual widow (that is, a virtual outcaste) in the society of that time. Knowing this, his wife, who was acclaimed for her wisdom and powers of expression in both mundane and spiritual matters, and therefore had the title *Ubhaya Bharati*, stepped forward and claimed her right to debate.

The whole episode is recorded at length in Vidyaranya's *Sankara Digvijaya*.[4] To put it briefly, Shankara hesitates, due to the customs of his time, but she insists, "What difference does it make whether one who challenges and attacks your doctrines is a man or a woman? Look at Sage Yajnavalkya debating with Gargi and King Janaka with Sulabha. Their reputation wasn't harmed by debating with women."

Shankara did not willingly accept the challenge, but he had learned about widowhood as a child. He had demonstrated the courage to break from the social religious tradition of his time, and returned to his mother when she needed him to steer her in the right direction at the time of her death. So he had the open mindedness to debate with Ubhaya Bharati, although women were not considered worthy opponents for a sannyasi.

[4] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, pp. 111 ff.

A seventeen-day debate on vedic knowledge followed – they must have been evenly matched. Finally she resorted to trickery. Knowing Shankara had taken sannyasa when he was just a boy, she said, "Debate with me on the *Kusumaastra-saastram*, regarding the science and art of love between the sexes, its forms and expressions, its nature and centres. How does it vary during the bright and dark fortnights? And how does it manifest in man and woman?"

Shankara was a siddha. He did not have practical knowledge of the subject, but he could devise non-customary ways to receive that knowledge. He said, "Give me one month's time . . . "

The problem with siddhis

An unusual plan was hatched: Shankara would enter the body of a dead king, making it seem that he had come back to life, and consort with the women of the harem to gain the knowledge required to win the debate. The young Shankara was not at all apprehensive, he said: "Lord Krishna had no problem when he lived with the gopis, so neither would I. Given my non-attachment and knowledge of vajroli, my continence will remain unbroken, even if I indulge in maithuna. However, I'll keep this body pure and gain the experiences of maithuna through temporarily identifying myself with someone else's body."

Which all goes to show that he was still a young man, and still learning and, as with the chandala in Varanasi, still needed to find out the limits of his theoretical knowledge when it came down to application. His disciple Padmapada felt uneasy about this plan and reminded his teacher, "When Matsyendranath, the great yogi, did something similar, he got so caught up in his experiences that his disciple Goraksha had to go and rescue him." But Shankara prevailed, he left his disciples to guard his own body which he left in suspended animation. Using his yogic powers he transported his consciousness and prana into a dead king's body so he could learn kama shastra in the harem.

Vidyaranya, a past advisor of several generations of kings, and therefore quite canny, remains discreet in the *Sankara Digvijaya*, though his cosmopolitan sense of humour seeps through. We are assured that Shankara remained only a witness of his continuous dalliances and dutifully studied *Vatsyayana* and all the commentaries upon those sutras in order to compose his own sutras called *Amaruka*. But he did get caught up after all, and apparently quite forgot why he had gone into that body in the first place, as many of us do.

The disciples who had been left guarding the dormant body of their guru were, in the meantime, distressed. Particularly once the appointed month was passed and Shankara still failed to return. Finally, Padmapada reasoned that such a great person as his guru must have caused a noticeable change in the abilities and conduct of the king whose body he had revived, and suggested they search for him by looking for auspicious signs in the nearby kingdoms. They planned to then somehow get an audience with the king and sing a sublime hymn. If the 'king' was Shankara, this would reawaken him to his real identity and mission.

They searched diligently and at last heard of a king whose nature had recently been transformed after a near-death experience. In order to gain admission to the court they played the role of wandering minstrels and sang, "We've been guarding your body on the mountain for so long, anxiously awaiting your return. How is it you identify with your situation here and continue to stay, forgetting us? Oh conqueror of passions! Please be reminded of your higher nature, with the help of vedic mantras like 'Not this, Not this', reject all the manifest and unmanifest phenomena as unreal, and remember your Self as Truth."

Shankara got the message. He spoke to the people of the kingdom, made a few arrangements, withdrew his pranas and consciousness and, leaving the king's body fallen dead once more in the middle of the court, returned through brahmarandhra into his own body, which was still being tended in a remote cave by his devoted disciples.

The modern western mind may wish to dismiss such dealings with death as impossible but similar views on skilled interventions after death have been recorded throughout history and all over the world. For example:

> By this time Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city; and Saul had banished from the land all who trafficked with ghosts and spirits. The Philistines mustered and encamped at Shunem, and Saul gathered all the Israelites and encamped on Gilboa; and when Saul saw the Philistine force, fear struck him to the heart. He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him, whether by dreams or by Urim or by prophets. So he said to his servants, 'Find me a woman who has a familiar spirit, and I will go and enquire through her.'
>
> His servants told him that there was such a woman at En-dor. Saul put on different clothes and went in disguise with two of his men. He came to the woman by night and said, 'Tell me my fortune by consulting the dead, and call up the man I name to you.' But the woman answered, 'Surely you know what Saul has done, how he has made away with those who call up ghosts and spirits; why do you press me to do what will lead to my death?' Saul swore her an oath: 'As the Lord lives, no harm shall come to you for this.' The woman asked who she should call up, and Saul answered, 'Samuel.' When the woman saw Samuel appear she shrieked and said to Saul, 'Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!' The king said to her, 'Do not be afraid. What do you see?' The woman answered, 'I see a ghostly form coming up from the earth.' 'What is it like?' he asked; she answered, 'Like an old man coming up, wrapped in a cloak.' Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed low with his face to the ground, and prostrated himself. Samuel said to Saul, 'Why have you disturbed me and brought me up?' Saul answered, 'I am in great trouble . . .'[5]

[5] *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*, 1 Samuel 28:2–15

We know that Shankara was a siddha, a perfected yogi, because he was able to use the psychic powers which arise from yoga without effort and without attachment. Even as a child he spontaneously displayed his mastery over matter by creating the rain of golden amalakas, and when mature he was able to bring the dead to life and travel across distances through unusual means.

The practitioner of raja yoga has to get past the *vibhootis*, such as psychic power, and finally transcend the *sabeeja* realms of samadhi where seeds for rebirth still remain. The aim is *nirbeeja samadhi*, the seedless state where there are no longer any seeds for rebirth in the consciousness and one can attain *kaivalya*, separation from *Prakriti* or the realm of manifestation.

Raja yoga uses *ashtanga yoga* (the eightfold practice of yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi) as a way to get in; and then employs *samyama*, the skilful use of oscillating between dharana, dhyana and samadhi, to get further control of altered states of consciousness and their consequences. If samyama is not practised, the practitioner is not grounded in the experience, and cannot bring it back to apply in daily life.

Shankara and his spiritual descendants consider such practices as necessary preliminaries for the experiences of Advaita Vedanta and tantra. Tantra has the possibility of the same phenomena as raja yoga – of amassing psychic power, siddhis and vibhootis, as side-effects, but often with a lesser degree of mental equilibrium because it is a faster route and one has less time to adjust and stabilize:

> If only one can release that force, then one can do many great things in one's life. This is the science of Tantra – to expand the mind and release the energy. But how to do it? For that purpose the science of Tantra has the practices of yoga. Yoga is the practical side of Tantra, but these are the paths which take you very slowly towards this development, . . . they are called the circuitous paths.

> However, there are shortcuts in Tantra and these are very steep paths.[6]

Even for a strong-minded person, this path can be problematic. Power is attractive; even a practitioner such as Shankara got distracted, so one really does need the qualifications of vairagya, viveka and mumukshutva in order to keep going.

Including women

Shankara had originally refused to debate with Ubhaya Bharati and she'd had to argue him out of that stance by reminding him of Gargi and other heroines of the Vedas. Then she had used her experience to bring him to the crunch. How would he deal with her on return? They both knew that although she had tripped him, he had won the debate. As Shankara matured, he incorporated tantra.

Apart from the four major maths dedicated to Advaita Vedanta, there is a fifth math, which definitely has a long and complex association with Shankara. It was in Kanchipuram, the capital of the reigning Pallava kings, and tantrics were very prevalent there at the time of Shankara. He was influential enough to persuade King Rajasena to build a temple to the goddess Kamakshi and he installed her yantra. He also renovated temples to Shiva and Vishnu and reformed the worship there:

> The people were surprised to see that the Acharya was not a dry man of intellect only, but was adept in all forms of spiritual pursuits.[7]

However, Kanchi has also struggled for recognition from the four major maths. Shankara's attitude to Ubhaya Bharati,

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[6] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Teachings of Swami Satyananda, Vol. V*, Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 1986), pp. 268–272

[7] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara the Missionary*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Bombay, India, 1978, p. 44

and the hymns composed to help his mother through death, indicate he actually thought women could become enlightened in this birth itself, and in his day and age, not just as heroines of the past or as *devis*, goddesses, in some other dimension. This legacy survives. Such broad vision is highly unusual in any country, in any religious tradition, and today, for women it is a shower of pure gold.

Swami Satyananda Saraswati began an international yoga movement in the 1950s, and although criticized at first by sannyasins of his own tradition, eventually became well known and respected for his work for the upliftment of women. Women have been at the forefront in many of the ashrams and centres he inspired around the world. He also installed Swami Satyasangananda as peethadhishwari of Rikhiapeeth with instructions to continue his work of uplifting the village tribals, and particularly women. In Rikhia district his organization, Sivananda Math, effectively looks after the needs of about 60,000 village people.

Swami Sivananda's disciple Swami Adwayananda was told to spread the knowledge of Sri Vidya. In 1947 the Sri Yantra was re-established in the temple near Trichnapalli. Adwayanandaji initiated Mataji Vidyamba Saraswati into sannyasa, resulting in a trained cadre of female yoginis proficient in conducting all kinds of vedic and tantric yajna and chants.

These yoginis now travel throughout the country and overseas, conducting havans. Their ashram, Lalitha Mahila Mahasamajam in Thirueengoimalai, Tamil Nadu, also houses and educates one hundred and fifty orphan girls, aged between one month and eighteen years until they can establish themselves independently in society. They have two Tamil-language schools for one thousand girls from the surrounding country villages, and one English medium school for four hundred students. And the tradition will continue; Swami Shambhavi Saraswati has recently been authorized to become the initiating swami in that tradition, giving Sri Vidya diksha.

In tantra, a female guru is acceptable; however, this would have been beyond the scope of most people in Shankara's society to deal with, just as it would still be unbelievable to have a female pope today. For most of the world's population including, or rather especially, the religious sector and their spiritual elite, a female birth has been considered inferior to the male birth for many centuries. They consider *moksha*, enlightenment or liberation, only possible for the privileged among men. It seems that accepting women as social equals, never mind spiritual beings, requires a revolutionary, divine outlook.

We see Shankara's total philosophy and lifestyle dedicated to identifying with the absolute reality. The Advaita Vedanta philosophy speaks of the identity of the atma and Brahman, but the social structure inhibited manifesting that understanding. Perhaps we should see Shankara's adoption of Sri Vidya as a skilful means to manifest that divine outlook. Sri Vidya effectively changes the attitudes to caste and gender in innumerable situations. For the esoteric practices the necessary qualifications concern one's spiritual disposition, so birthright is not the most important factor.

Tantric lineage of Shankara

All of this gives some of the biographic dynamics of how and why Shankara entered into tantric practices. It also explains why tantra was a necessary step in his role of re-establishing the sanatana dharma as a jagat guru. Clearly, he saw Vedanta and tantra as complementary paths, and had no problems with tantra as a spiritual discipline; his disputes were with those who endeavoured to use tantra in a destructive and manipulative way.

The teachings of tantra have been regarded as secret; not just because the initiates require certain qualifications of character and experience, but also because they claim that the less secret a practice is, the more diluted it becomes. Shankara's Digvijayas were high-profile events, establishing the Advaita Vedanta philosophy and the vedic lifestyle. For

those activities he required publicity. By contrast, the esoteric practices of Sri Vidya are traditionally low-profile, or preferably no-profile, and so there is less literature about them.

We should also realize tantra was an integral part of the teachings of the guru parampara that Shankara was trained through. Though it seems to be generally unknown, just as the Buddhists acclaim Gaudapadacharya's expertise in Buddhism, so the tantrics hold that he was a master of tantra. Gaudapada is said to be the author of *Shubhagodaya*, a treatise on tantric upasana devoted to Devi in the form of Tripura Sundari. Shankara himself is traditionally held to be the author of *Saundarya Lahari* and *Prapanchasara Tantra*, an important tantric text including subtle explanations of mantras.

The tantric renaissance

Scholars have been unwilling to acknowledge the scope of Shankara's genius and his knowledge of Buddhism, tantra and yoga, yet his life was immersed in all these traditions. *Tantra*, comes from *tanoti*, to expand (the consciousness), and *trayate*, to liberate (the energy).

> Just as raja yoga is known as ashtanga yoga, the eightfold path of yoga, the acharas are known as *navanga tantra*, the ninefold path of tantra. These nine codes of conducts, or *nava acharas*, represent the entire body of tantra and describe the progressive stages of growth and evolution. The nine sequential stages are: vedachara, vaishnavachara, shaivachara, dakshinachara, vamachara, aghorachara, yogachara, siddhantachara and kaulachara. [8]

In Shankara's time the practices of tantra had degenerated and he employed Sri Vidya to once again establish the sattwic potential of this science which he had mastered through the guru prampara.

[8] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Tantra Darshan*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, pp. 146–147

Today also, tantra has been misinterpreted and 'taught' widely by people with no basis in the tradition. Sri Swami Satyananda initiated Swami Niranjanananda as his spiritual successor in 1995, and this involves taking up the responsibility of once more purifying and re-establishing the spiritual traditions of India, including the yogic and the tantric. Swami Niranjanananda explains that the nine main paths in tantra are suited to people with different needs and levels of attainment. They can be integrated in skilful practice.

1. *Vedachara*: where the basic question is "Who am I?" and to answer it, life is lived according to vedic realizations creating harmony within oneself, the family and the environment. One increases self awareness and consciously disassociates from ignorant behaviour.
2. *Vaishnavachara*: where the aim is *shuddhi*, purification, of the inner life and lifestyle. Cultivating inner strength allows one's consciousness to rise above the struggles in life and approach difficulties as challenges to be overcome.
3. *Shaivachara*: where the focus is on duty, or *dharma*, and appropriate participation in the world. One works to overcome the influence of the instincts, the animal nature, of humankind and becomes the *drashta*, witness, of oneself. This gives a strong motivation to attain harmony and purification at every level of one's energy: physical, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual.
4. *Dakshinachara*: where one becomes involved in the world after having managed and overcome the *pashu vritti*, the negative, animalistic patterns and traits of the personality, becoming a person of spiritual power and spiritual strength. During this stage, sadhanas such as nada yoga help to develop the practice of internalization and the subtle psychic dimension of nada.
5. *Vamachara*: the inward journey begins. The instincts that distract the awareness and one's total focus on the spirit must be realized and eliminated.

6. *Aghorachara*: connects one with gentleness after transcending the dualities of life. *Ghora* means terrible and *aghora* means gentle, that which is not terrible.
7. *Yogachara*: in this context does not just mean the process of mind management through any of the branches of yoga, such as hatha, raja, kundalini, kriya, bhakti or karma yoga. It means the unity of the self is experienced and lived.
8. *Siddhantachara*: living totally in the present after purification of vasanas, vrittis and samskaras from the consciousness.
9. *Kaulachara*: where one guides and inspires others towards freedom.

Just from seeing this schema of the tantras, one can understand that there is no inherent conflict between Vedanta and tantra. We have seen how Shankara's gurus, Sri Gaudapadacharya and Govindacharya, passed down the knowledge of tantra, although they are primarily known as vedantins, and also factors in Shankara's life, or the spiritual path, that help us to understand why he became a tantric, and involved himself in the rituals and devotional practices of Sri Vidya. Similarly, in today's scenario, Paramguru Swami Sivananda and Sri Swami Satyananda transmitted the knowledge of the tantric path to Swami Niranjanananda.

The basic tools of tantra are mantra, yantra and mandala. We will inspect each tool and note how Shankara used it.

Mantra

Shankara, as a champion of Advaita Vedanta, was undoubtedly employing the pranava mantra *Aum* and the Maha Vakya, the four great sayings: *Aham Brahmasmi*, *Tattwamasi*, *Prajnanam Brahma* and *Ayam Atma Brahma*, for qualified students. For those who could not achieve nididhyasana and meditate continuously, he advised practices of yoga such as pranayama with mantra, japa and ajapa japa. In tantra also, for qualified students there are mantras such as those employed in Sri Vidya and various powerful bija mantras for specific purposes,

but for most people we have to be introduced to the mantras gradually through kundalini yoga, working with the bija mantras of the tattwas and chakras, etc. As a bhakta, an ecstatic devotee, he was spontaneously composing beautiful hymns that are essentially complex mantras for invoking divine grace, such as *Kanakadhara Stotram* as a small child, and this ability continued to mature through his years.

We are living in an ocean of sounds. Just as fish move through water, we move through words. Mantras are specific powerful vibrations that have been studied for centuries and we know that they produce impressions at different levels of consciousness as well as affecting human energy and emotions, and even physical objects. Primordial sounds heard by rishis in meditation and then communicated to their disciples by audible sounds are known as mantras. The word *mantra*, is composed of two roots: *man*, repetition, and *tra*, protection or liberation; a mantra protects those who repeat it:

> The word *mantra* was given to the vibrations as it means the power through which one can manage and free one's own mind. Mantra is defined as *mananat trayate iti mantrah* – the power, force or energy through which one is able to liberate the mind from its obsessions is called mantra.[9]

A yogi or tantric acquires creative powers through dedicated practice. Research is showing that many of the 'supernormal' powers, known as *vibhootis* or *siddhis*, are actually latent powers that are part of the human birthright, but have not been recognized as such. Tantra uses sound vibrations, whether chanted aloud repeatedly, whispered, or repeated mentally, to access specific areas of the psyche.

Language and the embryo: Sounds are deeply embedded in the psyche. Studying the brain and cognitive development in the embryo and young children, Chomsky reports that:

[9] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Mantra & Yantra (Yogadrishti Series)*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2012 (first pub 2010), p. 16

> Newborn babies already go well beyond the actual physical sounds they hear, dividing them into different more abstract categories. And they can make all the distinctions that are used in all the world's languages. Babies are 'citizens of the world'.[10]

Paramahansa Yogananda mentions memories from childhood which accord with these modern assessments of how a child learns language; he remembered not acquiring sounds and words but pruning unnecessary language from a source already imprinted in the brain, so that he was eventually left with the syllables of Bengali as his mother tongue.[11]

Survival of mantras: There are many practices linked with the art, or science, of mantra: from singing the name of God in kirtan, to chanting a mantra to avert death from snake bite, to intricate vedic chants conducted at yajnas. This knowledge is so ancient it is mythical. It is also persistent. The use of mantra and related disciplines for the mind forms the basis of every nation's folklore. Even today it infuses much of the archetypal literature which gives people a sense of relief and release from the limited world-view of an allegedly rational consumer-driven society:

> "*Brisingr* is from an ancient language that all living things used to speak. However, it was forgotten over time and went unspoken for eons in Algaesia, until the elves brought it back over the sea. They taught it to the other races, who used it for doing and making powerful things. The language has a name for everything, if you can find it."
>
> "But what does that have to do with magic?" interrupted Eragon.
>
> "Everything! It is the basis for all power. The language describes the true nature of things, not the superficial aspects

[10] Alan Gopnik, Andrew N. Meltzoff, Patricia K. Kuhl, *The Scientist in the Crib: What Early Learning Tells Us About The Mind*, Perennial, New York, USA, 2001, p. 106

[11] Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 1st hard back ed., Yogoda Satsanga Society of India, Kolkata, India, 2001, p. 3

> that everyone sees. For example, fire is called *brisingr*. Not only is that a name for fire, it is the name for fire. If you are strong enough you can use brisingr to direct fire to do whatever you will. And that is what happened today."[12]

We may think that the emphasis on mantras is merely magical and not scientific, and of course we are blinkered by our belief in science and materialism, but these days science is repeatedly 'proving' the observations of the rishis. As far as human psychology is concerned, the power of the word and speech is intricately and fundamentally connected with our sense of identity, behaviours and manner of relating with life externally. Not only this, Chomsky's research also says:

> We are designed to take in sequences of sound and translate them into representations of meaning just as we are designed to take in sensory information and translate it into representations of objects, and to take in facial expressions and translate them into representations of feelings . . . Exposure to a particular language has altered our brains and shaped our minds.[13]

Word power: Mantras are powerful sounds that are known to influence the brain and psyche directly. Just as before doing something, one thinks of it and also 'says' it to oneself mentally, similarly, in yoga and tantra we refer to the creative power being linked with sound. People agree that sound has psychological effects and powers, but want to argue that it cannot effect 'solid' objects in the same way; that it cannot, for example, create or destroy things in the external world. Actually though, we know that is untrue: bridges do collapse when armies march over them; plants do grow better with conducive music.

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[12] Christopher Paolini, *Eragon: Book 1 of the Inheritance Cycle*, Corgi Books, London, UK, 2011, p. 140

[13] Alan Gopnik, Andrew N. Meltzoff, Patricia K. Kuhl, *The Scientist in the Crib: What Early Learning Tells Us About The Mind*, Perennial, New York, USA, 2001, pp. 99 ff.

Mantras can also be used to access different *lokas*, or dimensions of consciousness. A mantra is a word of power; a sound with creative potential. Swami Sivananda described a mantra as being like a hand grenade; repeating it, doing *japa*, is like pulling the pin. There are different grades of mantras: for healing, for attacking, for stimulating chakras, for awakening consciousness, for reaching beyond death, and even for creating a 'universe'. *St John's Gospel* begins:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

Similarly we have vedic texts which say:

> Uttering *Bhuh* (earth) he created the earth (*Bhumi*).[14]

Perhaps we believe this sort of thing, not because we are religious, but because it is a deeply imprinted knowledge. So deep that it is registered by some part of our brain in the foetal stage when consciousness first descended into the embryo, or perhaps it is basic to the vijnanamaya kosha of yogic parlance:

> The most important thing that you have to know is that the vijnanamaya kosha is the realm of your unconscious mind or psyche. It is a world of signs and symbols, colours and lights. And your unconscious is part of the collective unconscious. It is directly linked to the collective unconscious or hiranyagarbha, the cosmic womb, which holds everything that has ever come into existence or is waiting to come into existence. It is the cosmic storehouse to which the unconscious mind of each and every individual is linked. That is why when you have experience of the vijnanamaya kosha you become intuitive.[15]

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[14] Sir John Woodroffe, *Garland of Letters*, Ganesh & Co., Madras, India, 1971, p. 8

[15] Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati, *Satsangs on Yoga: Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga and*

Sir John Woodroffe, a British High Court Judge, personally experienced mantra as a psychic force while presiding over a trial in India in the late nineteenth century. His investigation into the topic made him a world-renowned authority on mantra and tantra. In *The Garland of Letters*, he explains, in as rational a manner as possible, the nature of mantra, but has to sum up with an opinion that would have seemed quite strange in his day, though research now supports his findings:

> . . . this is a fundamental principle upon which all Tantric-Sadhana by way of Upasana rests. By worship and meditation or Japa of Mantras the mind is actually Shaped into the form of the object of worship and is made pure.[16]

Guru mantra: In the Dashnami tradition the first and perhaps most important initiation is mantra initiation, *mantra diksha*; when the guru gives a mantra which will be appropriate for that disciple's spiritual journey. The mantra functions as a link between that guru and that disciple. Only a realized master is to give mantras in this way because it is a complex and powerful science:

> There are many parts of a mantra. Each mantra has a positive power and a negative power. Each mantra influences and awakens a particular area or centre of the mind and the brain . . . Therefore, when a mantra is being given, the personality of the aspirant has to be considered.[17]

To protect the teaching from misuse, mantras are traditionally only given personally, and only from guru to disciple. In written texts as well as chants, the mantras are also often hidden in code.

Awakening the Vijnanamaya Kosha, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 2008), p. 39

[16] Sir John Woodroffe, *Garland of Letters*, Ganesh & Co., Madras, India, 1971, p. 13

[17] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Mantra & Yantra (Yogadrishti Series)*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2012 (first pub 2010), p. 17

It is also believed that without the guru's personal guidance and interpretation it will not work so well. The guru, rather than any text, is the real source of illumination and power, and we find again and again that the bhajans and hymns attributed to Shankara are simultaneously esteemed for their devotional beauty and as teaching texts, brimming with inspiration and insight. They change the consciousness simply by being chanted and therefore are mantras by definition. In his teaching texts also we find Shankara spontaneously breaking into poetry to introduce new insights or to emphasize the point. At such times – they are the spontaneous expressions of a siddha, but also they are revealed sounds: they are mantras of the shruti, given by the guru as blessings.

Yantra

Similarly, the hymn *Saundarya Lahari* with its complex associated rituals can be thought of essentially as a mantra composed to invoke divine grace in a life-threatening situation, or as a downloading of mantras and yantras from the Source.

Interestingly enough, Shankara does not ask for help or protection, but rather draws closer and closer to the image of Devi in his heart, moving from the phenomenal to the ecstatic plane of consciousness. Each verse has an accompanying yantra, and yantras in tantra are the dwelling places of the gods or powers invoked, However, for most of us, yantras are simply geometrical figures, perhaps associated with magic or witchcraft, and therefore to be treated with caution and scepticism.

Basically, yantras are used to convey information. A *yantra* is the psychic blueprint of the object referred to. It has its own creative potential relating to form and space just as a mantra relates to auditory vibration and time. A yantra can be activated in various ways, some public, some private. For example, there is external trataka on an actual object or symbol, and internal trataka with the eyes closed using

the power of visualization, and then there is darshan. When one receives a mantra from a guru it is usually accompanied by the corresponding psychic symbol, yantra or mandala. This is an aid in concentration during the process of sadhana.

The Sanskrit word *yantra* is composed of two parts: *yan*, which indicates a vehicle, and *tra*, to liberate; it is a vehicle for liberation. Mantra and yantra complement each other in the endeavour to gain spiritual understanding; mantra freeing one from the mind and senses, and yantra being the vehicle to a different *loka*, or dimension. Yantras are geometric symbols to induce concentration or meditation and are especially designed to unleash the hidden potentials of consciousness. Yantras can be inscribed on amulets, they can just exist; but if one practises *trataka*, steady gazing, on a yantra, it is like pulling the pin on a grenade. Therefore one does not practise without the guru's advice.

Trataka is actually an eye mudra, because it moves energy and awareness. All mudras, and eye mudras especially, affect the brain. The thing is, we can consciously focus a camera on the thing we want to take a picture of, however, with the brain, it is the right hemisphere, relating to the unconscious, which selects what it will focus on (photograph) from incoming stimuli. It then transfers its collage of information to the left brain which makes up a comprehensive self-centred explanation of what it has been presented with. Its explanation and direction is then once more represented to the right brain to apply in context with the living world. After a right-hemisphere stroke, therefore, the left hemisphere mainly sees what it expects to see, and not the whole picture:

> On its own the left hemisphere is remarkably entrapped by its vision. Once it sees something, it locks on to it, in a way that has little to do with choice. The world that it would be choosing from is, in any case, provided by the broader attention of the right hemisphere and often what engages

> the focus of our attention comes to us pre-consciously, and bypasses any willed action.[18]

This applies both to 'seeing' as in actual vision and to 'seeing' as in 'understanding'.

Focusing visual attention on any image for a considerable length of time has subtle and powerful effects, but particularly if those images are archetypes encoding whole new, or very ancient, world views. Trataka on a yantra is therefore quite different from looking at pictures. If practised repeatedly for long periods of time as a sadhana, that is, with unwavering intent, it can explode various impressions and attitudes. Therefore the tradition states that such practices should only be engaged in under the guidance of a guru. We find that Shankara established icons of deities and especially the Sri Yantra and Shivalingam throughout India and at each of his maths, for they uplift the consciousness.

As brain-mapping studies have filed their data, it has been found that the left hemisphere deals more with separate pieces of information while the right deals with the whole picture. Words, which are small bits, are therefore generally processed in the left hemisphere and pictures in the right. So the tantric strategy of invoking or representing a deity or force through techniques which use both mantra and yantra ensures balanced use of the brain and the whole gamut of processes it places at our disposal. And we find, for example, that in Shankara's devotional hymn, *Saundarya Lahari*, each mantra has an accompanying yantra and the two work together to achieve the aim of the practitioner.

References to the Sri Vidya mantra are scattered throughout Shankara's *Saundarya Lahari*, and the beeja mantra *Hreem*, which attracts the Devi, is the most commonly used seed mantra in the yantras which accompany each verse. Mantras and yantras work together in accessing different

[18] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, UK, 2010, p. 162

parts of the brain, different parts of the psyche, and levels of consciousness other than the narrowly-focused self-centred left hemisphere picture which we habitually refer to for our grasp on the external world.

Yantra and archetypes: Yantras can be described as archetypes, diagrams or blueprints already embedded in the psyche; but what does this mean? What is an archetype? While discussing the inherent unity between our consciousness, sacred architecture and the natural environment, the Prince of Wales mentions:

> The five-petalled rose pattern traced over 8 years in the skies above earth by our nearest neighbour, Venus (was) depicted 400 years ago by the German astronomer, Johannes Kepler. It is the source of the familiar five-pointed star found in many natural forms and in the world's sacred architecture.[19]

That pattern that living beings on earth have unconsciously observed Venus drawing in the sky for millennia is an example of an archetype. It is also found in slightly adjusted forms, in yantras corresponding to two of the verses of *Saundarya Lahari* (65 & 71), in the Rudra yantra, and in the more famous Mahamrityunjaya yantra which is specifically used for health, healing and victory over mortality.



Mahamrityunjaya Yantra

[19] HRH The Prince of Wales, Tony Juniper & Ian Skelly, *Harmony: A New Way of Looking at our World*, Blue Door (HarperCollins), London, UK, 2010, p. 8

We are influenced by the sun, the moon and by the planets of our solar system down to the very core of our physical and emotional cycles, but generally unconsciously. Yantras and mandalas are tools used to access such archetypes.

Mandala

The word mandala seems to have been adopted by the English language since Jung borrowed it to describe his findings in the realm of the collective unconscious. A *mandala* is a circular, often pictorial, representation of a particular mantra and yantra's consequences.

Mandalas may have natural components, such as clouds or animals as part of the design, or they may have devis and devas, but all are highly symbolic, representing internal and external energies and states of consciousness. Yoga and tantra use them as tools for refining and concentrating the mind.

Amongst the better known mandalas are the pictures of the chakras which generally contain a lotus, symbolic animals, deities, tattwa yantras and beeja mantras, all transmitting their message directly into the brain. In kundalini yoga, mudras, mantras and trataka on the yantras and mandalas of different chakras, is taken up systematically as directed by the teacher. This sadhana is to gradually purify or refine all the components of the *antahkarana*, the inner instrument of consciousness, composed of *manas*, the reflective mind, *chitta*, the memory, *buddhi*, the intellect, and *ahamkara*, the sense of separate identity.

Tantric sadhana is not merely an intellectual endeavour but a matter of reshaping and finally transcending the antahkarana. Shankara teaches that one's real self is an expanded homogeneous state of consciousness as explained in the *Upadesha Sahasri* (2:86 ff.):

> *The disciple*: "Sir, why are there the states of dream and waking (in me) if I am absolutely changeless like one in deep sleep?" (2:86)

Teacher: "But you always experience them (whenever they arise). (2:87)
Disciple: "Yes, I experience them, at intervals but not continuously." (2:88)
Teacher: "They are then adventitious only and not your own nature. They will surely be continuous if they were self-existent like Pure Consciousness which is your own nature. Moreover they are not your own nature in that they are non-persistent like clothes and other things." (2:89)[20]

Thus tantra sadhana can lead one directly to the realization of Shankara's advaita philosophy:

A light in the room at night illuminates the entire room, not only one specific part of the room. Similarly, in the state of realization, the entire subtle personality comprised of conscious, unconscious and subconscious is illuminated and there is no division or barrier at all.

Right now there is a total lack of understanding of the processes of the unconscious and subconscious and only some practical understanding of the conscious in relation to the body and mind. With realization, the conscious, subconscious and unconscious are seen as one consciousness, without any division, without any barrier. Becoming free of this barrier is becoming free of the concept of you and me, of duality.

The moment duality falls away one enters into the turiya state, where the connection is made between the individual consciousness and the omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent consciousness free from the fetters of maya, illusion, and the bondages of avidya, ignorance.[21]

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20 Swami Jagadananda (trans.), *Upadesa Sahasri of Sri Shankaracarya*, 9th impression, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1941, p. 1 verse 2:86–89, pp. 53–54

21 Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Lectures on Evolution of Mind*, delivered at Bihar Yoga Bharati from 24/8/98 to 4/9/98

Temples and other sacred structures can work as powerful mandalas changing our mode of perception. Performing ritual worship of sacred symbols or actually visiting or spending time in temples and other structures built as mandalas can spontaneously and profoundly affect the psyche and awakening the insights of the vijnanamaya kosha.

No longer unconscious

We can also understand this development of insight into the depths of our personality in terms of research into brain hemisphere functions. After studies of people with different kinds of brain damage and split-brain patients, McGilchrist can ask:

> The major difference between the hemispheres lies in their relationship with the unconscious mind, whether that means the dream state . . . or what we experience or bear in mind without being aware of it . . . the right hemisphere processes unconscious emotional material, whereas the left hemisphere is involved in the conscious processing of emotional stimuli . . . Why should 'we' not be our unconscious, as well as our conscious, selves?[22]

Why not indeed? People consistently identify with the superficial consciousness which is concerned with external events. We identify with the tip of the iceberg of the mind rather than its mass submerged in the ocean of consciousness because usually our awareness does not penetrate there. But once we become aware of our mental programming, and really notice our different states of consciousness, we can find tools in yoga, Vedanta and tantra to accept the hidden parts of the iceberg of our personality. We can improve ourselves. Then, although the body-mind aggregate continues to function, the enlightened observer has no stake in it and is therefore not tied.

[22] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, UK, 2010, pp. 187–188

Such a person is immensely one-pointed, constantly aware of the greater dimensions of life that we may only glimpse at high points of our journey, or when facing realities such as death itself. In this way he exhibits the basic nature of the paramahamsa sannyasin as described in the Upanishads, living always at the gate of realities, a master of the senses, never confined by the world of the senses and their projections.[23]

Shivalingam

When Shankara visited or arranged the construction of a temple and installed their murtis and accompanying rituals, he was working directly on the psyche by creating three-dimensional mandalas and indicating the correct mantras, attitudes and gestures for seekers to use there. When he also installed the Sri Yantra or a Shivalingam this process was intensified.

> Wherever he established the centres he . . . instructed them in how they should perform devotion, worship, meditation on this crystal lingam, Shivalingam, symbol of consciousness . . . It is postulated that a monolithic object like the Shivalingam did create a psychological excitement, or a psychological change in the depths of consciousness. As a result they begin to have visions.
>
> Unless you have certain visions you can't have an idea. The conscious mind operates through objective channels. The subconscious and unconscious mind operate through psychic channels, and these psychic channels are revived by visions. These visions should not be termed as hallucination or illusion. They are the product of the deeper mind. Anything that can cause visions can awaken your subconscious mind, or can even penetrate deep into your unconscious and from there it can just explode . . . the terrible experiences

[23] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Sannyasa Darshan: A Treatise on Traditional and Contemporary Sannyasa*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 1993), pp. 430–445

one sometimes has during higher meditation come out from the unconscious, because the experiences or the samskaras or influxes that spring from the depth of the unconscious, are very great, fantastic, powerful, and – of course – they are disturbing.

This shivalingam is still venerated now in India and we consider, that this monolithic structure carries around it a powerful field of energy which can awaken the inner potential and the inner experiences. That is why, wherever Shankaracharya went, he established shivalingams.[24]

Sri Vidya

Shankara debated against ritualistic Poorva Mimamsa. Yet tantra uses rituals, including Shankara's refined form of tantra, Sri Vidya. So what is the difference? As a vedantin he says only jnana gives realization of atman and burns all the karma which ties us to samsara, nevertheless ritual can help in the vyavahara reality of daily life. The Poorva Mimamsans and grosser forms of tantra were using the power of ritual to achieve their own purposes in the external world thus increasing their karmic bondage, whereas, Sri Vidya uses ritual to move towards sattwa or enlightenment. Practically speaking, ritual can be described as 'acting out' or solidifying intent. This means that ritual can be used to achieve balance – when you realize something is going wrong, and this is not an uncommon occurrence in our lives, you can sacrifice narrow or selfish concerns and resolve to make it right. This leads to *atmabhava*, the ability to perceive the divine spark in all beings as a reflection of one's own self.

There are different forms of Sri Vidya preserved throughout India. All of them seem to claim Shankara as their founder although details of their traditions differ. Brooks speaks of two basic forms of the *panchadasakshari*, fifteen-syllabled, Sri Vidya mantra: the *Kamaraja* tradition, in which

[24] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Satsang during Kriya Yoga Course, October 15th 1986

the series begins with *ka*, and the *Lopamudra* tradition where the series begins with *ha*.[25] There are three separate strings of mantras known as peaks, *kutas*, which combine to form the panchadasakshari. In the kaadi tradition, Kali's mantra *Kleem* is employed; in the haadi tradition, Lakshmi's *Hreem* is employed. The panchadasakshari mantra is transformed into the even more potent *shodashakshari*, sixteen-syllabled, mantra when the guru ascertains that a disciple has attained the necessary level of consciousness.

The kutas can be identified with specific chakras, with the nine gates of the human body and with the different levels of human consciousness, the A–U–M of the *Mandukya Upanishad*. Adepts refer to the *Gaudapada Mandukya Karika* on this Upanishad. This reconfirms the understanding that tantra was part of Shankara's spiritual inheritance and also strengthens the arguments that Shankara wrote the famous bhashya upon it. The Sri Vidya mantra is thought of as the expression of the Word from which the whole of creation has evolved. Its basic symbolic identification is with *Aum* and then with the Gayatri from the *Rigveda* (3:62:10).

Understanding the meaning of a mantra does not imply intellectual understanding or, for example, the ability to 'translate' the mantra from Sanskrit to Hindi or English words. In fact *beeja mantras*, seed mantras, which have no specific meaning, are considered more powerful than those carrying an intellectual, demarcated load of meaning. The Gayatri mantra, revered as a most sacred mantra of the Vedas, is linked to *So-Ham*, and to the Sri Vidya mantra. Thus the Vedas, yoga and tantra are linked at the root, and in his study of Sri Vidya, Brooks explains:

> The key issue remains the power of the mantra as a prescribed and restricted utterance that can influence nature, human events, and the supernatural, including the

[25] Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Srividya Sakta Tantrism in South India*, Manohar, New Delhi, India, 1996, pp. 90 ff.

> gods . . . The srividya, because it consists of "indestructible seed" syllables (bijakshara) rather than words, transcends such "mundane" considerations as semantic meaning . . . Thus Vedic gayatri is a more explicit mantric reality and hence a "lower form" . . . In contrast, the srividya, can be interpreted only esoterically.[26]

Without the correct understanding, preparation, necessary rituals and intent, the mantra simply will not do what is required. Yantras are dwelling places for the divine forces one wishes to invoke, and then one uses mantra with meditative intent to create an occasion of power during *upasana*, ritual worship.

The experience given through sound in the Sri Vidya mantra is embodied in the Sri Yantra, known also as Sri Chakra. The Sri Vidya mantra and the Sri Yantra are intimately linked, with the three kutas referring to the three sides of the triangle at the centre of Sri Yantra and also with the three sub-chakras of the Sri Yantra. The kutas are also linked with the three gunas of creation. The human being and the universe are represented as an essentially interrelated microcosm and macrocosm in the complex symbolism.

Sri Yantra

Yantras are usually thought of as flat, like the blueprints of an engineer or architect; however, they can also become three-dimensional. A three-dimensional, stepped pyramid is the form of Sri Yantra that Devi inhabits during the ritual of abhisheka, where the deity is bathed in auspicious substances and her presence invoked. The 'yantra' can also be explained from the root *yam*, which means 'to bind'. The deity is bound to the yantra for the purpose of worship. In this context, yantras were often used as the basis for temple construction throughout the world, from Chartres cathedral to the step pyramids of South America. In India, Sri Yantra has often been used as a blueprint for temples but is also thought of

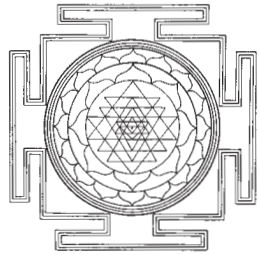
[26] *ibid*. Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, p. 95

as being on another level – of being the source of all yantras and an actual model of the universe.

Sri Yantra is the key yantra throughout *Saundarya Lahari* sadhana. It is also the given yantra for verses 22 and 31. In mantra 11, Shankara has described the structure of Sri Yantra, the dwelling place of the Devi, and the accompanying meditation for verse 11 is on Sri Yantra.[27]

Chaturbhih shree-kanthaih shiva-yuvatibhih panchabhir api
Prabhinnaabhih shambho navabhir api moola-prakritibhih;
Trayash-chatvaarinshad vasu-dala-kalaashra-tri-valaya
Tri-rekhaabhih saardham tava charana-konaah parinataah.

The four *Sri-kanthas* (triangles of supreme energy) and the five *Shiva-yuvatis* (triangles of supreme consciousness) are the nine *Mulaprakritis* (the basic triangles) comprised of forty-three angles distinct from Shiva (the point of bindu), the eight and sixteen-petalled lotuses, the three circles and the three lines, that constitute your mansion (the Sri-Yantra).



Sri Yantra

If it's a map, what does it mean? Sri Yantra is constructed from an interplay of triangles, circles, squares and lotus petals, and each is a symbolic manifestation of some aspect of creation in both internal and external aspects. The evolution of pure consciousness into matter and then its

[27] Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati, *Sri Saundarya Lahari: The Descent*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 2008), p. 428

involution back to consciousness as the kundalini rises is enshrined in this yantra. The details of how to construct Sri Yantra are elaborated within various traditions.[28]

Saundarya Lahari

The hymn *Saundarya Lahari* is often thought to be made up of two sections. The first forty-one verses are therefore also known as *Ananda Lahari* which is almost universally acknowledged as the composition of the Adi Shankaracharya. In its forty-one verses it speaks of the symbolism of the Sri Yantra or Sri Chakra, and the chakras involved in the ascent and descent of kundalini. It reflects the experience of the awakening of kundalini which is the goal of kundalini yoga, the kundalini kriyas and many of the tantras. Shankara is speaking from personal experience; for sadhakas the idea that verses 42–103 of the hymn are not by the same author is not conducive. They are in the form of an actual meditation on the Devi, from the crown of her head to the tips of her toes, and evoke the descent of grace.

Each stanza has its own yantra, mantra, aim and method of worship. The particular aim of the first stanza is to accomplish one's desired object, attain prosperity and overcome obstacles. However, when Swami Satyananda initiated the *Saundarya Lahari* sadhana from 1985–1988, individual aims were not considered, the sadhana was to seek grace to pursue the spiritual life with dignity.

Intent

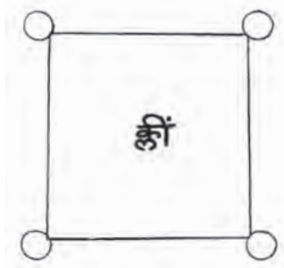
Saundarya Lahari was composed at the end of Shankara's life. He had already reached the stage where he was willing to give up his life to help an enemy. So when he was attacked by some other siddha, his response was not aggression; his response was divine. He composed a hymn to the Devi.

[28] Pandit S. Subrahmanya Sastri & T.R. Srinivasa Ayyangar, *The Ocean of Beauty: Saundarya-Lahari of Sri Samkara-Bhagavatpada with English Translation, Commentary, Diagram & Appendix on Prayoga*, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai, India, 1965, 10th reprint 2005, pp. 64–68

Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh points out:

> The teachers of the Tantra hold that a seeker on this path has to outgrow the social and even the human outlook and develop a super-human and divine outlook in respect of things.[29]

Shankara's mature devotion to the Devi can be seen in *Saundarya Lahari*, his early hymns praising Devi in various forms can be seen as a prelude to this inner experience. The first verse of the hymn begins on the transcendental plane. Shankara humbly asks for permission to worship Devi even though he has no great merit – and she is worshipped by the three great gods who are helpless without her.



Shivah shaktyaa yukto yadi bhavati shaktah prabhavitum
Na chedevam devo na khalu kushalah spanditum api
Atastvaamaaraadhyaam hariharavirinchaadibhirapi
Pranantum stotum vaa kathamakritapunyah prabhavati

> Shiva, when united with Shakti becomes all-powerful; otherwise he is unable even to stir. So how can one who has not acquired great merit be capable of worshipping You, who are hymned and worshipped by Hari (Vishnu), Hara (Shiva), Virinchi (Brahma) and even the eternal Vedas?

[29] Swami Sivananda, *Tantra Yoga, Nada Yoga & Kriya Yoga*, Divine Life Society, UP, India, p. vii

It is this pure bhakti which enlivens the hymn and makes it so moving. Shankara as a poet was a master of words; as a tantric, he was a master of the art of mantra, and this is shown in the structured layers of meaning and symbolism in *Saundarya Lahari*. His knowledge is not exhibited, it is the warp and weft of his illustrated tapestry of devotion.

For example, in Sri Vidya, it is understood that verse 32 relates to meditating on the Sri Chakra with the haadi mantra in anahata chakra, while verse 33 relates to the kaadi mantra in ajna,[30] but just chanting the verses of *Saundarya Lahari* is a subtle sadhana. Layers of symbolism underpin the whole structure of the composition Like the Upanishads and Tulsidas' *Ramacharitamanas*, the *Saundarya Lahari* encodes powerful mantras. They are hidden because, although manifesting the full potential of the mantras requires understanding from the disciple and the grace of the guru, mantras do possess an inherent power, and should not be misused.

Although mantras can be used for material benefits, the skilful use of them is to liberate one from samsara. Therefore when Shankara used mantra to change the way the mind was working, he was not just using the mantras to achieve success, or to overcome obstacles, he was using it to free the consciousness from the bonds of samsara. Thus his use of tantra as a teaching method complements the aims of Advaita Vedanta. Yoga is introductory in that it works on freeing consciousness from external and internal vrittis. Tantra goes further, for example, employing new areas of consciousness using mantra and yantra to contact different forces. A tantric of high calibre and sattwic intent prays for the descent of grace. This grace depends upon *aparoksha anubhava*, immediate experience without the mediation of the senses.

[30] Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati, *Sri Saundarya Lahari: The Descent*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 2008). pp. 215 ff.

Kundalini

Mantra, yantra, mandala, and mudra are all tools in clearing the nadis, balancing the chakras and awakening kundalini, and are also used to describe stages or experiences during the ongoing journey:

> In kundalini yoga it was discovered that the different parts of the brain are connected with the chakras. Certain areas are connected with mooladhara chakra, others with swadhisthana, manipura and so on. When you want to turn on an electric lamp, you do not have to touch the lamp itself, you operate it by means of the switch on the wall. Likewise, when you want to awaken the brain, you cannot deal with it directly, you have to flick the switches which are located in the chakras.[31]

Kundalini is usefully described as the evolutionary energy. It is said one's innate tendencies result in acquiring a human birth when the kundalini reaches mooladhara chakra. It is in *mooladhara*, the root cellar or basic place, that one achieves some sort of awareness and distancing from the instincts which have ruled life up to then. Kundalini may stay dormant in mooladhara for some time (some lifetimes maybe) but eventually it proceeds. One becomes a human being, that is, one becomes able to experience deeper aspects of oneself as the witnessing capacity, and the willpower associated with manipura chakra, matures. One can then appreciate and navigate through previously veiled areas of consciousness.

The aim of tantric sadhana is refinement of awareness, and that refinement is like the refinement of uranium; what is left is a lot more powerful. Shankara's list of qualifications necessary in a disciple effectively ensures that much of the preliminary work on the mind, in the form of training in

[31] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Kundalini Tantra*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2012 (first pub 1984), p. 32

self-restraint and techniques of pratyahara, dharana and so on, has already taken place before the sadhana begins. Even when such wards are observed there are strong internal shifts experienced when awareness penetrates previously subconscious and unconscious aspects of oneself. Old memories, new insights, emotions, perceptions and energies flood the system. There must be continuing effort through sadhana to attune oneself again and again to living appropriately, according to one's dharma.

Saundarya Lahari was perhaps Shankara's final hymn. Even earlier, Shankara had been willing to give his life to the Kapalika to help with his sadhana. With the end of his life approaching, although possessing the powers of a tantric siddha, Shankara had moved deeper and deeper into the spirit and his response to attack was not to prolong his own life but to bless the world in the form of *Saundarya Lahari*.

So many temples in India claim Shankara visited and blessed them. Similarly, several places claim he died there and blessed them. In June 2013, part of a mountain collapsed into a lake high in the Himalayas. The waters cascaded out and the resulting flood destroyed all the homes in Kedarnath. There was a shrine behind the Kedarnath temple, commemorating Shankara's mahasamadhi there. The force of the deluge washed away the shrine, but a huge boulder rolled to the spot and preserved the Kedarnath temple by breaking the force of the flood water into two torrents which curved away on either side. Do we see the universal Shankara at work here? Once more diverting the course of the flood as he did as a child when the waters threatened to disturb his guru's meditations?

15

Chronology

In the West, scholars such as Max Mueller pinned the dates of Adi Shankaracharya as 788–820 AD, at the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries. Many distinguished Indian scholars, such as Dr S. Ramakrishnan, seem to go along with western scholarship. Authorities from the Dashnami tradition, such as Swami Chinmayananda, also link him with historical figures of the Poorva Mimamsa School; although they date him a century earlier.

> About the middle of the 7th century AD Buddhism was in a state of decline. Its final defeat is attributed to Kumarilla Bhatta and Sankaracharya. Kumarilla was the founder of the Bhattapada school of Karma-Meemamsa and was a great opponent of Buddhism. For his stand, he took the Vedas and the Vedic rites as the basis.[1]

Literary evidence regarding Shankara's dates

The *Shankara Digvijaya* refers to the ritualists of the Mimamsa school, led by Kumarilla Bhatta and his disciple, Mandan Mishra. They are both historical figures who are said to have spoken to Shankara. If we can get their dates, have we found him? One would think so, and the dates of western scholarship have been firmly attached to this belief.

[1] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara the Missionary*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Bombay, India, 1978, p. 17

To begin with, Pande[2] argues that Shankara could not possibly have lived from 788–820 AD and still be a contemporary of Kumarilla Bhatta and Mandan Mishra. He is confident that Kumarilla lived at the very latest mid-seventh century because he was quoted by Santaraksita in *Tattvasangraha* in the first half of the eighth century, and criticized Dharmakeerti (who Pande claims lived from 580–650 AD) and was criticized in turn by Dharmakeerti's disciples. Pande is also confident that Mandan Mishra lived around 650–720 AD because Kumalashila (700–750 AD) quotes Umvek's comments on Mandan. Pande therefore argues that the Shankara who debated with these Poorva Mimamsans must have lived around 668–700 AD, or earlier.

Sankara the Missionary, by the Chinmaya Mission includes the point that Sreekanta quotes Shankara in his book *Yoga Prakara* written around 768 AD so we have an end date: Shankara must have lived before 768 AD.

Although Pande places Dharmakeerti at 580–650 AD, *Sankara the Missionary* mentions that the Chinese traveller Fa-Hian claims Dharmakeerti as a contemporary in AD 695, and that he is recorded as a famous philosopher by I-tsung in 693 AD. Shankara has quoted Dharmakeerti in his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*, so this would still place Shankara (at least the one who updated, if not wrote, the commentary on the *Brahma Sutras)* in the same general 'time corral': after AD 695 and before AD 768, but definitely not as late as 788–820 AD.

Swami Chinmayananda suggests that the confusion about two Shankaras may have been caused because Dhira Shankarendra Saraswati, the thirty-eighth Jagadguru of Kanchi was also called Abhinava Shankara and ascended to his seat in AD 788, thus causing confusion amongst western historians.

So the questions of who and when was the Adi Shankaracharya are still open, and there are some interesting points

[2] Govind Chandra Pande, *Life and Thought of Shankaracarya*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, India, 1994, pp. 42 ff.

to fuel the debate. Swami Tapasyananda's introduction to *Shankara Digvijaya* throws doubt on the 788–820 dates:

> Ullur S. Parameswara Iyer has pointed out in his great work *Keralasaahitya* that the sole support for the modern scholars' view on Sankara's date as being 788 A.D. is the following incomplete verses of unknown authorship:
>
> *Nidhi naagebha vahnyabde vibhave shankarodayah*
> *Kalyabde candranetraanka vahnyabde praavishad guhaam*
> *Vaishaakhe poornimaayaam tu shankarah shivataamagaat*
>
> Here the words of the first verse are the code words for the year 3889 of the Kali era, which is equivalent to 788 A.D. (It is derived as follows: nidhi: 9; naga: 8; ibha; 8; vahni: 3. Since the numbers are to be taken in the reverse order, it gives 3889 of the Kali era as the date of Sankara's birth, its conversion into Christian era being 788 A.D.[3]

However, Max Mueller dates accord with the *Jagadguru Parampara Stotram* of Sringeri Math, which does record Shankara's birth in 788 AD.

Traditional records

The most obvious problem with the dates mentioned above is that there is a strong body of evidence linking Adi Shankaracharya to four or five hundred years BC. When we remember that recent archaeological discoveries and satellite photos have moved the dates of the vedic society back about five thousand years from the previously held western estimates, it would seem sensible to pay attention to the traditional Indian dates on this matter. However, the records offered by the maths are confusing and assign wildly different dates, which at times have no semblance of logic. Why, we may ask?

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[3] Madhava-Vidyaranya, Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, (Swami Tapasyananada's introduction footnote) p. xvi

Kulkarni is one exponent of the early dates:

> There is a unique tradition that all the *Mathas* – the spiritual centres established by Sankara himself, point to his period being 509 BC to 477 BC. In spite of this unbroken tradition of all these *Mathas*, the Indologists have fixed his period as 788 to 820 AD. It is really unfortunate that we have been following the lead of the Western Indologists to learn our own history.[4]

Swami Mukhyananda, Head of Belur Math (the head-quarters of Ramakrishna Math and Mission in Kolkata, and therefore a representative of the Puri branch of the Dashnami tradition related to Sringeri Math) says:

> The date of Shri Shankara is still a matter of controversy. It is the consensus of opinion that he lived after Bhagavan Buddha. The dates assigned to him vary from 6th century BC to 8th century AD. The traditional date is Kaliyuga 2593 or 509 BC. It has been generally held by several modern Orientalists that he lived between 788 and 820 AD. Prof Telang, however, on the basis of a reference to Purna Varmam, whom he (Telang) identifies with the Buddhist king of Magadha, in the *Brahma-Sutra-Bhashya* of Shri Shankara, holds that he must have lived in the sixth century AD.[5]

So, Shankara has been recorded around 509–477 BC, that is, the sixth century BC, and again around the sixth or seventh century AD – maybe even 788–820 AD – and all parties have reasons and evidence for their views!

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[4] S.D. Kulkarni, Adi Sankara: *The Saviour of Mankind*, Shri Bhagavan Vedavyasa Itihasa Samshodhana Mandira (Bhishma), Bombay, India, 1987, p. 12

[5] Swami Mukhyananda, *An Interpretation of the Life & Teachings of Shri Shankaracharya*, (Elucidatory & Reconciliatory), 2nd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Ernakulam, India, p. 12

What was he doing?

The next question is: what was he doing? All scholars agree that he was writing commentaries to establish the Advaita Vedanta philosophy and debating against opposing philosophies, sects and religions. Also, he was intent on re-establishing the vedic dharma in society and the lifestyle of sannyasa for those determined to seek moksha. He was working on assimilating and refining the good points of the Jaina, Samkhyan, Buddhist, Tantric and Poorva Mimamsa traditions. Establishing temples, unifying systems of worship, training his disciples, he was travelling throughout the India we have today, plus regions now split into other countries, and neighbouring countries such as Nepal and Tibet.

Shankara was, by all accounts, a magnetic and inspiring figure, striding along, surrounded by disciples, giving satsang, singing bhajans and stotrams in a beautiful melodious voice. Full of light, summoning all to live to their highest potential and to realize their true identity, he was changing his own understandings, maturing and becoming more and more immersed in devotion.

Are there two Shankaras?

Certainly the *Vedic Shanti Path* chanted in the Dashnami tradition uses the dual person:

Aum namoh brahmaadibhyo
brahmaavidyaasampradaayakartribhyo
vamsha rishibhyo namo gurubhyah
Naaraayaanam padmabhavam vasishtham shaktim cha
tatputraparaasharam cha
Vyaasam shukham gaudapadam mahaantam
govindayogeendramathaasyashishyam
Shree shankaraachaaryamathaasya padmapaadam cha
hastaamalakam cha shishyam
Tam trotakam vaartikakaaramanyan
asmatgurunsantatamaanato'smi

Shrutismritipuraanaanaamaalayam karunaalayam
Namaami bhagavatpaadam shankaram lokashankaram
Shankaram shankaraachaaryam keshavam baadaraayanam
Sootrabhaashyakritau vande bhagavantau punah punah
Eeshvaro gururaatmeti moortibhedavibhaagine
Vyomavadvyaaptadehaaya shree dakshinaamoortaye namah
Yasya deve paraabhaktih yathaa deve tathaa gurau
Tasyaite kathitaa hyarthaa prakaashante mahaatmanah
Aum shaantih shaantih shaantih

Aum, I salute the names of the gurus of the Brahmavidya tradition: Narayana, Brahma (born of the lotus), Vasishtha, Shakti and his son Parashara, Vyasa, Shuka, the great Gaudapada, the Lord of yogis Govinda, and his disciple Sri Shankaracharya, and his disciples Padmapada and Hastamalaka, Trotaka and the one who wrote the vartikas (Sureshwara) – and all other gurus (of my lineage).
I salute Shankaracharya, the incarnation of Lord Shankara, for the welfare of the world, an ocean of compassion, the repository of the (treasures of) all the shrutis, smritis and puranas.
I salute the Shankara-incarnate Shankaracharya and the Vishnu-incarnate Badarayana (Vyasa) who (both) wrote the bhashyas on the sutras. I worship (both) divine ones again and again.
I salute Sri Dakshinamurti who expresses himself in the forms of God, guru and Atman, and whose body is all-pervading like space. One who has supreme devotion to God and equal devotion to guru, to such a great mahatma, the truth of the Upanishads will be as clear as crystal.
Aum peace, peace, peace.

The *Vedic Shanti Path* refers to Shankaracharya as an avatara of Lord Shiva and Vyasa as an avatara of Lord Vishnu. Tradition says that Lord Vishnu, in his role as Preserver, undertook to take birth again and again in the Dwapara Yuga to preserve spiritual understanding – hence his other names such as Apantaratamas and Krishnadvaipayana.

Maybe Lord Shiva undertook a similar task in this Kali Yuga and has come more than once as Shankaracharya.

As there seems to be distinct clusters of evidence around the dates of 509–477 BC, and then again the more modern dates around the seventh century AD, the theory of there being two Shankaras has gained ground. In this scenario, we have the *Adi*, original, Shankaracharya around the sixth century BC and an *Abhinava*, new, Shankaracharya around the seventh century AD. The many references in the *Shankara Digvijaya* and other sources, to Shankara's debates against the Poorva Mimamsans cannot be ignored; if we can find the dates of Kumarilla Bhatta and Mandan Mishra, it seems we have those of the new, Abhinava, Shankara.

Some say that as Vidyaranya was himself a Shankaracharya of Sringeri Math, he insisted the Abhinava Shankaracharya was the Adi Shankaracharya for political reasons, to give extra authority to Sringeri's work, views, tradition, and the like. Deliberate disinformation for political reasons was something Vidyaranya must have been well aware of in his professional life as advisor to kings, but remember that the author of the *Shankara Digvijaya* specifically mentions that he wants to purify himself from such previous misuse of his literary skills.

Can we believe this desire to reform himself? Motivations of deception are not in line with the Vidyaranya who speaks to us so fluently and earnestly from texts such as *Shankara Digvijaya, Panchadasi*, and *Jivanmuktiviveka*. It is much more likely his Digvijaya, and others, are actually speaking of an Abhinava Shankara who was hailed as the genuine successor of Adi Shankaracharya, in the same sense that a particular Rimpoche of the Tibetan tradition is definitely recognized as a particular great soul who incarnated previously:

> I was born in Tibet, and I was six months old when I entered the monastery of my master Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro, in the province of Kham. In Tibet we have

> a unique tradition of finding the reincarnation of great masters who have passed away. They are chosen young and given a special education to train them to become the teachers of the future. I was given the name Sogyal, even though it was only later that my master recognized me as the incarnation of Terton Sogyal, a renowned mystic who was one of his own teachers and a master of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama . . .
>
> Janyang Khyentse used to live in the room where his previous incarnation had seen his visions and launched the renaissance of culture and spirituality which swept through eastern Tibet in the last century.[6]

So the generally accepted western dates of 788–820 AD for the Adi Shankaracharya are not looking so good now. Perhaps looking at an abbreviated timeline will make things clearer (though of course one can doubt all these dates).

TIMELINE

Dharmakeerti 580–650 AD and referred to in China by 695 AD (quoted by Shankara in *Upadesha Sahasri* and the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya).*

Kumarilla Bhatta 600–670 AD (met Shankara).

Chalukya king Vikramaditya reigned 654/655–670 AD (Sringeri Math records Shankara's birth in the fourteenth year of the reign of Vikramaditya. If it was this Vikramaditya, Shankara was born 658/659 AD).

Mandan Mishra (Swami Sureshwarananda) 650–720 AD (criticized Dharmakeerti and Shankara before becoming Shankara's disciple. He wrote *Brihadaranyaka Bhashya Vartika* on Shankara's *Brihadaranyaka Bhashya* which was quoted by Vidyananda in reference to Jinasena's *Harivamsa* written 783 AD).

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[6] Sogyal Rimpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, (Rigpa Fellowship), Rider, London, UK, 2002, preface pp. xv–xvi

Shankaracharya 668–700 AD (re. *Darshanaprakasha* of Sringeri tradition – this date would explain why Shankara mentions the city of Pataliputra as though it still existed; it was flooded in 750 AD).
Dhira Sankarendra Saraswati 788–839 AD (the thirty-eighth guru of Kanchi known as Abhinava Shankara[7], (or maybe he ascended to that seat in 788 AD).

It is fuzzy, but something is in there. Let's look more closely at the kings.

Kings

In general, the sannyasa tradition has been well advised to keep out of politics and into reality, but the leaders of the spiritual traditions have to deal with secular leaders too. We find many references to kings associated with Shankara, but can we get definite dates for Shankara by looking at the kings with whom he was associated?

Pande refers to a King Sudhanvan who issued a copper plate in 2663 of the Yudhishthira Era[8] (about 476 BC). King Sudhanvan is definitely an influential figure in Shankara's story for, if we remember our mythology, he is really Lord Indra, king of the gods, specifically beamed down to earth to assist with Shankara's mission.

Shankara is also associated with King Vikramaditya, but when was he living? Pande remarks:

> Some palm-leaf manuscripts in the monastery dating from the 17th century and claiming to be copied from an original of the 15th century recorded a verse in which Sankara was said to have been born in the 14th year

[7] Madhava-Vidyaranya, translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1986, (Sw. Tapasyananda's introduction) p. xv: "Abhinava Sankara (788–839) was born at Chidambaram and was the head of the Sankara Math at Kanchipuram between 801 and 839. He was reputed for his holiness and learning and is said to have gone on tours of controversy (Dig-vijaya) like the original Sankara."

[8] Govind Chandra Pande, *Life and Thought of Shankaracarya*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, India, 1994, p. 42

of King Vikramaditya. It has been suggested that this Vikramaditya could be the Badami-Calukya Vikramaditya I, son of Pulekesin II, who ascended the throne in AD 654–55. This would give Sankara's dates as AD 668–700.[9]

But then – while speaking on Shankara's guru, Govindapadacharya, Kulkarni claims there is an oral tradition that Govindapada married four ladies before he managed to free himself and find his guru, Gaudapadacharya. One of these was the daughter of a king and in due succession, Govindapada's eldest son Bhartrihari (also known as Bhartriprapancha, author of *Niti Shatakam*, on right conduct, *Shringara Shatakam*, on the art of love, and *Vairagya Shatakam*, on vairagya) was crowned king. He abdicated in favour of his younger brother Sri Harsha:

> . . . who had later on assumed the title *Vikramaditya* after he had driven away the *Shakas* from his kingdom. Alberuni, the Arab traveller, mentions in his *India* that in 457 B.C. *Shri Harsha* established *Shaka* era in his name.[10]

Really, we see what we want to see.

Other evidence about Adi Shankaracharya

In India, even today it is usual for a child's birth chart to be drawn up. The tradition of daily noting the positions of stars, planets and the moon is very ancient. Kulkarni quotes both the *Brihat Shankara Vijaya* and the *Shankara Digvijaya* to confirm that Shankara was born in the 2,631st year of the Yudhisthira *shaka*, era:

> According to the *Brihat-Shankara Vijaya* of *Chitsukhacharya*, it was the eleventh day (*ekadasi* – a day for fasting) of the

[9] *ibid*. Pande, *Life and Thought of Shankaracarya*, p. 44

[10] S.D. Kulkarni, *Adi Sankara: The Saviour of Mankind*, Shri Bhagavan Vedavyasa Itihasa Samshodhana Mandira (Bhishma), Bombay, India, 1987, p. 114

bright half of the month of *kartika* in the year 2639 of *Yudhisthira shaka* i.e. 555 BC, that his mother formally gave him permission to accept *sannyasa asrama*. At this time he was about eight and a half years old.[11]

Pande presents a whole wealth of evidence supporting his dates of 668–700 AD, linking Shankara with Kumarilla Bhatta and Mandan Mishra. However, he also presents a whole wealth of information about an earlier historical personage acclaimed by the Dashnami tradition as Shankara. He also points out that for years scholars held the traditional view that Adi Shankaracharya lived from 508–476 BC:[12]

1. The Sarada Peeth at Dwarika backs this time period:
   i) *Gurusamsavali* says the Adi Shankaracharya was born in 2631 of Yudhishthira Era on the fifth bright tithi of Vaishakha and died in 2663 of Yudhishthira Era on the full moon in Kartika.
2. Kanchi Math agrees, arguing:
   i) *Brihat Shankara Vijaya* says the Adi Shankaracharya was born in the 31st year after 26 centuries of the Yudhishthira Era, in the cyclic year Nandana, month Vaishakha, fifth lunar day of bright fortnight, on a Sunday.
   ii) *Prachina Shankara Vijaya* quoted by Atmabodha says he was born when 2,593 years of the Kali Era passed, in the year Nandana.
   iii) *Puriya Sloka Manjari* says he died at the age of thirty-two in Kali Era year 2625 in the year Raktakshi on the bright Ekadashi.
3. The Jaina tradition backs this time period by saying that the Adi Shankaracharya died in 474 BC:
   i) *Jinavijaya* says he died in 2157 of Yudhishthira Era in a cyclic year called Tamrakshi (same as iii above as the Jaina

[11] *ibid*. Kulkarni, *Adi Sankara: The Saviour of Mankind*, p. 105

[12] Govind Chandra Pande, *Life and Thought of Shankaracarya*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, India, 1994, pp. 41–42

Yudhishthira Era starts in 2624 BC, that is, 505 years after the usual date).
4. The Puri tradition is similar to Kanchi and Dwarika.
5. The semi-puranic text *Shiva Rahasya* says the Adi Shankaracharya was born in the third millennia of the Kali Era.

Based on the preceding information, here is another defendable timeline.

TIMELINE

Buddha 567–487 BC

Adi Shankaracharya approximately 509–477 BC according to:

1. Records of Govardhan Math at Jagannath Puri
2. Records of Sarada Math at Dwarika
3. Records of the Kanchi Kamakoti Math
4. Records of Sringeri Math
5. *Brihat Shankara Vijaya*
6. *Prachina Shankara Vijaya*
7. *Vyasachaliya Shankara Vijaya*
8. Records of Nepali kings (Shankara visited in sixth century BC)
9. King Sudhanvan, said to be an associate of Shankaracharya, issued a copper plate in 2663 of the Yudhishthira Era[13] (about 476 BC).

Why the confusion?

Swami Chinmayananda, a respected and precise scholar, mentions that the *Jagadguru Parampara Stotram* of the Sringeri Math records Shankara's birth in 788 AD, his establishment of Sringeri Math at the age of twenty in 808 AD, and his attaining mahasamadhi in AD 820.[14] However, (having just established through literary evidence that Shankara was definitely born after Dharmakeerti), he comments that this is all just acquiescing to western scholarship. Swami

[13] *ibid*. Pande, *Life and Thought of Shankaracarya*, p. 42

[14] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara The Missionary*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Bombay, India, 1978, p. 18

Chinmayananda subsequently comments that the records of Govardhan Math at Jagannath Puri, of the Sarada Math at Dwarika and of the Kanchi Kamakoti Math all point to 509 BC as the time of birth of Adi Shankara. He also mentions that the genealogical tree of the kings of Nepal refer to Shankara's visit in the sixth century BC. At the same time, Swami Chinmayananda in his 1978 publication opens the whole topic up to a wider perspective, which would not have been acceptable to the British Raj, western culture, or the materialistic mindset of the twentieth century:

> Sankara is not an individual. To us students of the Advaita philosophy, Sankara is an institution. No single person could ever have achieved what he had achieved in his short span of life. No master or prophet has ever achieved so much for so many in so short a time. Very often this tempts us to consider that Sankara was an avatar.[15]

Although there is mounting scientific evidence regarding reincarnation[16], for centuries the West has had difficulty in accepting this understanding of the significance of life and death, although it is a keystone factor in many eastern civilizations and countries, such as Tibet and India. This surely has something to do with the historical development of the Christian Church. Biblical references to reincarnation were carefully removed in a succession of meetings following the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, convened by Emperor Constantine, in which the early Church chose the present twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Many of the texts that had been suppressed, were rediscovered at Nag Hammadi, in Egypt, in 1945 and can now be read.[17]

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[15] *ibid*. Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara The Missionary*, Foreword

[16] Prof. Ian Stevenson, *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*, Praeger, Westport, USA, 1997

[17] Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming: The Resurrection of Christ Within You: A revelatory commentary on the teachings of Jesus, Vol. 1*, Self-Realization Fellowship, Los Angeles, USA, 1st ed., 2004, reprinted 2007, p. 69 (footnote)

In India, the teachings about reincarnation, samsara, how to break free of that endless cycle of birth and death, and how avataras may voluntarily descend into it, have been preserved by the scriptures throughout the centuries. Consider, for example:

> Just as a person, casts off worn-out clothes, and puts on other new ones, likewise the embodied spirit casts off worn-out bodies and enters other new ones. (*Bhagavad Gita* 2:22)

The esoteric teachings have been preserved by sannyasins, not by trying to convert other people to those beliefs, but by carefully selecting eligible people and then imparting detailed knowledge and training.

But how can Shankara have such early dates?

A seemingly insurmountable problem with this viewpoint relates to the logic of literary evidence. One problem with the early date for the Adi Shankaracharya has been how to explain why definitive works such as the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, always held to be by Adi Shankara, nevertheless can contain a quotation from Buddhist authors such as Dingnaga[18], Dharmakeerti, or perhaps refer to a king or philosophy from a later period. One explanation could be that both Shankara and authors who came after him are quoting well-known passages from undisclosed ancient sources. So many authoritative texts are now missing that this

[18] Madhava-Vidyaranya, translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, p. xxii (Swami Tapasyananda's introduction): "Internal evidence is given by Dr A.G. Krishna Warrier in his *Introduction* to his translation of Sankara's *Brahma-sutra-bhashya* into Malayalam. 'He states that the Buddhist author Kamalasila has pointed out that Sankara has quoted in his *Brahma-sutra-bhashya* (BS II. 2–28) the following passage from the *Alambanapariksha* by Dingnaga, the celebrated Buddhist savant: *Yadantarjneyarupam tat bahiryadavabhasate*'. Dingnaga's date, which Dr Warrier links with those of Vasubandhu (450AD) and Bhartrhari, is fixed by him as about 450AD."

is quite possible. In addition, as previously discussed with the *Dakshinamurti Stotram*, it is quite possible that interpolations have taken place in Shankara's work, or that he has been subtly misinterpreted to accommodate the understandings of society.

However, a solution to this problem, and a compelling argument for the existence of an ancient Adi Shankaracharya, can now be drawn on the basis of modern linguistic analysis.

The Protocommentator

Daniel H.H. Ingalls says our present commentary on the *Brahma Sutras* by Shankara, was probably written early eighth century AD. The next earliest is by Bhaskara written around 800 AD. But on the basis of internal evidence, he feels there must have been a much earlier, highly respected commentary which was the *basis* for both Shankara and Bhaskara's commentaries. Ingalls calls the author of this earlier commentary the 'Protocommentator'.[19] Shankara, Bhaskara and later authors called him the *Vrittikara*, the Commentator.

In the context of our discussion, the idea of Shankara's commentary being based on, and modifying, a previous authoritative version of the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* firms the ground for the theory of two Shankaras: Abhinava Shankara around the seventh century AD, and the Adi Shankara about the sixth century BC. Darling comments:

> . . . wherever the supercommentators of Sankara's works indicate that Sankara is departing from the proto-commentary, it is to be noted that Bhaskara upholds the view of the proto-commentator and passionately objects to Sankara's departure. Ingalls thinks that Bhaskara's commentary is based largely on the protocommentary.

[19] Daniel H.H. Ingalls, 'Samkara's Arguments Against the Buddhists', *Philosophy East & West, Volume III*, No. 4, Jan 1954, p. 293

> Ingalls also points out that a large part of Bhaskara's commentary is basically similar to Sankara's. Since Bhaskara had little love for Sankara, whom he often attacks in vitriolic fashion, it cannot be said that Bhaskara was borrowing from Sankara. Rather, it seems better to assume, Ingalls explains, the existence of a common proto-commentary which served as the basis for the work of Sankara and Bhaskara.[20]

If we hold this view then the Abhinava Shankara's references to this earlier commentator the *Vrittikara* (whom we may call the Adi Shankaracharya) are important. They are said to come at various places in the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* including 1:1:4, 1:1:11–13, 1:1:19, 1:1:23, 1:2:23, 1:4:26 and 3:3:53. We will just look at the first few.

Shankara changes his position?

In the extant *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* on 1:1:19, Shankara makes a major correction to the Vrittikara's position which has repercussions through the surrounding sutras. Vyasa's sutra 1:1:19 runs:

> *Asminnasya cha tadyogam shaasti*
>
> Moreover the scripture teaches the absolute identity of this one with this (One).[21]

We can follow the footprints of Shankara and the Vrittikara as they circle each other's positions. It's an interesting study on how such an important, fundamental text can be changed within the tradition – but it's a bit dry and technical and so has been placed in *Appendix 2*. If you like philosophical debates you can stop and read it now, otherwise here is an overview of the situation.

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[20] Gregory J. Darling, *An Evaluation of the Vedantic Critique of Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, India, 1987, p. 120

[21] Swami Gambhirananda (trans.), *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Shankaracharya*, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, India, 1991, pp. 71 ff.

The first chapter of the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* is called *Samanvaya*, 'The reconciliation through proper interpretation'. It begins with the topics: *Deliberations on Brahman* and *Origin of the Universe* and ends with *An Explanation of Everything*.

The first chapter has four sections. In Section 1 Shankara comments on the first twenty-seven sutras of Vyasa, which are all related to the nature of Brahman. Here follows a simple attempt to summarize the issues up to the 19th sutra (1:1:19), which is where the modern Shankara can no longer just agree with the accepted version and steps in to the arena. To summarize:

1. The original view held by the Vrittikara is that *ananda-maya* can mean the final and subtlest kosha – the essence of the individual self, the body made of bliss, but here it is actually another name of Brahman/atman, meaning 'Abundant bliss'.
2. Shankara disagrees, saying, "Why change the meaning and suddenly say that *maya* means 'abundant'? Ananda-maya is just the subtlest of the five sheaths, *koshas,* that are the vehicle of the atma – simply leave it at that."
3. He clarifies that when *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2:5:2) speaks of Brahman and says, "Truly, joy is his head, enjoyment his right side, hilarity his left side, bliss, *ananda*, the trunk of the body (that is, the self), and Brahman is the tail that stabilizes", it doesn't mean that Brahman has a tail. It is speaking metaphorically of Brahman as the underlying reality that supports everything else (including anandamaya kosha).

Shankara's rebuttal of the Vrittikara's position is quite lengthy, relying mainly on the *Taittiriya Upanishad*.[22] He spells it out for a while, but then instructs the reader to apply the gist of his correction regarding 'the tail' to sutras 1:1:13–18 as well.

This whole re-editing of the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* by Shankara in our extant version, is glossed over in many

[22] *ibid*. Swami Gambhirananda, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Shankaracharya*, pp. 71–79

translations. They either apply his correction throughout as instructed or stick with the original (as Bhaskara thought Shankara should have done).

Can we interpret the controversy as really being a re-interpretation of the Adi Shankaracharya by the Abhinava Shankaracharya? It is interesting to look at the different attitudes evinced towards *Brahma Sutra* 1:1:19 by Shankara's supposed near-contemporaries. According to Govardhana and Anandagiri, Shankara first presents the view of the Vrittikara:

> According to this view, the *anandamayatman* (self consisting in bliss) is identified with the Paramatman (Highest Self), in that otherwise liberation (*moksa*) is not possible . . .
>
> For Sankara, the term *anandamaya* (consisting of bliss) is no more a description of Brahman than the other members of the series beginning with *anna-maya* (consisting of food) . . . Sankara is relegating the *anandamaya* to the sphere of empirical or relative (*vyavahara*) truth, thereby declaring in opposition . . . to the *vrttikara*, that the *anandamayatman* (the Self consisting of bliss) and the Paramatman (the Highest Self) are not equivalent . . . Bhaskara, however, as Ingalls notes, accepts the interpretation of the *vrttikara* or Protocommentator and criticizes Sankara's interpretation, and says "The proper way to interpret this sutra is the traditionally handed down way".[23]

We can assume that the basic text was given by the Adi Shankaracharya, because by 'Adi Shankaracharya' the historian means no one else but the person who was the original author of the *Brahma Sutra Bhasya*. In the text that exists today, Shankara pays respect to the views of that person – but he changes them. Perhaps the present text was preserved as a whole by the Dashnami tradition because the

[23] Gregory J. Darling, *An Evaluation of the Vedantic Critique of Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, India, 1987, pp. 120–121

Adi Shankaracharya and the Abhinava Shankara are both accorded respect and are recognized as being avataras of the same energy.

How do we know it's him?

Within the tradition there are particular ways of establishing authority. For example, his guru first sent Shankara to Varanasi to debate with the acknowledged pandits there and thus establish his credentials. We have seen that it was necessary for him to be acknowledged by the leaders of other traditions, such as the Mimamsans. Later he had to accept challenges and prove himself victorious in debate against leaders of the Patanjali school of yoga, the Jainas and Buddhists along with Nyaya, Samkhya and Vaisheshika systems of philosophy. He had to prove himself 'sarvajna' at the Sharada Peeth in Kashmir before he could be accepted as authentic in that region.[24] In the same way, the Dalai Lama is recognized by certain accepted proofs. He undergoes 'training' and then his authority to make changes in interpretations and procedures is acknowledged.

Are there three?

The various traditions of tantra, Samkhya, Mimamsa, Jainism and Buddhism are India-based and ancient so one can understand that they would attract written references. They are referred to time and again in the context of Shankara's Digvijayas and also in Shankara's texts.

Tradition states that Christ's direct disciple, Saint Thomas, brought Christianity to India before 50 AD.

> Scholarly and Christian tradition agree that Christianity arrived on the western coast of India very shortly after the time of Jesus, reportedly brought in person by one of

[24] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara The Missionary*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, India, 1978, p. 48

> Christ's twelve apostles, Thomas, who spent the last years of his life in India.[25]

This would mean that the early church, called 'The House of God' in Goa, predates the Vatican. Many early apostles of the Christian Church are known to have been in Goa before the second century and they swiftly collected ardent disciples. Was there no need for debate with them?

We know that Shankaracharya challenged all other philosophies in India, yet there is no mention of Christianity in any of his written works. Does this mean that the Shankara who wrote the bhashyas and prakara granthas predated the Christian era, or at least the establishment of the organized Church?

Shankara and Christianity

Although Shankara's books make no reference to Christ, records of Christ seem to have been made by some of the institutions Shankara established. This is confirmed by historical research recorded by Paramahansa Yogananda, who was a member of the Giri branch of the Dashnami tradition:

> Records of Jesus' years in India were preserved in Puri, according to His Holiness Sri Jagadguru Shankaracharya Bharati Krishna Tirtha, spiritual head of that city's ancient Gowardhan Math and, until his passing in 1962, senior most of the reigning Shankaracharyas.[26]

Also, Swami Satyananda once mentioned that although there is no record of Shankara debating with Christianity as an opposing school, the early Christian monasteries appear to have been influenced by Shankara's *Matha Annaya* which contains instructions on how his monasteries should be

[25] Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming: The Resurrection of Christ Within You: A revelatory commentary on the teachings of Jesus, Vol. 1*, Self-Realization Fellowship, Los Angeles, USA,1st ed., 2004, reprinted 2007, p. 59 (footnote)

[26] *ibid*. Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming*, p. 85 (footnote)

managed.[27] To investigate this issue thoroughly it would be necessary to study any similarities between its guidelines and those of the earlier Christian monasteries and also look at dates of the early Christian church in India.

We would expect some reference to Christianity. It cannot just be that Shankara disdained them as having no philosophy worth debating with. The Jewish tradition that Christianity is based on is very refined and complex, with references to chakras, different lokas, required moral conduct, and the concept of reincarnation repeatedly referred to in their classical texts.

> The Bahir, attributed to the first-century sage Nechuniah ben Hakanah, used reincarnation to address the classic question of theodicy – why bad things happen to good people and vice versa: . . . 'This is because the righteous person did bad in a previous (life), and is now experiencing the consequences.'[28]

And, though most references to karma, reincarnation, kundalini, etc., have been removed from the Bible now, some references are still scattered throughout both the Old and New Testaments. For example John the Baptist was asked, "Are you Elijah?" (John 1:21); and Jesus' disciples say to him, "Some say you are John the Baptist: some Elijah; and others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:14).

The Essene *Dead Sea Scrolls* found in the Qumran caves support the idea of an Indian background to Christ's teachings.

> *The Lost Years of Jesus Revealed*, by Rev. Dr. Charles Francis . . . observes: "Many Hindus believe that Jesus' 'Lost Years' were, partly at least, spent in India, getting much of

[27] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, audio cassette of satsang given during Teacher Training Course, 11th March 2009, Rikhia, India

[28] Astor Yaakov, *Soul Searching: Seeking Scientific Foundation for the Jewish Tradition of the Afterlife*, Southfield, Michigan: Targum Press, USA, 2003

> his best teaching from the Vedas. Didn't he say 'Take my yoga upon you and learn of me, for my yoga is easy'?"[29]

The Greek word used was 'zeugos', which means both 'union' and 'yoke' just as *yoga* means 'union' and 'yoke' in Sanskrit. The early Christians thought John the Baptist and Christ were incarnations of enlightened souls, many of their beliefs were in tune with the civilization of India at that time.

> Gnostic mysticism had come to the Jews from the East, from India and Persia and Babylon . . . Gnosticism was Egyptian Christianity for the two hundred years that the leaders of the new Faith were working out its theology. It was gradually pushed out by orthodox Catholic Christianity and its books were burned. Similarly, Essenism was the early form of Palestinian Christianity.[30]

Reconciliation

It is possible to offer the view that the Adi Shankaracharya predates Christ. He may also have returned around the same time as Christ took birth, when there was no Church to argue with. But it does seem surprising that the Abhinava Shankara would have completely ignored a flourishing and aggressive new religion. Why would he ignore the threat of Christianity to the traditional cultures of India in the seventh or eighth century AD?

In relation to this question, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati explains that the early Christians of the House of God were not aggressive. The new religion was not a threat, it was not actively proselytizing. The early Christians were not competitive and were accepted by the Indian culture, as many disparate faiths, philosophies and religions were in the past, and are today. Also, Shankara was not at all opposed to

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[29] Paramahansa Yogananda., *The Second Coming: The Resurrection of Christ Within You, A revelatory commentary on the teachings of Jesus, Vol. 1*, Self-Realization Fellowship, Los Angeles, USA,1st ed., 2004, reprinted 2007, p. 84

[30] *ibid*. Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming*, p. 84 (footnote)

people following any religion of their choice; his arguments were with people using spiritual power destructively or manipulatively. He had no problem with the House of God and therefore did not debate against them.

Part of the problem with dating any event in ancient India is that the history stretches so far back. Respected names reoccur, for example, there are about twenty 'Vikramadityas' as it is a title as well as a name. And then there is the simultaneous use of several different calendars. We have referred to a King Sudhanvan who could be associated with the Adi Shankaracharya (about 476 BC). However, Swami Satyananda refers to the King Sudhanvan who later became the emperor of India and was in power when Christ visited India in order to study its various traditions such as Advaita Vedanta and bhakti yoga before starting his own ministry. This Sudhanvan was one of the Shaka rulers, thus part of an important historical dynasty whose calendar, the Shaka calendar, is now the official one used by the Indian Government.

Swami Satyananda also mentions that Shankaracharya visited Baidyanath Dham, near Rikhia, about two thousand years ago.

> How much time did Adi Shankaracharya get? He passed away after a lifespan of thirty-two years. During that period he triumphed in all directions from the north to the south of India and silenced Buddha Dharma, which had become the religion of the kings. In Badrinath the image of Narayana, which had had been thrown in the Alakananda river, was reinstalled. What a powerful person he must have been.
>
> He also came here to Baidyanath Dham. He wrote, "*Poorvottar jvaalikaanidhane*", which means that amongst the twelve jyotirlingams this one is *poorvottar*, the north-easterly one. All the mountains around here are volcanic. *Jvalika* means volcano, so this must have been known as an extinct volcano two thousand years ago, when Shankaracharya

made this reference. Today it is not a volcano. Today it is a mountain called Trikut.[31]

It seems the Dashnami tradition, for a long time, has been prepared to quietly agree with, or ignore, confusions of their old records by modern scholars, who in bewilderment have decided that it all got mixed up due to many overlapping calendars and kings and traditions with references all relating to different eras – plus there is human error (or discretion) in recordkeeping.[32] Nevertheless, there are records of a Shankaracharya present around the birth of Christ.

TIMELINE

Alexander the Great 326 BC.
Shankara 40–8 BC (Sringeri Math records him as head of Kamakoti Math from 18–12 BC).
Jesus Christ 1–40 AD (Puri Math records Jesus of Nazareth's visit there as a young man before taking up his ministry).
Vikramaditya (Sringeri Math records Shankara as born in the 14th year of the reign of Vikramaditya. If this is Vikramaditya of Ujjain it places Shankara around the first century AD).
The Shaka emperor Sudhanvan (Swami Satyananda Saraswati points out that King Sudhanvan was in power during Christ's lifetime, including the 'Lost Years' when Indian tradition records Christ as studying Advaita philosophy in Kashi and Vaishnava bhakti in the east.)

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[31] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, satsangs delivered on *Ashram Culture, Rishikesh: India – the spiritual land*

[32] Madhava-Vidyaranya Translated by Swami Tapasyananda, *Sankara Digvijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*, 3rd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1986, (Sw. Tapasyananda's introduction): ". . . something is definitely out of joint for scholars quote the records of Sringeri Math as stating that Adi Sankara was head of the Kamakoti Math from 18–12 BC and died in 12 BC and was followed by Sureswara (for 785 years) from 12 BC to 773 AD. Whereas records of Kamakoti Math state Sankara was its head from 480–477 BC followed by Sureswara from 477–407 BC – the whole period of 785 years being occupied by 33 Acharyas during that period."

There do seem to be three distinct 'sightings' of this phenomenon called Shankaracharya emerging. The first, maybe the Adi Shankaracharya himself, is recorded around the sixth century BC. Another Shankara, possibly born at about the same time as the birth of Christ, remains a shadowy figure, whose presence is mainly recorded in verbal traditions. The third one, fairly recent, the Abhinava Shankara, entangled in the literary web around the seventh century AD, seems to be the one who re-edited the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* and the one most often referred to in the *Shankara Digvijaya*. It seems this Abhinava Shankara has been confused by modern historians with the original or *Adi* Shankara.

It may be appropriate here to point out that the bulk of Shankara's teaching was esoteric. The knowledge that he was giving freely in one sense, was highly restricted in another. Even today, texts from the yogic and tantric traditions that one can buy in bookshops or even download from the internet, invariably mention that techniques should not be practised without proper guidance. It is secret knowledge. The sannyasin tradition was specifically charged by Shankaracharya, to preserve the integrity of the refined aspects of this knowledge. So we may as well accept that there are aspects of Shankara's tradition which remain unpublicized.

Just as one may say that the tip of the iceberg is all that exists, similarly, one can say that Adi Shankaracharya lived from 788–820 AD if one so wishes. However, it would be wiser to remember that his tradition was founded in order to protect and preserve knowledge which was powerful and could be misused. This ought to be remembered when trying to understand gaps in history. For example, the Sri Yantra is often said to be associated with the modern historical personage of Shankara because it was established in Hindu temples in South India no later than the tenth century, but initiates believe Rishi Lopamudra was the first initiating guru of Sri Vidya. This must have happened a long time ago because her husband, Rishi Agastya, initiated Sri Rama

into mantras for battle according to the *Ramayana* and that was many thousands of years ago. Hence, Shankara was not founding the ancient tradition of Sri Vidya but re-establishing it.

Avatara

Modern records are very – modern. We began the discussion of Shankara's life with the scenario of the bardo before his birth and the indication that he was sent down not as an ordinary person, born on account of his own karma, but on a mission to establish the sanatana dharma so that life could be lived in the right way on earth. The tradition portrays him as an avatara. Was this how Shankara saw himself?

Granted that in the West some people have difficulty with the basic idea of reincarnation. In Shankara's tradition transmigration is an accepted facet of evolution. The *Bhagavad Gita* says (2:16–18 & 20):

> The physical body is transient, whereas the Spirit is eternal, the seers of the truth realize this.
> The only imperishable thing is that which pervades this universe; no one has the power to destroy this indestructible substance.
> But all these bodies pertaining to that imperishable, indefinable and eternal Spirit are going to perish anyway; therefore, Arjuna, fight.
> The Soul is not born nor does it ever die; nor does it come into being only after being born. Because it is unborn, eternal, everlasting and ancient; even though the body is slain, the Spirit is not.

So within Shankara's tradition there is knowledge related to different levels of accomplishment in death and rebirth.[33] Masters explain that there are different levels

[33] Swami Sivananda (trans. & commentary), *The Bhagavad Gita*, 10th ed., Divine Life Society, UP, India, 1995, pp. 188–199 (8:15–28)

of development in the higher aspects of mind and these influences cause one's destiny. The following is a satsang by Swami Satyananda Saraswati on the matter, when he was asked a question on the subject:

Are there any karmic connections or karmic debts with people in this life from a past life situation? Do we choose our own parents?

The doctrine of karma is an absolute truth. Nobody should have any doubt about it . . . This law (of cause and effect) is the sound philosophy of karma, migration, transmigration, reincarnation and metamorphosis, where matter is not totally obliterated but transformed. Even after the death of this physical body, the karmas remain and are transferred to another body where you are obliged to undergo all the necessary experiences of the effects of the previous life.

So far as choosing parents is concerned, only a few people can choose their parents. They are people with higher consciousness. At the time of death there are two types of people. One type becomes totally unconscious. Their mind, senses and awareness become dormant as if they were sleeping and then they leave their body.

When the spirit leaves the body, it is in a dormant potential state. It is like a seed which is being tossed hither and thither. It has no choice of its own and no awareness of itself. According to the gravity and the quality of karma, nature moves the seed from the old body and, at the proper time, it puts it into the mother's womb. Here you have no choice. According to karma you have to be born into the womb of a mother you may like or you may not like. It is not up to you.

There is another kind of soul who, at the time of death, maintains inner awareness. They are the yogis and you can be like that . . . since these people are aware, they can decide where to go. Nature does compel them to a certain

extent, but since they are aware, they have control over the laws of nature also. These souls have a choice.[34]

Mission

In the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* Shankara speaks of another echelon; those who are born with a divine mission. He explains that for those who have gained knowledge through meditation on qualified Brahman, through the panchagni meditation for example, the journey is to the Brahma loka for what seems like an eternity (until *pralaya*, cosmic dissolution) or until some mission makes it necessary to come back here in some form or other. For those who have realized the Absolute Brahman, no return journey is necessary but is sometimes undertaken voluntarily from compassion. Maybe realized souls with a mission, such as Swami Satyananda, undertake severe austerities, like that of the *panchagni tapas*, the sadhana of five fires in order to work in different lokas.

The *Brahma Sutras* (3:3:32) says:

Yaavad adhikaaram avasthitih aadhikaarikaanaam

"Those who have a mission to fulfil continue in the corporeal state as long as the mission demands it."[35]

Kulkarni quotes Shankara's commentary:

At the command of Lord Vishnu, the Vedic sage *Apantaratama* of *Treta*-age, took birth as *Krishna-Dvaipayana* (*Vedavyasa*) at the confluence of *Dvapara* and *Kali*-age. This Vyasa continued the work which he was doing in previous birth as sage Apantaratama. Such a person has not to begin at the beginning in every birth. He takes up the thread from where it has been left in the previous birth and starts

[34] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Teachings of Swami Satyananda, Vol. V*, Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 1986), pp.128–129

[35] Swami Gambhirananda, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Sri Shankaracarya*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, India, 1993, p. 701 (3:3:32)

with the knowledge already gained. Sages *Vasishtha*, *Bhrigu*, *Sanatkumara*, *Daksha*, *Narada* and others did likewise. These sages had attained Brahmajnana and had no necessity to take rebirth. Yet they did so at the command of the Lord, to propagate again and again the Vedic tenets which get blurred by the passage of time. This is necessary for the welfare of the masses. The Lord appoints them for this particular purpose.[36]

From the mythology surrounding Shankara we understand he also came down to fulfil a mission, therefore his remarks on the topic of people born for a mission are highly relevant. Referring to sutra 3:3:32, Shankara explains:

> The corporeal existence of Apantaratamas and others, engaged in the mission of encompassing the well-being of the world through such works as the promulgation of the Vedas and so on, is regulated by the mission itself . . .
>
> Apantaratamas (*i.e. Vyasa*) and others, though they are divine, are entrusted with their respective missions by God; and hence though they are possessed of full vision, leading to liberation, they continue in their bodies so long as their missions demand this and so long as their actions are not completed; and when that is fulfilled they become freed.
>
> Thus there is no contradiction. For the fulfillment of their missions they move on from one body to another with perfect liberty, as though from one house to another, while ridding themselves of their residual karmas that have started bearing their fruits once for all in those particular lives; and while retaining an unobliterated memory (of their identity, etc.) they do this by creating new bodies and owning them either simultaneously or successively, for they are the masters of the materials that produce the bodies and senses.[37]

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[36] ff. S.D. Kulkarni, Adi Sankara: *The Saviour of Mankind*, Shri Bhagavan Vedavyasa Itihasa Samshodhana Mandira (Bhishma), Bombay, India, 1987, p. 96

[37] Swami Gambhirananda, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Sri Shankaracarya*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, India, 1993, pp. 702–703 (3:3:32)

Compassion

The importance of right behaviour as an example or role model is underlined when referring to the concept of avatara, and this does not mean intellectually smart or logically correct but balanced behaviour: naturally correct in the multidimensional matrix of sanatana dharma. For example, Shankaracharya worshipped Devi, a saguna form of Brahman, at the end of his life, yet he did so not from lack of knowledge, the love arose from within him spontaneously, as it did when he was a child. And it was probably also in response to the needs of the overwhelming number of human beings for whom the nirguna Brahman is too remote, people lost in samsara who need some tangible form to love and a reassurance that the Mother loves them too.

The concept that is accepted in Shankara's mature philosophy, and in so many religions, is that the divine embodies itself on earth in order to protect human beings from suffering separation from the divine, and to uplift the virtuous. When seen from the heart of the matter, where is the difference between these paths? The Dalai Lama meditates deeply each day:

> For as long as space remains
> For as long as sentient beings remain,
> May I too remain
> And dispel the miseries of the world.[38]

Like Arjuna, spiritual aspirants today are on a battlefield and have an urgent need to know the course of right action when faced with the sufferings of earth. For this reason, just the knowledge that a *satguru*, one who can dispel the darkness and transmit truth, exists, is a relief. There are still living traditions dedicated to preserving the teachings that can give direction and eventually attainment in life. These

[38] Dalai Lama, *The Art of Happiness at Work*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama & HC Cutler, Hodder, Sydney, Australia, 2003, p. 69

teachings are designed to inspire a continuous effort to live in a sattwic manner. The commitment to *dharma*, right action on earth, is a worthwhile aim for humankind. Combined with unflinching awareness of the higher consciousness it leads to *moksha*, liberation from the earthly plane, though even moksha may be dropped as a motivation.

So the understanding of Shankara as an avatara is not so outlandish, and although Shankara does not speak of himself as an avatara, his life speaks for him. He actually comforts his disciples with the assurance that reincarnation enables us to complete our work or destined duties.

> It is said in the *Madhaviya Sankara Vijaya* that in consoling Suresvaracharya for being prevented from writing a gloss on the *Brahma-sutra-bhashya*, Sankara assured him that he would be born again as Vachaspati and have his longing fulfilled.[39]

Though such ability to steer oneself between the bardos between lives is only for siddhas, Shankara assures his disciples that this is within their range, thus implicitly indicating his own mastery of the manifestation process.

[39] Swami Chinmayananda, *Sankara the Missionary*, Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, Mumbai, India, 1978, p. 69

16

Relevance of Shankaracharya's Teachings

Shankaracharya lived a life that was incredibly productive, charged and potent, which transformed the lives of countless people and ensured the preservation of a path of spirituality and truth which sincere aspirants can follow. His genius and dexterity are unparalleled. In this concluding chapter, we will look at four great contributions of Shankara that are at least as relevant in today's landscape as they were centuries earlier.

First, he outlined a respect for other traditions under the umbrella of sanatana dharma, creating union between warring philosophies and religions. Secondly, respect for all human beings, *atmabhava*, and an understanding of varna being an expression of one's natural propensities, *swabhava*. Thirdly, he upheld the vedic concept of the harmony of secular and spiritual life by associating the four *purusharthas*, the aims worthy of a human being with the four quarters of one's lifetime, known as the *ashramas*: brahmacharya, grihastha, vanaprastha and sannyasa. He taught that all four ashramas are natural and necessary stages of life for one to realize one's true nature. Finally, the fourth contribution is his dedication to the ideals of sannyasa, maintaining awareness of the highest reality while working to surrender all the faculties of a fully balanced personality to the divine mission.

I: RESPECTING OTHER TRADITIONS

When Shankara was engaged in his mission of re-establishing the sanatana dharma, one of the problems that he had to address on the spiritual level was that the scriptures were being misinterpreted. Consequently, traditions were intolerant and antagonistic to each other and there was a danger of the teachings being lost.

As the first step, he systematically sought to explain the major scriptures of the vedic tradition and reconcile their apparent differences. He established the precedence of *shruti*, spiritual texts relevant to sanatana dharma, over *smriti*, which codified social customs.

> When a Smrti contradicts a Vedic text, it is not to be relied upon (and ought to be rejected); for a Vedic text can be inferred to exist as the basis of a Smrti passage only when there is no such contradiction.[1]

Thus he differentiated the changing social customs attached to different religions or cultures from the eternal spiritual teachings. This is a simple and important distinction that we still need to apply both personally and on a planetary scale.

He then wrote the *upadesha granthas*, teaching texts, establishing his own views and giving a working philosophy and lifestyle relevant to the times based on his understanding of the essential spiritual truths. His own experience of union with Brahman enabled this, and the resulting darshana or philosophy of the different levels of reality was also expressed spontaneously in his hymns.

The next effort in this work involved travel and debate in order to further reconcile different philosophies, and to pay respect to the different traditions that had developed up to then. He had resolved differences and made things

[1] Swami Gambhirananda (trans.), *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Sri Sankaracarya*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, India, 1993, p. 302 (2:1:1)

clear on paper. This was good for philosophers and scholars, but it had to be brought to the people in cities and towns throughout India. Also, in order to preserve the sanatana dharma he first set up the system of alakhbaras, then the akharas, and organized the wandering sadhus into the Dashnami tradition of sannyasa.

Those were practical steps to preserve spiritual knowledge, but also, as a *jagat guru*, world guru, he had to face issues of injustice and discrimination against people on the basis of caste and gender. His own realizations are revealed in hymns such as *Manisha Panchaka* which clearly differentiate spiritual insight from the attitudes of the society of his time. The force of his conviction that one should live by such insights was expressed by his adopting bhakti and the rituals of tantra in his personal sadhana.

Reconciler of religions and sakara traditions

Shankaracharya supported the karma kanda in line with the refined representation in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The understanding that it is the ego that one needs to sacrifice led to removing gross practices such as *bali*, animal sacrifice. This removed points of discord with Buddhist and Jaina traditions. However, in the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* (3:1:25), he maintains that scripture is the only sure source of knowledge when we want to ascertain what is good or bad. People cannot decide on the morality of an action, as it depends on space, time and environment. An action which is bad in one set of circumstances is good in another.[2]

He accepted *sakara* worship, religions based on particular forms of God, as preliminary to knowledge of the unqualified Brahman, and deemed them capable of leading people gradually to understand the many different aspects of the one reality. So he worked to defuse the tensions between the *Shaiva*, *Vaishnava*, *Saurya*, *Shakta*, *Ganapatya*, *Bhairava Kapali* (and

2 Swami Mukhyananda, *An Interpretation of the Life & Teachings of Shri Shankaracharya (Elucidatory & Reconciliatory)*, 2nd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Ernakulam, India, 1998, p. 149

other) sects, and composed hymns to the various deities.[3] And we can see, from his life and from the hymns he composed as a spontaneous response to different manifestations of God, that Shankara was a bhakta of God in any form.

He not only understood people's emotional need for a relationship with the divine, devotion was a wellspring within him. Bhakti developed more and more as a natural consequence of jnana as he progressed along the spiritual path and lived his spiritual realizations. The reconciliation of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy with the worship of form can be understood as acknowledging the intuitive experience of different powers that arises in the course of sadhana, and life itself. Such experiences can and do arise for everyone practising sadhana with sincerity and intensity of purpose. They are repeatable experiences like scientific truths, and are understood and taught by the gurus. Acknowledging these insights, and living in the light of such experiences, develops faith and inner strength so that one can transform the perception and content of life itself.

Shankara was a genius, and just as we cannot call Michelangelo only a painter, Einstein only a mathematician or the Dalai Lama only a spiritual leader, so here we cannot say Shankara was only a philosopher. However, he developed Advaita Vedanta as a unifying philosophy because it has the breadth to give meaningful guidance to atheists searching to understand their own experiences, to those who already believe in and have a living relationship with their personal form of God, and to the jnanis worshipping the unmanifest, nirakara, Brahman.

Implications for today: peace on Earth

In modern India, the dangerous conflicts are not between worshippers of Lord Vishnu and worshippers of Lord Shiva, or Devi, but between the so-called Hindus and Muslims,

[3] Swami Mukhyananda, *An Interpretation of the Life & Teachings of Shri Shankaracharya* (Elucidatory & Reconciliatory), 2nd ed., Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Ernakulam, India, 1998, p. 102

and on a wider stage between warring countries. The most dangerous conflict is between modern 'western' earth-destroying materialism and the ancient spiritual values of sanatana dharma. And this war of values is echoed in every country on Earth.

There have been, and continue to be, spiritual luminaries who follow in Shankaracharya's footsteps, using the insightful philosophies and practices of yoga, tantra and Vedanta to elevate the consciousness of humankind. Swami Vivekananda first took jnana yoga to the world community. Paramahamsa Yogananda adapted and taught the ancient practices of kriya yoga. Last century, Swami Satyananda continued the tradition of Shankara by repeatedly touring India, and extended this effort throughout the world, inspiring people to practise yoga and simultaneously presenting the teachings of tantra and Vedanta in a simple scientific style without any religious trappings. This century, Swami Niranjanananda, his spiritual successor, continues these Digvijayas, broadcasting yoga and religious tolerance. He travelled globally almost continuously until the age of twenty-one when his guru recalled him to India to lead the Bihar School of Yoga. Since then he has been coordinating organizations of yoga throughout India and worldwide, yet has maintained his base in Munger, Bihar, where sannyasa training and intense sadhanas open to all races, philosophies and religions are still being conducted.

II: ATMABHAVA – THE WITNESS IN MEDITATION

Shankara was interested in helping people to rediscover their true nature, not in destroying their philosophies. For Shankara's teachings, the aim is establishing identification with the eternal witnessing Self. He insists that there is a witnessing consciousness which is able to know itself as Supreme Consciousness or Brahman. In *Upadesha Sahasri* he points out that people can only know about the appearance and disappearance of mental modifications because of the witness.

There are different levels of witnessing going on, but all of them appear to be beneficial, leading people to have both a much broader perspective and an ability to keep the finger on the pulse of what is actually relevant. It enables them to have very intuitive, incisive and original answers to practical everyday problems too, so material prosperity, success and power can go hand in hand with spiritual attainment. The eternal witness that Shankara urges us to meditate on as our inner self also leads to conscious life, conscious death and, eventually the ability to transcend the cycle of transmigration.

Integral yoga

Yoga can be a tool of all societies and religions as it develops the witnessing aspect and actually opens the brain, perceptions and consciousness. Shankara understood the various means and methods of yoga suitable for different people. His commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* underscores the harmony he sought between revelation and practical techniques. Although he saw that jnana yoga was the ultimate tool for freedom from samsara through knowledge of Brahman, he also realized that the jnana yoga path is the culmination of previous efforts.

Shankara recognized the spiritual need for karma yoga, work without selfish motivation for the good of the world, and of bhakti yoga where one's ego is annihilated in the intense feeling of surrender and contemplation of the inner light. Elements from hatha yoga, kundalini yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga are all demonstrated in Shankara's life and teachings, and this integrated approach is also perceived as the need of today by masters of the Dashnami tradition. Swami Sivananda's integral yoga, which is now propagated by the Bihar School of Yoga, was developed in this vein.

Many sannyasins of the Dashnami tradition are now engaged in bringing forward yoga as a lifestyle able to form the basis for a new kind of civilization which will be able to deal more realistically and effectively with the internal and

external problems facing humankind and all the creatures of the planet earth today. The need for such a sweeping reassessment of our world vision, and the urgency of bringing this about, is uniting people from diverse spheres of specialization to integrate their efforts.

Shankara created the sannyasa tradition so that a dedicated group of people with a spiritual aim could, in every age, lead humanity out of its limitations, using whatever method is most relevant to the times. Swami Satyananda Saraswati, the 'Conqueror of Hearts', swept through the West with his message: "Yoga is the way to uplift the consciousness of mankind." His statement that human consciousness desperately needs uplifting has found support from widely diverse levels of society, just as Shankara's mission did. As individuals and as a civilization, we need guidance to perceive the necessary direction, and to know where to apply our efforts. We need to increase our balance, self-confidence and willpower, and to destroy our arrogant ahamkara so we can actually begin to move in the right direction. And we have to start working on it quickly according to planetary observers who are aware of both the strains being placed on the natural environment of land, water and sky, and the unhappy conditioning and values threatening us and the psyche of our children today.[4]

Goodwill to all

Shankara says the important thing is to constantly identify with the witnessing consciousness and, with that focus, maintain balance, otherwise we remain under the sway of very limited and disjointed perceptions of reality which can result in aggression and inappropriate behaviour. Our society today seems to encourage the dominance of the left hemisphere, which perceives the world as something to be used, rather than as a thing in itself. The left hemisphere

[4] HRH The Prince of Wales, Tony Juniper & Ian Skelly, *Harmony: A New Way of Looking at our World*, Blue Door (HarperCollins), London, UK, 2010, pp. 82–83.

is also the 'home' of anger, the other emotions being based more in the right hemisphere along with the essential capacity for empathy.[5]

Understanding and respect for other people and life forms arises when there is harmony in the inner self, and a wider, more peaceful awareness. Hatha yoga aims to balance the ida and pingala nadis relating to the right and left hemispheres, and uses pranayama extensively to achieve this. Meditative yoga highlighting the witnessing awareness and atmabhava, as advocated by Shankaracharya, can also provide the means to bring about an integrated function of the brain when we need a wider perspective on the world and our purpose in it.

Atmabhava means recognizing the same soul or self, *atma*, in all beings, and letting that recognition be the basic *bhava*, attitude and feeling, that carries you through life. Shankara respected women, outcastes, followers of other religions and faiths, rivers and Earth herself as spiritual beings. In Shankara's Dashnami tradition there are examples of such enlightened teachers who function as clear mirrors, naturally galvanizing people to work to improve their inner selves and the external situation. Many of the masters of the Dashnami tradition have worked to remove casteism and inequalities in society since Shankara's time, including firebrands like Swami Dayananda, saints like Swami Sivananda and avadhootas like Swami Satyananda.[6]

Being truly human

In the world at large we see religious persecution and exploitation of earth's resources. This state of affairs is a primitive quirk, a residual of the lower brain we share with animals, that we have to rise above to acquire a truly human

[5] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, UK, 2010, pp. 27–28

[6] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Bhakti Yoga Sagar, Volume Four*, 1st ed., Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2007 (first pub 1999), pp. 4–7

nature. Shankara's biographies portray him as a human being, albeit with divine qualities, come to save earth from exploitation and death at the hands of the asuras. He was prepared to follow inner convictions even when they were opposed to tradition, and willing to change his views and actions according to his own experiences.

In *Upadesha Sahasri* (17:76–77) his concluding instructions include giving up all connections with caste, and those things not leading to the Self. Spiritual leaders have been insisting on this for centuries, but animalistic thinking is still a problem. In terms of gender differences, all human beings are equipped with more or less the same brain – which has its own limitations – but in many societies, women are not educated and are conditioned not to use the intellect, rather they are trained to depend on men and need male protection from male domination to be able to survive. Without education or freedom to move out from the house independently, women, and widows or divorcees in particular, are often trapped in miserable circumstances for the rest of their lives.[7] Shankara's understanding of this and his response to the needs of his own mother and to Ubhaya Bharati's predicament when her husband took sannyasa has provided the validation for others in his tradition to empower women in the spiritual tradition.

Empowerment is different from atmabhava, but may stem from atmabhava, or from recognition of a social evil that thwarts progress. The true masters show us our unchangeable self and exhort us to see the same in others. The practices of yoga preserved by Shankara's present-day Dashnami tradition have empowered countless women across the globe to take their destiny in their own hands, to develop their spiritual power and strength, to become beacons of light in their communities and the world at large.

[7] Phoolan Devi, with Marie-Therese Cuny & Paul Rambali, *The Bandit Queen of India: An Indian Woman's amazing journey from peasant to International Legend*, The Lyons Press, Guilford, Connecticut, USA, 2006

Superconsciousness as the basis for personality

Shankara assumes that humankind's basic nature is divine. Essentially his philosophy is based on this view and his mission is to restore this self-recognition. Harmonious interaction with earth and seeing divinity within other beings follows as a natural consequence. Shankara recognizes different levels of the matrix which we need to explore in order to understand our human personality. To become aware of our real nature as the Absolute Consciousness, *Brahman*, we need to build up a continual experience of ourselves as the witnessing consciousness. While living in the world of duality and dualistic thinking, and working effectively in relation to that world, one has to remain steady and discriminative.

In his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* (13:11) Shankara says self-knowledge results from qualities such as humility and correct perception of truth – these are the means to *moksha*, the cessation of mortal existence, of *samsara*. On the other hand, ignorance consists of pride, hypocrisy, cruelty, impatience, insincerity and leads to the perpetuation of samsara. For Shankara, the tenets of his teaching are not just a philosophical stance; they are experiences or realizations that one can be trained in. Then they must be applied to life, in one's actions, attitudes, feelings, thoughts and total lifestyle, in order to clear the accumulated karma of many lifetimes and finally break free from samsara, the ocean hard to cross.

In order for students to have experiences which are beyond the senses and the mind they must be in control of their senses and the mind. This is why in his teaching manuals, such as *Aparoksha Anubhuti*, he insists on the sadhana chatushtaya and proficiency in practices such as pratyahara and dharana as preliminary qualifications. This might eliminate most of us from being potential students, but it's quite necessary from the practical point of view of a teacher who wants to teach people relevant subjects that they can understand and apply.

Love of life

Shankara's realization of the identity of the atma in all beings continued to deepen. He was learning from life, seeing life itself as the embodiment of Brahman and interpreted the Upanishads as chronicles of this experience in the lives of the rishis. His teachings were not mere static formulas for action, behaviour or thought, he really became *Sham-kara*, the embodied compassionate aspect of Shiva, who works to uplift the suffering.

Shankara's central theme is the identity of the individual self and Universal Self; however, this is not the central problem for most people. To be able to see an alternative to our present total preoccupation with the phenomenal world, or our own virtual world of selected perceptions, we first simply need to be healthy, to improve our clarity of mind, emotional stability, insight and willpower. We need to become aware of, and develop, all five koshas of the personality, rather than mainly identifying ourselves with the body/mind. The popular form of yoga, based on asana practice, confines one to the *annamaya kosha*, the physical body. However, we really need to also be able to experience the *pranamaya kosha*, the energy body, have a proper understanding of the *manomaya kosha*, the mental body, develop the *vijnanamaya kosha*, the intuitive and psychic aspect of our personality, access the *anandamaya kosha*, the deep bliss of self knowledge, and know the witness of these five aspects of our manifest dwelling as just a tiny spark of the Sun.

We have developed the intellect and intelligence to some extent in social education, and in raja yoga this is taken much deeper, but we continue to suppress and deny the instinctive animal nature which is still operating from the primitive structures of the brain. Techniques such as kriya yoga specialize in enabling us to see our inner conditioning and the inner enemies of greed, anger, lust, arrogance, etc., steadily, without identifying with them or being horrified by them, thus being able to transform and transcend them. It results in being more natural, practical, compassionate

and creative, being able to internalize or externalize our attention as necessary, and being able to hold the type of focus that we need for as long as we need it. Thus one achieves samyama.

Shankara was a siddha yogi and so, in response to the needs of the people he became a teacher of yoga, despite his own humorous jibes about pranayama torturing the nose. His mission was to save the whole earth, by uplifting the consciousness of human beings. Swami Satyananda's slogan as he toured the world teaching yoga in the 60s, 70s and 80s was 'Everything is possible with yoga'. It becomes increasingly obvious that this was no idle boast.

Shaping realities

Shankara's Advaita Vedanta is based on overcoming duality and realizing the One. Through incisive awareness during sustained introversion he could see the basis of reality (and unreality) inside. Although more fully described as a cosmic engineer, here on earth he functioned mainly as a traffic authority, explaining to people how to drive the car during their incarnation. Number one point is to remember who you are: you are not the car but its driver. Number two is, remember where you are going. Number three is knowing how to drive, and doing so.

Yoga and tantra actually go beyond the discovery of two versions of reality presented by the two sides of the brain, to how one can truly manage this phenomenon. The science of hatha yoga gives time-tested techniques to balance and then transcend ida and pingala nadis so that the sushumna nadi of the raja yogis can flow. Recently, research has also shown that, as embodied beings, we need to balance and be aware of the effects and interplay of the nervous system and the endocrine system. This relates to the rest of the nadis and the chakra systems dealt with in kriya and kundalini yogas of tantra. The yogic mudras, for example, cause emotions which can activate and adjust these systems. This means one becomes able to access and maintain the witnessing

consciousness which pierces through the disparate 'realities' of the body, brain and the mind.

Ritual actions in the practices of yajna, mudras, chanting of mantras and so forth, enable one to rotate energy and awareness through the nadis and chakras of the psychic body – to strengthen and purify, store or send energy and establish different mental states. Spiritual life is a process of broadening and intensifying one's awareness, of becoming aware of tendencies that one was not able to be conscious of before, then purifying and integrating them. The mind becomes still, peaceful and intensely aware. Eventually, this enables a *mumukshu*, a spiritual seeker, to become a *brahmavit*, a knower of Brahman.

Yogis of the calibre of Shankara use such techniques to help their disciples establish themselves as the *drashta*, the witness, and as the *stithaprajna*, one always balanced in steady wisdom. Neurological research, and the discoveries of neuroplasticity must increase our respect for the techniques of yoga and tantra. We can better understand Shankara's insistence on *nididhyasana*, repeated meditation on the ultimate reality. It gives a scientific rationale for why he insisted again and again that one should constantly identify with the witness, even while moving in, and shaping, the *vyavahara* reality of the sensorial world.

The witness of today's research

In an age long before neurophysiology's computer-enhanced researches into the brain, Shankara spoke with authority of the non-conscious intellect and a higher, witnessing awareness. Such terms are very similar to those now hesitantly employed to explain curious findings about the structure of the brain as it relates to consciousness. Oliver Sacks, while working with patients undergoing the actual physical breakdown of the brain and its neurological functions noticed that some people were able to maintain a witnessing, and at times even humorous, awareness of the breakdown of their own 'minds'. His observations, as some

of his patients retained their composure under internal as well as external disintegration, led him to speak of lower and higher faculties of mind. He speaks of a witness similar to that referred to by Shankara, for it transcends the breakdown of the very cells of the brain and the end of one's relationship with life as we know it. Shankara insists this witnessing consciousness is the central experience to be sought and maintained throughout life. This is not just an abstract postulate of his philosophy; he makes this especially clear in his teachings.

Different levels of consciousness

Gaudapadacharya, Shankara's paramguru, connects the philosophy of different realities with an individual's needs in sadhana. This is still relevant today as people need to develop the vijnanamaya kosha, or their own capacities for psychic experience, intuition and creativity. Yogic techniques can and do systematically develop this aspect of ourselves in a reliable and scientific manner. People are only just beginning to realize this. Probably because most modern scientific research into the brain came from the West where even the most erudite scientists often lack a background in yoga or other eastern techniques of consciousness research which would give them valuable topographic maps.[8]

The state of Earth and all her creatures, however, is so threatened now that we need to realize the connection between yogic techniques and expansion of consciousness and truly start working on ourselves.

III: LIVING A FULL LIFE ON EARTH

Because of his own experience and realization, Shankara was able to explain the nature of a human being's relationship with the reality which exists beyond the framework of our

[8] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, UK, 2010, p. 437

life and death. He was able to explain the meaning of this transitory existence. Thus for anyone who fears death, or who wants to die skilfully, Shankara's teachings have relevance. He also recognized that to fully overcome the *kleshas*, the sufferings caused by ignorance, one needs to live a full life.

Ashramas and a sense of perspective

Shankara's advice on how to live on earth is an integral and important part of his spiritual mission and he advocated *ashrama dharma*: participating fully in brahmacharya, grihastha, vanaprastha and finally sannyasa ashrama. This is possible and to some extent necessary, for everyone. Likewise, the *purushartha*, the worthwhile efforts that a person should make in life for: *artha*, satisfaction and security, *kama*, fulfilment of desires, *dharma*, natural goodness or one's natural duty, and *moksha*, self-realization, are necessary for everyone according to their natures.

Brahmacharya ashrama and childhood is for play and education. *Grihastha ashrama* is household life for fulfilment of desires and responsibilities, but also for improving one's karma through selfless service, *nishkama karma yoga*, and at times, for being a warrior on the battlefield of life. *Vanaprastha ashrama*, retirement from society and reconnection with nature, then commences and is an essential bridge for people to be able to move from attachment to worldly occupations to absorption in spiritual life – when the desires of pravritti marga drop by themselves. Finally *sannyasa ashrama*, the time for total dedication to the nivritti marga comes – and one prepares to meet God. We will look at sannyasa separately and in greater detail. For Shankara, that was the true culmination of life, and that was his main focus after all.

For a few 'old' souls, such as Shankara, the Dalai Lama and Swami Niranjanananda, the earlier ashramas are quickly dispensed with, and the young child enters immediately

on the spiritual path with full awareness of their mission in life. However, Shankara's philosophy encouraged active participation in all stages of life with awareness and detachment. He insisted on a provision for people naturally inclined to sannyasa to be able to do so at an early age but made it clear that this is not at all advisable for the vast majority of spiritual aspirants.

Ashrama dharma is part of the vedic teaching but here we will also look at it from the point of view of tantra. Shankara himself did not leave so many teachings for the first three ashramas in written form, but his successors today have clarified the teachings of tantra to save them from misinterpretation, preserving the integrity of this living tradition.

1. Brahmacharya ashrama: learning and samskaras

In the vedic system which Shankara upholds, brahmacharya ashrama is the first quarter or stage of life. Up to approximately twenty-five years of age one should be devoted to study and learning.

Children and samskaras: How should we apply this teaching? The receptivity of babies and toddlers should not be underestimated. Scientists find that a one-year-old generally has twice the amount of neuronal connections as the mother or father. The number of connections increases for two or three years and then begins to decline (in a process which is actually called pruning). Those pathways that are regularly used remain and become more defined, and the others gradually disappear.[9] So it is important for all children to acquire the right samskaras from an early age when they absorb the deep guidelines for their lives. This means being fully aware of children, being with them, taking them to the right places and allowing them to associate with playful, kind and wise people. It cannot be done only through computer games and books or even schools.

[9] Sharon Begley, *Train You Mind, Change Your Brain*, Ballentine Books, New York, USA, 2007, pp. 76–77

The impressions received as a child are amazingly powerful. Going to spiritual places implies meeting evolved people, *satsang*, and often beautiful natural settings, but also exposure to a different type of geometry of yantra and mandala. Temples are different from suburban houses or flats on a psychic level. Similarly, being on a mountain top or near the ocean or in a rainforest has profound effects on the ability to perceive.[10]

Learning about oneself: A visit to an ashram that upholds the spiritual values and way of life can help the inner personality of children to blossom, as they receive the opportunity to learn yoga there, to sing kirtans, dance, run around in gardens, help in the work, meet people from all walks of life, and benefit from the presence of a guru.

Swami Niranjanananda has continued and intensified a revival encouraging the training of children in yoga and various other skills of mental discipline and communication. In 1996, he founded the *Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal*, the Children's Yoga Fellowship Circle, which has branches across India, including about 30,000 children in Munger. Besides learning yoga, Sanskrit chants, English, music, dance, drama and martial arts, they learn the rituals of abhisheka, havan and yajna, and are trained as yoga demonstrators, yoga instructors and propagators.

Swami Satyasangananda, Peethadhishwari of Rikhiapeeth, has been training *adivasi*, tribal, children to participate in yajnas and conduct the associated mantra paths, to learn English, basic computer skills, modern and classical dance, and other skills.

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[10] HRH The Prince of Wales, Tony Juniper & Ian Skelly, Harmony: A New Way of Looking at our World, Blue Door (Harper Collins), London, UK, 2010, p. 9 "*I find . . . that if people are encouraged to immerse themselves in Nature's grammar and geometry – discovering how it works, how it controls life on earth, and how humanity has expressed it in so many great works of art and architecture – they are often led to acquire some remarkably deep philosophical insights into the meaning and purpose of Nature and into what it means to be alive and aware in this extraordinary Universe. This is particularly so in young people . . . Essentially it is the spiritual dimension to our existence that has been dangerously neglected during the modern era.*"

Actually living in the ashram of the guru during these formative years was the accepted form of education in ancient times, and still is in Thailand for example, and it means a vital transformation can take place. Spiritual vision, self-discipline, perseverance, happiness and creativity become the bedrock of the personality. In a gurukul, from the age of eight, the child and growing youth is led to explore his/her self, not only the physical-mental aspect, but all the koshas and the spirit, gradually learning and experiencing the effects of the practical systems of asana, pranayama, pratyahara, mantra, yantra, concentration, meditation, and even nada yoga and karma yoga as they become relevant. In this way, through ashram life the foundation skills of yoga are imbibed as a lifestyle.

Traditionally, the brahmachari diksha was given at the age of eight when the child was initiated into the Gayatri mantra and instructed to practise it daily along with nadi shodhana pranayama and surya namaskara – to facilitate a balanced development of all the faculties. The practice is still prevalent in India, although its significance has become obscure. However, one perceives a revival of the intent of the practice when couples or families entrenched in the yogic life opt for their children to receive this samskara in the form of mantra diksha.

2. Grihastha ashrama: household life

The people in *grihastha ashrama*, the householders, are stressed nowadays. From about twenty-five to fifty years of age they shoulder responsibilities at home, at work and in society at large but they need an assurance that there is a worthwhile vision of life which they can aspire to after their duties to children are complete. Being able to see a meaningful path in life beyond the mortgage or daily competitive demands can help maintain a balanced vision of what it's all about. Even in the middle of the rat race, one can realize there is another dimension of life where one can experience a sense of peace and surety of purpose.

Karma sannyasa: An adaptation of Shankara's teachings for the needs of the day, is seen in the concept of karma sannyasa, introduced by Swami Satyananda in 1980. Swami Niranjanananda has stated:

> Many people have a strong inclination towards the spiritual path and ardently desire to involve themselves spiritually. At the same time, they are attached to their families and are very much a part of society for economic and other reasons. Such an attitude often brings conflict because they are unable to balance their family and spiritual life. For such people, the commitment to karma sannyasa, or householder sannyasa, is an important step in spiritual life.[11]

The inner attitude and discipline of karma sannyasa enriches one's life in the community and the family. Living life in the world as a witness, fragrant with vairagya, blossoming like a lotus in water enables one to fulfil one's duties through karma yoga.

Ashram life: Ashrams continue to be an integral part of the Indian social fabric and many householders opt to spend some time there. Living in an ashram for a month or so each year encourages a simpler lifestyle which is good for health on all levels. Music and song as a part of daily life lifts the emotions. In itself the practice of singing bhajans and kirtans, including those written by Shankara himself, uplifts the spirits and gives actual teaching in spiritual values, often including mantras with their own powerful effect. Music is an important aspect of communal life and can transcend social barriers and speak to people from different nations and faiths.

Ashram life allows one to develop emotional balance, clear thinking and positive samskaras. Also, one can recharge and improve one's own ability to relax, to work and to adapt.

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[11] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Sannyasa Darshan: A Treatise on Traditional and Contemporary Sannyasa*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 1993), pp. 86 & 87

This is better for oneself and one's children, than having to go through detox clinics later in life.

Today, with the problems of the planet acute and urgent, householders need to practise viveka and vairagya because they are in the forefront of decisions and actions in the world. Grihastha ashrama provides the perfect opportunity to develop one's capacity, willpower and creativity along with the ability to fulfil one's natural desires, ambitions, and dharma, but, as Shankara constantly pointed out, it is just a stage in one's spiritual development.

In contemporary society, grihastha ashrama is generally taken as the most important stage of life – childhood and youth is thought of as a preparation for that, and retirement a fall from it. Definitely grihastha is important in itself, but rather than clinging to that rajasic stage desperately, its importance should be understood in relation to the other stages of life. Recognizing our future in vanaprastha or retirement, as a positive and necessary period of reorientation from the pravritti marga to the nivritti seems to have escaped us today.

Developing a business, becoming successful professionals, and controlling the environment for our own ends is related to manomaya kosha, and vyavaharika satta – how we think things are. It is the ability to play and explore, to leave obsessiveness with the 'known', and to become open to new experiences, to empathize and actively cooperate with other living beings and Earth herself that we need to retrieve and develop as we mature.

The acharas of tantra: In tantra, some of the *acharas*, ways of conduct, are specifically designed for household life. Whether one is a child or an adult, while one is fully involved with family and social obligations, with satisfying ambitions, desires and obligations, the acharas focus attention on what one can improve in oneself. They provide an inner path of wisdom, purification, strength and harmony.

Vedachara, the first achara, aims to create harmony within the environment and family, which in turn creates harmony

within oneself. It cultivates an awareness of the actions and behaviours which can be improved. At this stage, one begins to disassociate from ignorant behaviour and to connect instead to wisdom in action. In this way, vedachara is the karma yoga aspect of the tantras.

The second achara, *vaishnavachara*, cultivates faith, purifies the sentiments and sublimates the emotions. The aim is *shuddhi*, purification, of the emotions, mind, speech and lifestyle. The emotions are channelled and transformed in a creative and uplifting way. Vaishnavachara helps to cultivate inner strength to allow one to rise above the struggles in life and approach difficulties as challenges to be overcome. Thus, vaishnavachara indicates union with faith and constitutes the bhakti aspect of the tantras.

Shaivachara is the third achara and represents the jnana yoga aspect of the tantras. Through vedachara, vaishnavachara and shaivachara, a greater awareness is cultivated in life. The focus is on duty, or *dharma*, and appropriate participation in the world. It is through these acharas that the influence of the instincts of life is overcome. The mind is elevated and becomes the *drashta*, witness, of oneself. This leads to the attainment of harmony and purification at every level: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.[12]

The concept of grihastha ashrama advocated by Shankara surely incorporated these two major aspects of living external life fully, according to one's dharma, while earnestly treading the internal spiritual path of self-awareness, and that lifestyle is still taught in his tradition today.

3. Vanaprastha ashrama: pilgrimage and new understandings

The idea of vanaprastha ashrama changes retirement from the dreaded meaningless twilight realm of the West to a

[12] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Tantra Darshan*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, p. 147

preparation for meeting with the divine. The vanaprastha ashrama gives people an opportunity to have the time and space to look inwards, and to gain in wisdom. Shankara's instructions on the activities to be followed in life are practical. For example, in *vanaprastha*, which literally means 'retirement to the forest' but which can be understood as implying returning to one's own nature, one is authorized to gradually leave family, business and other external commitments after fulfilling one's responsibilities, and to go on pilgrimage both internally and externally.

Today, retirement is often seen as a closing down of life, or if good health and wealth are present, an opportunity to indulge in tourism: travelling for pleasure. To truly use the opportunity of vanaprastha ashrama for spiritual sadhana and experience, one should flow with the natural process of relinquishing material and social responsibilities and handing them on to the next generation. For some time travel can be conducted as an external pilgrimage, releasing attachments and expanding one's horizons, and gradually the transition can be made to the internal pilgrimage.

Festivals of life – auspicious times: Observing holy days used to be part of the culture; nowadays even holi-days seem to be on the verge of extinction; in vanaprastha ashrama one has the time and the motivation to reinstate holy days and holidays in one's life.

In twentieth century western culture, the understanding of auspicious times was mainly lost. Research has re-established respect for practices such as planting and harvesting in harmony with the waxing and waning moon cycles. *Swara yoga* is the nano-science of understanding auspicious times, and the resurgence in yoga has led to the awareness that *samskaras*, seeds planted in the consciousness, are also best planted in harmony with the cosmic forces.

Today the cosmic calendar is being reintroduced. This century many yoga schools and ashrams connected with the Dashnami tradition have re-introduced sadhanas according

to the lunar calendar and auspicious planetary conjunctions, as the practices are known to be more beneficial at those times. Special chants are conducted on *ekadashi* and *poornima*, the eleventh lunar day and the full moon day. Similarly, the two Navaratri festivals are now practised worldwide. Yajnas are practised at the correct times of the day and year for benevolent results. Along with this concept of practising sadhana in harmony with planetary rhythms, celebrations of nature, pilgrimages and other spiritual activities are proving themselves successful in re-orienting people's lives and their sense of completeness.

Swami Niranjanananda has reinstated the need to recognize vanaprastha as a unique stage in one's life by initiating the Vanaprastha Sadhana Satra in 2016. During the one-month sadhana held during the auspicious period of Chaturmas, the participants are encouraged to imbibe the samskaras that help clear the old impressions and re-educate the mind, so that one acquires a better understanding of life and expresses oneself with wisdom and positivity. The endeavour is also to deepen the inner faith and develop atmabhava as one walks away from the path of pravritti and takes the road of nivritti.

Pilgrimage: In sharing the experiences accrued while travelling to such places as the Shivalingams in India and Mount Kailash and the lake Manasarovar in Tibet, Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjanananda have effectively instilled a new aspiration in many disciples from India and overseas to emulate such life-changing adventures. They have also renewed respect for the places of pilgrimage. One may think pilgrimages mainly affect the pilgrim and the people met *en route* but the esoteric understanding of such subjects is that the power spots of the earth, the ley lines, or nadis between them and the murtis worshipped by the pilgrims, are also nourished by the process.[13]

[13] Itzhak Bentov, *Stalking the Wild Pendulum: On the Mechanics of Consciousness*, E.P. Dutton, New York, USA, 1977

Pilgrimage used to be a vital current in European life and various pilgrimage routes are respected even today because of the experiences of generations of pilgrims. For example, from the mountainous border of France and Spain to Galicea, the Spanish port from where Columbus sailed to prove the earth is round, thousands of pilgrims yearly follow in the footsteps of Christ's disciple Santiago de Compostela. Originally passing through many churches and fountains, and serviced by free boarding houses, like dharmashalas, the pilgrims walk with the resolve, 'I am walking on foot with thirst for truth – being alone so I can be accompanied by God.' Some people spend their whole lives in the circuit.

Nowadays, the tradition of pilgrimage is also being revitalized around the world by the influence of many Tibetan Buddhists, forced out of Tibet, who have the skills to recognize places of power, and know the benefits of pilgrimage on the psyche. In Islam, everyone is supposed to visit Mecca at least once in their life. Pilgrimage is a worldwide tradition, even for aboriginal communities isolated from other cultures:

> For the (Yaqui) Indians the location of each town along the river symbolically corresponds to a spot in their mythical world. Like the lava mountains in Arizona, these sites are places of power. The Indians have a very rich mythology. They believe they can step in and out of a dream world at a moment's notice. You see, their concept of reality is not the same as ours.[14]

Pilgrimage is still a living experience in India. Shankara travelled the length and breadth of India on foot. If one travels in the Himalayas on the pilgrimage routes, one meets not only sannyasins but many middle-aged householders who are travelling from one sacred spot to another, on packed buses, on little winding roads flanking the towering

[14] Taisha Abelar, *The Sorcerer's Crossing – A Woman's Journey*, Penguin, New York, USA, 1992, p. 14

Himalayan mountains. This process of renouncing the family comforts, facing the dangers of travel and imbibing inspiration from superb places of power invigorates the whole process of retirement.

Different perspectives of the acharas: And what faculties is this going to develop in our life? It seems very appropriate in vanaprastha ashrama to consciously move the focus of our attention from vyavaharika satta to paramarthika satta; to turn off pravritti marga and start down nivritti marga. Time should be spent in swadhyaya, yoga sadhana and simple kindness in the situations of life where we meet other beings travelling with us on the planet. As one matures and achieves mastery over one's senses and mind, one naturally begins to look within. For the jnana yogi of Shankara's tradition this must eventually lead to a steady perception of the spirit within all, *atmabhava*. By the age of fifty, the feeling that there is something else; that we need to reconnect with who we are behind the mask, and that we need to find some meaning in life, is fairly prevalent. In vanaprastha ashrama, this is acknowledged, and there is guidance on this inner path of pilgrimage:

> The next two acharas, *dakshinachara* and *vamachara*, have commonly been translated as the right-hand and left-hand paths of tantra, respectively. However, these are misnomers which create confusion. From the tantric philosophical understanding, *dakshina* means involvement in the world, and *vama* means separation from the world. In dakshinachara, the idea is that one becomes involved in the world after having managed and overcome the *pashu vritti*, all the negative, animalistic patterns and traits of the personality. One consolidates this by living a worldly life and becoming a person of spiritual power and spiritual strength . . . One becomes an inspiration in society by leading a sattwic, enlightened and harmonious life. During this stage, sadhana continues in order to develop the practice of internalization.

> From vamachara the inward journey starts. The aim is to overcome the instincts which pull and divert the awareness and attention . . . 'Vamachara' means to look in the opposite direction, that is to look away from the world towards the spirit. In vamachara, the barriers that hamper the ability to see one's spirit must be realized and eliminated.[15]

Today this may sound an idyllic fantasy, but it is actually a time-proven lifestyle preserved from vedic times. Such experiences are especially relevant to those in vanaprastha ashrama. We can try it; in fact if we do not try it we will find ourselves excluded from the final purushartha of life, moksha.

4. Sannyasa ashrama: the path to moksha

So in this section we can look at sannyasa ashrama as the final stage in a full life, recognized as a time when one makes a one-pointed dedication to discovering and living the highest truth. For people who may not have been formally introduced to the idea and practice of sadhana; still there comes a time for release from this life and, at seventy-five plus, in the last quarter of our lives, we should be making inner preparation for the next experience. In this ashrama we see that it is not only a withdrawal into self-study and samadhi but also a gathering of one's resources, talents, experience and strengths to help others. There is a commitment to atmabhava.

Shankara was speaking to any who were capable of listening, and in his tradition, that continues.

> The way of life of a modern sannyasi should be to work in society . . . but while remaining unaffected internally.[16]

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[15] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Tantra Darshan*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, pp. 147–148

[16] Swami Satyananda Saraswati, *Sannyasa Tantra*, Sri Sharada Press, Bangalore, 1982, pp. 96–102

Shankara, and all of us embodied beings, are locked into time-space and are therefore dealing mostly with people of our own particular caste and country. To learn about universal truths we must expand our awareness beyond those restrictive boundaries. In Shankara's long-standing tradition, the whole armoury of Advaita Vedanta, yoga and tantra are at hand to break free by skilful means, as guided by the teachers. And Shankara's teachings are especially relevant today when there seems to be a temptation to retreat into a virtual world of electronic spectatorship rather than taking up the challenge of venturing into personal experience of reality.

Overcoming avidya: The concept, and later the experience, of there being different levels of reality leads to an interesting role for ignorance, *avidya*. It is because of one's orientation to the lower reality that one is unable to see the higher reality. In simple terms, according to Shankaracharya, being too worldly is ignorance. In the first two ashramas the main focus was the world, its lessons and experiences. In vanaprastha one stepped back to the witnessing position and began to perceive the texture of the phenomenal world in relation to its source – the inner world. Following pravritti marga means living with one's own needs and desires as the main focus of life, and thus one obscures one's connection with the eternal Self. The nivritti marga of sannyasa is where one sees things as they are, where one sees 'Thatness'.

Shankara's description of the paths open to us in life concurs with new understandings of the brain. Research describes how our major tool for perception is structured: one hemisphere has a more ego-centred, survive-and-use mentality, the other has empathy and a broader perspective; thus the hemispheres have a mutually restrictive role to some extent.[17] McGilchrist comments that there are positive aspects, or reasons for the different views of reality presented by the brain's hemispheres, just as the opposing index finger

[17] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, UK, 2010, pp. 18–19

and thumb allow delicate adjustments to be made, so do the opposing systems of the brain. For a yogi or a sannyasi, if consciousness can maintain the witnessing position, the dual nature of the brain facilitates one's ability to have a balanced transcendental viewpoint, to respect other creatures, see the spirit within and appreciate realities other than normal waking consciousness, which is, after all, just the tip of the iceberg.

The modern understanding of neuro-plasticity confirm also Shankara's teachings. For a practitioner of yoga there are a wide variety of techniques that can balance, rejuvenate and empower the personality. Such practices may involve restructuring the brain through repetitive hatha yoga sadhana, performing raja yoga sadhanas which develop pratyahara and dharana so that we can internalize, suspending the vrittis and thinning the kleshas in order to transcend the mind and its conditionings. Or they may include kriya sadhana, specifically designed to develop vijnanamaya kosha, which is necessary for increased psychic perception. For a vedantin, *nididhyasana*, repetitive attentive meditation, on the Maha Vakyas, for example, can restructure the brain and establish enlightened attitudes and perceptions.

In this section, sannyasa has been presented as part of the vedic lifestyle, inevitable and essential for everyone as the end of life approaches and the senses start turning round naturally so that we begin to look within rather than outside. This is an essential phase of our evolution, a chance to develop the witnessing consciousness which survive death as we move inevitably out of life. Nonetheless, in Shankara's tradition it is accepted that for some, virtually the whole of life will be dedicated to sannyasa.

IV: SANNYASA: THE BALANCED WITNESS

For *mumukshu*, seekers of moksha, liberation from samsara is the only aim; it is not just the *purushartha* for sannyasa ashrama. For one with high motivation it is not necessary to wait for old age, in fact full training in the sannyasa

parampara assumes twelve years living with the guru, twelve years as parivrajaka and then a gradual maturing process from mumukshu to brahmavit, so one needs comparative youth and vigorous health.

For the fully developed *brahmavit*, one who knows Brahman, there is clarity about one's life's purpose from a very young age. It is believed that there is no need for them to take rebirth, they are freed from that cycle, yet if they have undertaken a mission, they come. Shankara comments on Vyasa's sutra:

> (32) Those who have a mission to fulfill continue in the corporeal state as long as the mission demands it.
> . . . the corporeal existence of Apantaratamas and others, engaged in the mission of encompassing the well-being of the world through such works as the promulgation of the Vedas and so on, is regulated by the mission itself . . . For the fulfillment of their mission they move on from one body to another with perfect liberty, as though from one house to another.[18]

Shankaracharya himself took to sannyasa ashrama at a very young age, destined as he was to uphold the eternal spiritual teachings and to restore dharma upon planet Earth. Examples of such luminaries are Ramana Maharshi and Swami Niranjanananda who have lived the traditional precepts from childhood, adapting them to the current circumstances. They have exemplified the highest ideals of sannyasa by dedicating their entire life to the wellbeing of others and the will of a higher power.

Inner and outer pilgrimage

In the scheme of ashrama dharma we have seen, the tradition of pilgrimage associated with the vanaprastha

[18] Swami Gambhirananda (trans.) *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Shankaracharya*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, India, 1993, p. 702

ashrama to facilitate the renunciation of the known and the dawning of new perspectives. However, pilgrimage is also intimately connected with sannyasa, both for trainees or mumukshu, and for the realized brahmavit. *Parivrajaka*, continual wandering, awakens viveka and vairagya, strengthening the mind and breaking down attachments. Externally, this enabled sannyasins to understand the problems facing society at any particular time, and to work as guides to alleviate the causes of suffering.

For sannyasins who have attained the ability to directly perceive reality, and have attained the state of paramahamsa, pilgrimage again forms part of the sadhana as is explained in the *Paramahamsa Upanishad*.[19] Shankara travelled as a sannyasin for most of his life, visiting the sacred places in India and Nepal, and perhaps further afield and the most vital spiritual leaders today follow that tradition. When Swami Satyananda began paramahamsa sadhana in 1988, he renounced his fame and institutions and travelled the length and breadth of India from the Himalayas to Kanya Kumari. He visited places known to be imbued with the power of the sadhanas of the rishis, including the twelve Shivalingams and many of the sacred pilgrimage places associated with Shankara.

The Kumbha Mela is a huge gathering of sannyasins, where leaders of diverse traditions meet; attending the mela is itself regarded as opening the consciousness. Swami Satyananda speaks of his experience:

> **Kumbha Mela: Prayag, Allahabad 12th–14th January and 2nd–7th February 1989**
> Prayaga, the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati, the symbols of Ida, Pingala and Sushumna, has been forever eulogized as the king of teerthas or Teertharaj. The

[19] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Sannyasa Darshan: A Treatise on Traditional and Contemporary Sannyasa*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013 (first pub 1993), pp. 430–445

Padma Purana states: 'Just as the Sun is supreme among the planets and the Moon is supreme among the stars, Prayag is the supreme teertha.' Poorna Kumbha Mela is held at Prayag every twelve years when the planetary positions of Brihaspati or Jupiter in Vrish Rashi and Surya or the Sun in Makar Rashi are affected. This year was especially auspicious as Somavati Amavasya took place after 172 years . . . The charged water electrified my whole body and I could easily feel the truth of the saying that a bath here gives a man rebirth in this life itself.

I had called Swami Niranjan to be with me during this momentous occasion and to have darshan of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati Devi. During the rest of the day we jostled with millions of devotees who had come here like me, and being amidst them was itself a moving experience. Throngs of people from every culture, race and creed, with just one thought in mind – to bathe at Prayaga, gave me the unique vision of witnessing faith in motion, and I could easily conceive the idea of that "Faith" which is a dynamic principle and has been known to move mountains.

I also had the darshan of many sadhus and saints who had all gathered here, including Mahant Godavari of Juna Akhara, Devraha Baba, the Jagadguru Shankaracharyas and many other tapasvins and tyagis. For days afterwards and even now when I close my eyes, I can re-enact the vision of the crowds milling through the sandy bed of the Ganga and all the devas, gandharvas and asparas gathered in the sky to witness this great spectacle.[20]

The experiences of pilgrimage constitute an actual sadhana to uplift the consciousness. In sannyasa for the *brahmavit*, the one who knows Brahman, the lifestyle is based on that transcendental knowledge, and therefore the life is seen as a *lila*, a play projected from the source.

[20] *Tirtha Yatra*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2007, pp. 197–198

Sannyasa in life

According to *Sankara Digvijay*, Shankara's initial mission was to save Mother Earth and protect her. For this it is necessary to improve the consciousness of mankind. If we cannot even perceive other human beings as being worthy of respect – not to mention animals, rivers, mountains or trees, our perceptions, empathy and general state of consciousness are impoverished and unbalanced and need correction. The important thing is to constantly identify with the One witnessing consciousness in ourselves, and to see it in every being. With that focus we can maintain balance internally and externally, our actions become harmonious and auspicious. We become Shankara.

To go beyond the personality, yoga is just one aspect, there is nididhyasana, constant identification with Brahman embedded in the lifestyle of sannyasa, and remember, the real Shankara is the one who used to sing those beautiful hymns as he led his disciples along the narrow lanes of Kashi and the dusty roads of ancient India. In tantra, the different *acharas* or lifestyles that develop different capacities, and reflect the inner states experienced as one moves through deeper stages of sannyasa, are clearly described:

> Following vamachara is aghorachara, which is the fearless state in tantra. *Ghora* means terrible and *aghora* means gentle, that which is not terrible. In aghorachara, the traits of the human personality become virtuous, peaceful, gentle and compassionate, and there is detachment from the senses and sensorial attractions.
>
> From aghorachara one moves into yogachara, the conduct of yoga. *Yogachara* means living the principles of yoga in which the unity of the self is experienced and lived. It denotes an awareness of the higher principle and the endeavour to become one with that higher principle.
>
> With perfection of yogachara one moves into *siddhant-achara*, where the divisions of consciousness in the form of

the past, present and future drop away and one becomes a *jivanmukta*, a liberated soul. As an embodiment of wisdom, freedom and knowledge, one enters the final stage of *kaulachara*, where one guides and inspires others towards freedom.[21]

Today, it is necessary to preserve the witnessing attitude as the life support systems of the planet and the health and sanity of society begin to change and disintegrate in ways that we do not yet understand. Although apparently helpless the one who remains balanced and poised can tip the scale of balance. Training in the different sciences of yoga, and particularly the art of witnessing, is therefore essential in this age. This would explain why even the parmahamsa sannyasins of Shankara's tradition continue to dedicate their lives to the propagation of Advaita Vedanta, tantra and yogic skills for whoever has viveka, vairagya and the will to learn.

Sthitaprajna

This recognition that we have to train the mind and develop beyond is not new. The *Bhagavad Gita* describes the one with steady wisdom (2:56, 64):

Dukheshvanudvignamanaah sukheshu vigatasprihah
Veetaraagabhayakrodhah sthitadheermuniruchyate

One whose mind is not shaken in adversity, who does not hanker after pleasures, and is free from attachment, fear and anger, is called a sage of steady wisdom

Raagadveshaviyuktaistu vishayaanindriyaishcharan
Aatmavashyairvidheyaatmaa prasaadamadhigachchhati

The self-controlled one, moving amongst the objects of the senses, self-restrained and free from attraction and repulsion, attains to peace.

[21] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, *Tantra Darshan*, Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India, 2013, p. 148.

Shankara's commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* is one of the works that define who he is. His philosophy is not only for the enlightened, or for elderly sages, it deals with how human beings should live as we try to steer our way through life. Riding the body's hormones, DNA and brain, riding the external circumstances, learning about the relationships between the two, and inculcating self-control, we realize that Shankara's teachings are completely relevant to our situation.

But how are we bound to samsara? Shankara's simple answer again refers to the causes of suffering, the *kleshas*, and specifically to *raga* and *dwesha*,[22] which cause us to spend our lives in bondage as we continually chase pleasure and try to avoid pain, and think that this is just the natural way to live.

So how do we get beyond samsara? Ultimately through jnana, but from looking at his life, we can see that Shankara believed the process to involve developing and living the necessary qualities of a bhakta:

> He hates nothing, not even that which causes him pain. He regards all beings as himself. He is friendly and compassionate. He is full of compassion for the distressed i.e., he has offered security of life to all beings, he is a samnyasin. He does not regard anything as 'mine' and is free from egoism, from the notion of 'I'. Pain and pleasure do not cause in him hatred and attachment. He remains unaffected when abused or beaten. He is always content; he thinks he has enough whether he obtains or not the means of bodily sustenance. He is also satisfied whether he comes by a good thing or not. He is a yogin, always steadfast in thought. He has a firm conviction regarding the essential nature of the Self. This samnyasin has directed to Me exclusively his Manas – purposes and thoughts – as

[22] A. Mahadeva Sastri (trans.), *The Bhagavad Gita with the commentary of Sri Sankaracharya*, V. Ramaswamy Sastralu & Sons, Madras, India, 1961, p. 358 on 13:20

well as his Buddhi – the faculty of determining. Such a devotee is dear to me.[23]

The list of qualities of a bhakta is similar to those given for a sthitaprajna. Because of the kleshas: avidya, asmita, raga, dwesha and abhinivesha, we constantly and naturally confuse our self and the world but through investigation, or through the power of devotion when one unites with the Self, duality ceases and the enslaved personality disintegrates. Jnana burns the wood of maya and gives birth to the light of steady wisdom in which one sees *Aham Brahmasmi* – "I am Brahman." The attainment of sannyasins is not primarily connected to their external life. Still, sannyasa is expressed in life by a continual effort towards sattwa. Swami Niranjanananda explains:

> In relation to jnana marga, the path of wisdom, as long as one identifies with the dualities of the world the answers that one obtains are never real. These answers will simply delude the mind and fix it to another belief, thought or reality. They do not engender the force of *mukti*, liberation or enlightenment . . . tantra is much deeper than intellectual questioning. It is not concerned with appearance; it is the process of realizing the eternal reality. It is not concerned with what is perceived by the senses, mind and feelings, it is the process of understanding reality as it is, emanating from the transcendental consciousness.[24]

In Shankara's *Upadesha Sahasri*, *avidya*, ignorance of the nature of reality, has been recognized as our first, generally unrecognized, and most dangerous problem. What starts out as a lopsided view of reality affects what we desire, and then we act on our desires, and thus our life is created. He

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[23] *ibid*. A. Mahadeva Sastri, *The Bhagavad Gita with the commentary of Sri Sankaracharya*, pp. 312 on 12:12–14

[24] Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, 'Satsangs on *Vijnana Bhairava Tantra*' in Nasik, India, 2002

describes the phenomenal or worldly realm as avidya – as being unreal, a mere projection. His analysis of the human situation and our social preoccupations may seem harsh, but then Shankara is a cosmic being. His reality is not based on the senses, thoughts, or even the experiences of this lifetime which all create vrittis in the clear space of the consciousness.

The raft of sannyasa

When McGilchrist says, "The brain is not just a tool for grappling with the world. It's what brings the world about," it means scientific research is confirming the statements of the rishis: that the vyavahara reality is just a projection. However, just communicating between the two sides of the brain, or different aspects of our personalities, is not the answer to the profound ignorance of our situation which Shankara is referring to. Definitely we should improve the quality of life here on planet Earth, but Shankara is insisting that we remember who we are during our lives, between lives and beyond the whole cycle. Shankara, or the sat guru, has to remain the impartial witness for his teachings to form a solid raft to ferry people across samsara, the realm of mortality.

This is sannyasa: a fundamental shift in the orientation of consciousness which releases one from ignorance and overcomes attachment to samsara, releasing one from the cycle of rebirth and the whole basis of human suffering. Shankara may say it playfully; but he keeps on saying it.

> *Punarapi jananam punarapi maranam punarapi jananee jathare shayanam*
> *Iha samsaare bahu dustaare kripayaa apaare paahi Muraare – Bhajo Govindam!*

Again birth, again death and again lying in the mother's womb – this process of samsara is very hard to cross over – save me Murari through your infinite kindness.

The guru

The heart of the sannyasa tradition is the guru, the enlightened soul whose nature transforms the nature of everyone in the vicinity. Shankaracharya has one clear aim which is the antithesis of most people's: enlightenment, which carries with it release from the mortal life of sensory earthbound existence; or to be more precise, release from the process of enforced rebirth. If all we know of the mind is the sensory-oriented ordinary mind we will be rudderless in the bardo, swept along by the karmic currents after death, just as we are in life. In Shankara's tradition control over the process of death and rebirth is demonstrated even in the present day. Such a death is termed *maha samadhi*, and means one is able to break free of the transmigration process.

Swami Satyananda Saraswati progressed through the stages of paramahamsa and avadhoota sannyasa. He revealed his mastery in December 2009, when he simply announced that he was going and instructed his disciples not to attempt to stop him. He sat in padmasana, entered meditation, began chanting *Aum*, and left his body consciously. Since then, also, he has manifested his presence several times in different places. Disciples have seen, heard or felt his presence, and have received guidance from him in diverse ways.[25] Such mastery is rare but well-documented within Shankara's tradition.

It is not that Shankara set out as a social reformer, involved in, and aiming for, revolutionary change in society; he was just an embodiment of compassion towards all ensnared in the continual illusion and suffering of samsara. As Shankara the philosopher matured, he became a childlike bhakta once again – so absorbed in That, that he became effortlessly detached from the world – the drop became the ocean. So we can take these instructions as a blessing for ourselves, from Shankara, the auspicious one:

[25] *Avahan* magazine (various issues), Sannyasa Peeth, Munger, Bihar, India

> Oh my mind, you indulge in vain ideas like 'me' and 'mine' . . . You have no consciousness of things and I have no desire of having anything. It is, therefore, proper for you to remain quiet.
> As I am no other than the Supreme Eternal One I am always contented and have no desires. Always contented I desire no welfare for myself, but I wish your welfare. Try to make yourself quiet.[26]

Gurus teach from their own depth of experience according to the needs of their disciples, Shankara's teachings continue to be disseminated and made relevant to contemporary needs by the gurus of his tradition. It is encouraging and inspiring that the techniques have been preserved throughout the centuries and are still being taught to sincere aspirants. Not only that, we still have the opportunity to meet the living Shankara, *Bhagavad Gita* (4:7–8):

> *Yadaa yadaa hi dharmasya glaanibhir-bhavati Bhaarata*
> *Abhyutthaanam adharmasya tadaa'tmaanam srijaamyaham*
> *Paritraanaaya saadhoonaam vinaashaaya cha dushkritaam*
> *Dharmasansthaapanaarthaaya sambhavaami yuge yuge*

> Whenever there is a decline in righteousness, Bharata (Arjuna), and a rise in unrighteousness, then I manifest myself.
> For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age.

[26] Swami Jagadananda (trans.), *Upadesa Sahasri of Sri Sankaracarya*, 9th impression, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India, 1941, pp. 288–289 (19:1–3)

Epilogue

The writing of this book was inspired and guided by two masters of the Dashnami tradition established by Shankaracharya: Swami Satyananda Saraswati and Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati. The legacy of Shankara continues to be alive not merely through his books or songs but through an unbroken lineage of masters who embody the principles that he stood for. They are the living Shankaras. Therefore, as the last word on the subject, we shall see how the lives and teachings of these two luminaries of the sannyasa tradition reflect Shankara's own enlightened self.

THE GUIDANCE OF SWAMI SATYANANDA SARASWATI

Given the mandate to 'spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore' by his guru, Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh, Sri Swami Satyananda experienced success in all directions: his life was a veritable *Digviyaya*. This applied to his tours throughout India and overseas, and also in the way that he was able to reveal a spiritual path acceptable and useful to people from different cultures, religions and backgrounds. Not only that, like Shankara, in his life he experienced the teachings of Vedanta and tantra at a young age. He utilized his public working life by synthesizing and propagating a wholesome system of integral yoga capable of helping all those who sincerely wish to expand their awareness and are prepared to practise. Finally he retired to live as a paramahamsa and avadhoota sannyasin, immersed

in vedic tapasya and bhakti, blessing all he came in contact with. He became a *jagat guru*, a steady beacon of light for a world in turmoil.

From practical experience, therefore, Swami Satyananda understood the mission of Shankara and the issues he was facing, and the teachings of Shankaracharya have been a constant theme in Swami Satyananda's teachings of yoga, Vedanta, tantra and sannyasa. As far back as the 1960s he was asked about the tradition of Shankaracharya and its importance for his own mission in life. He answered:

> Jagat guru Shankaracharya had come to rectify and restore the age-old vedic culture. Time has again eroded that tradition and to-day it requires to be revived and re-instated. My dream is to fulfil this great task.

Sri Swamiji worked tirelessly on this mission throughout his life. In Rikhia (1996), he said:

> Shankaracharya was a boy who was born in the southwestern tip of India eleven or twelve hundred years ago. He came from a scholarly family of that area. His father was a great teacher of the Vedas, Sanskrit philosophy, etc. At an early age, he left home and went to central India. He found his guru on the banks of the Narmada river, at a place called Omkareshwar. His guru's name was Govindapada. He stayed there for some time and had his first initiations from him.
>
> After finishing his learning, he went to the Himalayan region, up towards Badrinath. There he lived in a cave and wrote commentaries on all the Upanishads. All his writings are respected, venerated and accepted as extremely systematic philosophical analyses. They are considered to be the best works by all standards. Shankaracharya was a great philosopher. He was the founder of the philosophy called Advaita Vedanta, which is qualified monism. Shankaracharya did not propound a religion of his own. He said that the Vedas are the ultimate truth, and his commentaries, explanations and notes were

based on what was in the Vedas. He did not comment on his own ideas, his personal view, but the view of the Vedas.

He was also a great yogi. He went to Badrinath and Kedarnath, the ultimate Himalayan mountain retreats. Then he returned to the south once again, after which he went to Kashmir. The king of Kashmir accepted him as his guru and gave him all his support. Then Shankaracharya traversed the length and breadth of this country and met all the scholars. It seems that during this period there were many great scholars in this country. So, if one had something to say to the common masses, one had to first of all convince the scholars. If they were convinced, well and good, but if they were not, the masses would not listen . . .

The scholars were convinced by what Shankaracharya said and by the time he died at the age of 32, he had established four seats for his tradition of thought. One is in southern India, in Sringeri near Bangalore; the second is at the western tip of India, in Dwarika; the third is at the eastern tip of India, in Puri; and the fourth is in the north, near Badrinath. There are four seats, and those who sit there are called jagat gurus. They function well even today. I belong to the southern seat. I live in the north, but the seat of my philosophy is in the south at Bangalore. That is where my tradition comes from.

Like Shankara, Swami Satyananda Saraswati amalgamated Vedanta and tantra. The philosophy he gave was atmabhava, and the practices he systematized and opened up were derived from tantra, and include asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha, meditation techniques, hatha yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga, kriya yoga and kundalini yoga as well as various interlocking esoteric techniques.

The tradition of Shankaracharya has two main branches: one is Vedanta, the other is tantra. In our tradition you can find swamis belonging to both the vedantic tradition and the tantric tradition. Vedanta means jnana yoga, the yoga of contemplation, reflection and total absorption in the reality of the absolute. No

asanas, pranayama, mudra or bandha – just sitting down and asking, 'Who is Brahman?' The other tradition is tantra, where the emphasis is on practice. Yoga is a part of tantra: tantra is the mother and yoga is the son . . .

Mind in its ultimate analysis is atman. Atman is the word used in the Upanishads, in Vedanta philosophy and in the Hindu tradition for something which is permanent behind the impermanent affairs. Atman is the Self, self with capital 'S'. And this atman is the nucleus of your existence. The mind is the gross incarnation of the atman. And when this mind is again transformed it again shines as atman.

Shankaracharya has said, *jivo brahma eva na aparaha*, that is the sutra. *Jiva*, the individual self is not different from the cosmic self, the *paramatman*, it is the same – just as matter is equal to energy, and energy is equal to matter. You know the very famous equation of Einstein. The same equation can be applied to atman.

Every epoch has its own technology, its own way of life. Many centuries ago, Adi Shankaracharya walked from Kerala in the South to Badrinath in the North, then returned to Kerala to perform his mother's last rites. Once again he started from there and conquered all of India, established the maths of Puri, Dwarika, Joshimath and Sringeri. Can one man travel such distances on foot in fifteen to sixteen years? There must have been something. The people of India had their own peculiar capability, and they still do.

Peace and reconciliation

Swami Satyananda's commitment to improving spiritual understanding and promoting peace amongst cultures around the world persisted throughout his life. In the 1990s he turned his attention to systematically expressing this commitment in a series of yajnas and celebrations in which the Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Jaina, Shaivite, Vaishnava and other traditions were the honoured guests. By doing this he was continuing Shankara's tradition of reconciling religions and sects.

For a while there was a problem between the Shaivites and Vaishnavites. Just last century, Appaya Dikshitar, an ancestor of Swami Sivananda, was not allowed into the Tirupati temple as he was a Shaivite. Shankaracharya had put an end to this futile conflict on a philosophical level. He elected a Shaivite priest to look after the worship at the Narayana temple at Badrinath. There the deity wears a tilak, a vertical mark on the forehead, the sign of the Vaishnavite, and the priest doing the pooja is a tripundadhari, wearing the three horizontal lines on the forehead, the sign of the Shaivites.

Shankara established Narayanaji in the Badrinath temple and appointed a Shaiva priest. This tradition continues down to the present day. The temple of Badrinath is Vaishnavite but the priest of the temple is a Shaivite. This is the tradition that Shankara created. The animosity existing between Shaivites and Vaishnavites was as acute in earlier times as that between Hindus and Muslims today. Tulsidas was successful in removing this enmity among the common people, while Adi Shankaracharya eliminated it at the intellectual level.

Intellectuals know there is no difference if a Shaivite priest worships a Vaishnava deity, a Muslim priest conducts the pooja at Kashi Vishvanath temple, or a Hindu maulvi conducts namaz in Jama-masjid. Such things are not happening today, but they should and will happen one day or another. So Shankara removed sectarian enmity during his period.

Spiritual evolution

Swami Satyananda Saraswati was a spiritual scientist teaching differently according to the prevailing conditions and the different stages of evolution of his disciples. He understood that all aspirants do not belong to the same category, and therefore one must be encouraged to practice according to one's nature, one's *swadharma*.

There has to be a balance between idealism and practicality. A discerning person tries to understand the reason behind every event and process, and by doing that, he learns. This is

what Dattatreya practised. He was a great spiritual scientist, like the material or physical scientists of the twentieth century. Dattatreya, Lord Buddha, Lord Mahavir, Adi Shankaracharya and others like them were the scientists of spiritual life. They raised questions pertaining to the realities of life. What is the purpose of this creation? Where did we come from? What is the basis of creation? How do we remain alive and where will we go after death?

In his own life, Swami Satyananda reconciled the Arya Samaj revolutionary tendencies of his father, willing to sacrifice convention for justice, and the devotional temperament of his mother, steeped in the traditions of bhakti. He reconciled his early sadhanas in tantra with his education and natural philosophical allegiance to Advaita Vedanta. He then absorbed the yoga of compassion and seva from his guru Swami Sivananda. In pursuance of his guru's mandate to 'spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore'. He then travelled all around the subcontinent of India and overseas, observing the needs of people and of the global societies. This enabled an extraordinary sympathy and understanding to shine from his personality.

The depth of his own experience, perceptions and perspective gave him full appreciation of Shankara's philosophy and life. Swami Satyananda had reconciled opposites in his own life and saw that Shankara was forging a path between practicality and idealism simply because it needs to be done.

Essentially, there is no difference between dvaita and advaita. They constitute the two great philosophies of our country. Dvaita philosophy is the basis of sadhana and advaita philosophy is the basis of experience. Adiguru Shankaracharya argued for advaita vedanta, but in his spiritual practices he always followed dvaita. He worshipped Devi, Shiva, and many other gods and goddesses.

After he established the Sringeri Math, Shankara argued for the philosophy of advaita, non-duality; he did not speak

of the Shaiva philosophy, but then he fell seriously ill when those who opposed him cast an abhichara mantra on him, a mantra intended to kill someone. That was when he went to the banks of the Narmada, and began worship of Devi. He prayed to Devi from the bottom of his heart and created the 103 verses of *Saundarya Lahari*, and by chanting this he was able to counteract this tantric attack.

So even though Shankaracharya was a propagator of the advaita view and was initiated into the Shaiva tradition, at the end of his life he sought the shelter of Shakti. He worshipped Shakti because it needs to be done.

Swami Satyananda knew what tradition means and understood the heart of Indian spiritual traditions. Gradually Sri Swamiji gave more and more information on this intriguing Shankaracharya to help us understand the ambiguities, subtleties and downright contradictions in the accounts of Shankara's activities.

Sri Swami Satyananda sent instructions for me to write a biography of Sri Shankaracharya some years ago, and the story proved more and more fascinating as it progressed. Often I would feel Sri Swamiji's presence and inspiration while writing the book, and each time I visited Rikhia, he would give another satsang laced with new clues, opening up a completely new perspective. On 15 October 1997 Sri Swamiji explained his view that there were at least three Shankaras. During a satsang he was asked: "Sage Vasishtha was the rajaguru of Rama's ancestors and he was also rajaguru to Sri Rama. How is it possible that one man could stay alive for such a long time?" He replied:

There has been a certain tradition about great men in our culture. For example, even today the Jagadguru is known as Shankaracharya. Is the Shankaracharya of today and the one of eleven thousand years ago the same person? No. Similarly, in ancient times there was a rishi called Vasishtha. It was the name of a person, but thereafter all the individuals who

occupied his position in the same tradition were known as Vasishtha. Before they took the position, their names were different.

Similarly, the Vyasa you talk about was the son of Satyavati and Parashar. Was he the same Vyasa who wrote great books like the eighteen Puranas? No. Vyasa is the traditional name of a lineage. The name is the same, so is the position in the lineage, but the person was not the same.

In the tradition of the gurus, two names are mentioned: 'Shankaram Shankaracharyam'. Shankara and Shankaracharya were two different men. It is Shankara the story of the crocodile is about. In this story, a crocodile caught the leg of Shankara, which led him to take sannyasa, and he was enlightened at the age of thirty-two. His disciple was Shankaracharya, and he was followed by another Shankara, Abhinava Shankara. After that, the lineage of the Shankaracharya was established. Nobody knows the name of the person who heads the lineage, he is known only as Shankaracharya. Now, the question arises, who wrote all the Bhashyas? Was it Adi Shankara, Shankaracharya or Abhinava Shankara? This is a matter for history.

Shankara and Shankaracharya are two different personalities. Normally people don't know this fact. When we chant the *Vedic Shanti Mantras*, we say *Shankaram Shankaracharyam Keshavam Badarayanam*. Two names are mentioned here. Adi Shankara was a great personality who won over all of India. He was a very powerful sannyasin who left his home at the age of eight, left his guru's abode at the age of sixteen and died at the age of thirty-two. In such a short time he was able to re-establish vedic dharma across the country. After him came Shankaracharya who was a learned teacher and wrote commentaries on various scriptures. These are non-sectarian and deeply philosophical commentaries, and considered to be classical works all over the world.

His last words on this topic that I heard were in Rikhia on Holi, 11 March 2009. He began, conversationally:

Shankara was born in his mother's place (not the father's home as is usual) called Shashala, about thirty kilometres from Kaladi. He was born about fifty years before Christ's birth.

At this time the king of Kashmir was called Sudhanvan. He gave Adi Shankaracharya VIP status and provided him with a security guard not only in Kashmir but throughout his later travels. This was necessary because Adi Shankaracharya was such a fiery and potent teacher that he was on the hit-list of leaders of sects that opposed him. This king later became the emperor, and he was the emperor of India in the time when Christ visited India. He was one of the Shaka rulers and the Shaka calendar is now used by the Government of India.

Shankara organized the sannyasins of the time into the Dashnami tradition and set up monasteries. The system of monasteries that he set up influenced the later set-up of the Christian church's monasteries.

There is very little difference between the Advaita Vedanta of Adi Shankaracharya and the Muslim faith. Both believe that there is no need for worship of idols or *murtis*, or even guru; nothing should come between a person and God. Both believe that there is only one God. However, Advaita Vedanta says go ahead and worship these forms if you so wish, as this serves to purify the mind, but is nevertheless actually unnecessary. Also, Muslim belief holds that God is 'out there' whereas the Advaitins believe in the inner God, the *antaryamin*. Muslim belief is actually close to Trika philosophy in the Shaiva school, which believes in the triad: the reality of God, the soul and creation. Advaita only believes in the reality of the Ultimate.

If we are one with the Ultimate, why are we not realized? When the Buddha was asked this question, he said it is because we don't look for a means out of samsara. Therefore we are *buddhu*, ignorant or foolish, rather than Buddha. What is the means? *Anasakti*, not being attached; and hence the necessity to practise yoga and remove the *chitta vrittis*, the modifications

of the mind. On a deeper level, *anasakti* means that whatever you do, you do for others, not for yourself. Ultimately, this is because you recognize the one atma or Brahman in all.

Swami Niranjan

The legacy of the Adi Shankaracharya continues. Swami Satyananda Saraswati found another Shankara, to whom he passed on his spiritual inheritance. History repeats itself.

Let me speak a little about Swami Niranjan also. Everyone sings praises of the guru; Swami Satyananda likes to sing praise of the disciple.

Swami Niranjan came to Munger at the age of four. I told him to go back home to his mother. How was I to keep a child of four in the ashram! So he again came back at the age of six and remained there. He was in Munger from the age of six till ten. And how he would trouble me! He and Swami Gorakhnath would pull apart everything in the ashram, tape recorders, typewriters, duplicating machines. If asked, "What are you doing?" they would reply, "We are trying to learn what it is."

At the age of ten I took him to Ireland with me and left him there. Conditions were very difficult. He used to live in the Catholic community, so the Protestants would round him up on the streets and tell him that he should not live there. I asked him to tell them that he would continue to live where he was, but also to go to their school to teach yoga. So now the Catholics said, "You cannot live here, for you go to the Protestant school." They would print graffiti on the walls of his house: 'Yogi bear lives here.' Ireland was a great test for him; it was a very sectarian country. That was his training ground; he learnt how to live among people of different mentalities there.

Swami Niranjan has renounced for the wellbeing of humankind. He is my successor because he is capable. I chose him at the age of four and trained him without telling him that he would succeed me. He can communicate more easily with the people of today. He knows how to talk with them and his

personality is suited for that. He can think the way young people today think whereas I think the way people used to think fifty years ago. Now he may also retire because there has to be some end to one's duties and obligations.

You are born, become an adult, grow old, die, then you are born again and die again. This is the cycle of the world. Therefore it is said, history repeats itself. You may say, life repeats itself. This is the law of nature; nature exists on recycling. Leaves sprout and fall, turn into compost which gives birth to plant life, and then the leaves again fall. The seasons repeat themselves, every year the rains follow summer, winter follows the rains; day follows night, night follows day. From water, clouds are formed, from clouds water is formed. One is born, dies, then is born again and dies again. Therefore, Sri Shankaracharya says:

Punarapi jananam punarapi maranam punarapi jananee jathare shayanam
Iha samsaare bahu dustaare kripayaa apaare paahi Muraare.

Again birth, again death and again lying in the mother's womb – this process of samsara is very hard to cross over - save me Murari through your infinite kindness.

So how do we get out of this cycle? If there was a straight way out, we would be freed of it, but there is none. We can get out only if there is God's grace. So Shankaracharya says:

Kripayaa apaare paahi Muraare – save me Murari through your infinite kindness.

THE GUIDANCE OF SWAMI NIRANJANANANDA SARASWATI

From investigating the legends of Shankara's life, it is clear that he was someone born with special qualities. His parents both had significant dreams in which they were informed that they would be having an extraordinary child – and that there were strings attached – the child was born for a special

destiny and that would be the priority of his incarnation, rather than the normalities of life and family. This was also the case with Swami Niranjanananda' parents. Their guru, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati, agreed to do sadhana to bring down the soul of one beyond karma, who would be destined to be his spiritual successor. But they had to understand and agree that this child would be his *manas putra*, mentally conceived son, and not simply their darling child.

Sannyasa

From the time Swami Niranjan first began speaking, he began requesting, and then demanding, to go to the ashram and live with his guru, Sri Swamiji. From the age of four, he would pack his bag and go to the railway station and try to get on the train to Munger, only being prevented by the station master. He cut his clothes into small pieces and when his Auntie asked him what had happened, he hid the scissors and said it was a mouse, and then, more boldly, "And the name of the mouse is Sannyasa!" By the age of six, he had overcome the objections of his parents and Sri Swamiji, and became a resident of the small and austere ashram in Munger until, at the age of eleven, Swami Satyananda initiated him into sannyasa and took him to Ireland and left him there as a parivrajaka, to help propagate yoga throughout Europe and, later, South and North America.

He was recalled to Munger and India in 1983 to lead the yoga movement and take up his role as Swami Satyananda's spiritual successor. He is the disciple of Swami Satyananda who has the responsibility to continue Shankara's tradition of sannyasa in today's world. At first occupied with fulfilling the mandate now passed on to him by Swami Satyananda of 'spreading yoga from door to door and shore to shore', he travelled widely, conducting his own Digvijayas, simultaneously opening and systemizing the practices of pratyahara and dharana in various satsangs and books. He was initiated as a paramahamsa sannyasin in 1990, and for some years his teachings were mainly expressions of Advaita

Vedanta, while his activities were directed towards setting up international yoga organizations and re-establishing yoga in mainstream society.

In 1993, he was anointed spiritual successor to Swami Satyananda by the luminaries of the sannyasa tradition. In 1995, at the first Sat Chandi Mahayajna, Swami Satyananda passed on his spiritual shakti and sannyasa sankalpa to Swami Niranjanananda and declared him to be the guru and paramacharya of the tradition. In 2009, before attaining mahasamadhi, Swami Satyanananda gave Swami Niranjanananda the command to embark on a new phase of sannyasa life and develop a new chapter.

Following the instructions of his guru, Swami Niranjanananda has established Sannyasa Peeth on the banks of the Ganges for his own sadhana as a paramahamsa of Shankara's tradition and for qualified aspirants, with the aim of reintegrating the ancient vedic spiritual heritage and culture into the fabric of modern society. In 2013 he commenced the *panchagni-vidya*, the meditation on the five fires, performed sitting amongst four fires, with the sun itself as the fifth overhead. This is one of the highly respected austerities spoken of in the Upanishads, a meditation leading to understanding the interconnectedness of the universe and all living beings, and to transcendence. It opens the doors to Brahma Loka or Satya Loka from which one may return if necessary for some mission.

Preserving vidya

Indeed, there are some souls who are born for a mission. This is evident not only through the events of their lives but also through their character. This is true of both Shankara and Swami Niranjanananda. Through serving his guru's mission to uplift the consciousness of humankind. Swami Niranjan has himself become a jagat guru and shares Shankara's experiences from the inside. Therefore, the last word on Shankara in this book is from him, a veritable Shankara himself. He begins:

The story of sannyasa goes back many thousands of years. In the early days, sannyasa was seen as renouncing the home, family and society to live in solitude and isolation, contemplation and meditation, in order to go through a process of self-development. Some centuries ago, a luminous sannyasi was born, named Shankaracharya. It was he who consolidated the growing number of recluses and sadhakas of the sannyasa tradition.

The sannyasa *parampara*, or tradition, was radically changed by Sri Shankaracharya. He said that sannyasa is for the service of mankind, for preserving the vidya or knowledge. What is modern today will become ancient after a few thousand years, so he created the sannyasa traditions which provide continuity in preserving the knowledge beneficial for the development and upliftment of the whole of humanity. We can say that *sannyasa* means 'total dedication for the growth of humanity'. However, very few can actually dedicate themselves fully to this path.

Shankaracharya was a very powerful spiritual personality. People would respect him, listen to him, seek his guidance and follow his advice. While travelling through India, he once reached a town where, among the multitudes that came for darshan, a father was seeking help for his son who did not speak or play with other children. The father was extremely worried and had come with the hope that Shankaracharya would help his son to become normal. After listening to his tale of woe, Shankaracharya asked the farmer to bring the boy before him. When the boy came, Shankaracharya asked him, *"Kastvam?"* "Who are you?" and the boy replied:

Naham manushyo na cha deva yakshah
Na brahmano kshatriya vaishya shudrah
Naham grihastho na cha vaanaprasthah
Svaatmanandaiva nijabodharoopah.

I am not human, divine, or demi-god;
Not brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya or shudra am I.
I am neither householder nor renunciate,
but the one who enjoys bliss within his atman.

Hearing this, Shankaracharya assured the farmer that there was no need to worry about his son. There was nothing wrong with the boy – he had attained the liberated state of avadhoota, and had taken this human body only to work out some desires leftover from previous births. Shankara named the boy *Hastamalaka*, implying the boy saw reality as clearly as one sees an amalaka fruit in the palm of one's hand. He became one of Shankara's most devoted disciples. His hymn, the *Hastamalakiyam*, was so profound that Shankara composed a commentary on it himself.

Shankara understood individuals and the needs of society. He grouped recluses and sadhakas from different regions of the country according to their traits and the location where they lived. For example, a recluse living in the forest would be called Vanam or Aranyam. The recluse who lived near the seaside would be called Sagara. The recluse who lived near human habitation or civilization would be called Puri or Bharati.

The Saraswati tradition

In Shankara's tradition, there are ten divisions of sannyasa known as *Dashnami*, ten names, and each division represents a particular state of being or mind. Each division has a particular duty assigned to it. *Saraswati* is the goddess of wisdom, learning and speech and the Saraswati tradition was assigned the duty of preserving and continuing the propagation of knowledge so that it could be utilized by future generations.

In the history of sannyasa, you will discover that the people who have contributed the most to spiritual learning and literature have been people from the Saraswati, Bharati and Puri traditions, related to the Sringeri math. The direction to investigate and to bring the wisdom of the past for application today and in the future, has been followed by the Puri, Bharati and Saraswati traditions. As Saraswati sannyasins it is our responsibility to understand and absorb the many different sciences and systems existing in the world because as the saying goes, "Truth is one but is called by many names." We need to realize the link between them, and express them according to the needs of society.

Shankaracharya's philosophy of Advaita Vedanta states that all rivers meet and merge in the ocean, and in doing so they lose their individual identity. In the same way, all thoughts and beliefs merge into the supreme reality; they do not maintain separate identities when they reach there. At the end, the entire creation and all individuals merge into the supreme spirit, and that supreme spirit exists in all even though it is formless, nameless, unmanifest and unimaginable.

Our order, Saraswati, has always excelled in Advaita, Vedanta and yoga. The Giri tradition has excelled in hatha yoga, tapasya and tantra. The Puri tradition has excelled in the Samkhya system of thought. So all these ten different sampradayas had a belief, a practice, a way of life and they all followed it. This is the tradition, and the credit for this goes to Shankaracharya who brought the different factions together to become a major social force to maintain a balance in the life of a person – a balance between the external and the internal, the mundane and the spiritual.

The Satyananda Yoga–Bihar School of Yoga sannyasins are all Saraswati, whether they are poorna, karma, jignasu or rishi. For easier identification, only the poorna and rishi sannyasins use the title of Saraswati; karma and jignasu sannyasins do not use it.

Women in sannyasa

In the past, many great sannyasins, rishis and sadhus openly initiated women in the spiritual sciences, either as sannyasins or householders. Today they are the luminaries whom we follow. During the political and cultural rule of Islam and later of Christianity, through the British, the entire tradition was suppressed for many hundreds of years. Swami Sivananda, in this age, was the first one to publicly renew this process.

One more interesting point to that question: do you know who the first person to initiate a woman into sannyasa was in the Dashnami tradition? Yes, Shankaracharya himself, the founder of the Dashnami tradition. He gave sannyasa initiation to Ubhaya Bharati, the wife of Mandan Mishra who became

Sureshwara Saraswati. Although it is mentioned nowhere, but he did give it, because both were bound by one statement. When Shankaracharya was having the debate with Mandan Mishra, and won, then Ubhaya Bharati came and said, "Your victory is only half, because I am the other half and I am the better half. If you win against me then you have won, but if we lose, then we will become your disciples."

The debate with Mandan Mishra went on for nine days, and the debate with Ubhaya Bharati, who was thought to be an incarnation of Saraswati, went on for three months. And Shankaracharya was losing. Finally, she asked him one question he could not answer. He asked for time to study the subject, and when he knew the answer he came back, gave the answer and won. The point is that she herself had desired to take sannyasa and Shankaracharya obliged.

It was to honour her as the first disciple and female sannyasin that Kanchi Peeth was made in Kanchipuram. Shankaracharya made four peeths for the propagation of Vedanta but Kanchi Peeth had a different function. The *pratima*, divine symbol, is still there in the Kanchipuram Temple. Ubhaya Bharati is seen as an avatara of Saraswati and the main deity of Kanchipuram Peeth is also an aspect of Saraswati.

She was the first female disciple, and discipleship in those days was seen as renunciation. Whether people wear red, yellow, black or geru clothes, or shave their heads, that the time period decides but she became a renunciate, tyagi, tapasvi, sadhu, sannyasin.

This is the Dashnami tradition we belong to. We are sannyasins of the Shankaracharya order. Shankaracharya united the entire nation in one idea, one thought and one philosophy: Advaita Vedanta. However, Shankaracharya also had to go through a process of opening himself to transcend maya. He believed that Brahman is everything, God is everything, and he would conceive of Brahman as a masculine power and was never comfortable with the idea of Shakti, the feminine power. He wrote brilliant and unparalleled commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras*, on the Upanishads, on the *Bhagavad Gita*

and on many other texts. He was a person of great intellect. Nevertheless, one door was still closed in his life.

The story goes that to open the door, Shiva and Parvati had to come down in the guise of an old couple. Shiva took the form of a corpse and Parvati took the form of a woman and sat with the head of the old man in her lap and started to wail and cry. It was early in the morning and Shankaracharya was going to the river for a bath along with his disciples. There he saw this woman, blocking the path with a dead body. He said, "Mother, please remove this dead body."

The young woman said, "How can this dead body move without Shakti? You don't recognize Shakti, but remember that without Shakti nothing can move in this world. Brahman is all-pervasive and permanent, sure, but without Shakti, even that power, that force, is ineffective. Yes, how can this dead body which is devoid of Shakti move without her?" This statement opened the eyes of Shankaracharya. He said, "Thank you mother, for enlightening me. I was wrong."

When he accepted that he was wrong for not recognizing Shakti before this moment, the dead body and that woman disappeared. He realized they were Shiva and Parvati who had come to open his eyes to the fact that Shakti, energy, is an integral principle of the Cosmic Self.

Shankaracharya became an advocate of Brahman and Shakti both, Shiva and Shakti both. He accepted the existence of the two. His experiences, feelings and thoughts can be discovered in the verses of *Saundarya Lahari* and *Ananda Lahari*. In the opening verse he states:

> *Shivah shaktyaa yukto yadi bhavati shaktah prabhavitum*
> *Na chedevam devo na khalu kushalah spanditumapi*
>
> Shiva, when united with Shakti, is endowed with the power to create, protect and destroy the universe; otherwise he is unable even to stir.

Shiva without Shakti is non-functional. Shakti is supreme, but she hides herself within Shiva. This was the revelation that

came to Shankaracharya through the grace of Shiva and Shakti. After that, endowed with this force and grace, Shankaracharya conquered the thoughts and the minds of all sects and traditions of this country, and became the universal master.

Basis of sannyasa

Although in the present day many people have altered the sannyasa system according to the prevalent living conditions and mentality, nevertheless there are people who maintain the sannyasa lifestyle as it was practised five thousand years ago.

The basis of the sannyasa lifestyle is the pursuit of spiritual excellence. This should not be understood as an intellectual attainment. Spiritual excellence is not memorizing scriptures and literature, or becoming a good lecturer or philosopher, it is a state of experience where philosophy and performance are totally compatible, and this compatibility is seen in a balanced, positive expression of thought, word and action.

The drive to achieve spiritual excellence in sannyasa follows certain ideals. The first ideal is *tyaga*, renouncing the attachment to objects that we consider pleasant, or associate with as our own. Traditionally, it is said that anyone who becomes a sannyasin dies a legal death. After taking sannyasa, one cannot lay claim to inheritance, money, property, name and fame. Sannyasa represents total disassociation from the social way of thinking.

In this context, not everybody is qualified to be a sannyasin. Today, despite thousands wearing geru and walking around with shaven heads, maybe one or two can be identified as sannyasins, who have that spirit and force of character. Very few people have the capacity to venture into and properly understand the basics of sannyasa life. The true sannyasa samskara exists in very few people. It is seen in those who are totally free from every kind of influence and interference, and remain true to the inspiration that brought them to spiritual life. When the spiritual samskaras are already active, at a certain point in life they take over. The mind and emotions have no role to play in the life of such a person.

Shankaracharya definitely travelled as a missionary to re-establish the *sanatana dharma*, the eternal values. He could have gone to the mountains and started his meditations, but he did not do that. We are also travelling and propagating yoga just as Shankaracharya propagated sanatana dharma. The need of today is not Vedanta, it is yoga. If you are sick and I come and tell you, "Look, you and your God are one", it won't mean anything to you. You will say, "Very nice, Swamiji. Thank you very much." But when I can help you by saying, "If you do this practice you will get better", you will appreciate that more than a philosophical discourse on the nature of your relationship with Brahman, with God.

So, sannyasa today is exactly the same as it was in the past, and in the future it will be the same. Even when we enter the space age I will be going to other planets in geru to teach! Why not? We travel in planes today, tomorrow we will travel in rockets. After all, the basis of sannyasa is sadhana.

Philosophy and sadhana

Shankaracharya also organized the sadhana of the sannyasa traditions. He organized the philosophy through the four 'great sentences' of the Vedas, the four Maha Vakya: *Aham Brahmasmi*, "I am Brahma"; *Ayam Atma Brahma*, "The soul is Brahma"; *Prajnanam Brahma*, "Knowledge is Brahma"; and *Tat Twam Asi*, "You are That". These became the guiding sankalpas or thoughts for the sannyasa tradition.

He was a great spiritual leader and a revolutionary. He fought against all the ideas, philosophies and religions of his era which he felt would not lead people to the highest realization. His idea was to form a nucleus of sannyasins who would have a relatively higher awareness, who would teach and inspire others to follow a way of life which would allow free expression of their innate spiritual potential, and which would have nothing to do with the prevalent religious concepts.

Shankara was a teacher who did not emphasize intellectual awareness; rather, he emphasized intuitive awareness. He conceived a new order of sannyasins who would become

the spiritual torchbearers for future generations. The purpose of this order was to preserve the right knowledge, the right understanding, the proper means and techniques for attaining altered states of consciousness, so that people would be able to experience the highest reality.

The purpose of sadhana is to acquire a virtuous, strong and balanced personality and this process regulates the body, mind and emotions, giving excellence in everything we do, the expression of the head, heart and hands. The process that leads to this excellence is yoga. And the final outcome of this excellence is knowing 'I am not different to That'. Identifying with that concept becomes the *sayujya avastha* of bhakti yoga: the experience of oneness. That is the fulfilment of human life.

In between we can read whatever we want, follow whatever we want, sit in any car we want, construct as many houses as we want. We can spend lifetimes coming here and getting richer and richer and richer. Fine, no problem. But ultimately where do we go? Towards this excellence. Advaita is not just a philosophy; it also points towards a certain conduct. One who adopts the philosophy and conduct of advaita is called a sadhu, a sannyasin. This is what Adi Shankara believed. Saints and rishis who came before him believed the same, and sannyasins and sadhus of today also believe this.

Advaita teaches that there is only one Supreme Self, which is all-pervasive in this creation, just as air is all-pervasive on earth. Air does not have any boundaries. Continents can have boundaries, nations can have boundaries, societies can have boundaries, houses can have boundaries, but air has no boundary. It flows throughout the world continuously without any barrier. You cannot say that this is American air, this is Indian air; you cannot distinguish between them. Air moves continuously throughout the planet; it is one element that connects every life-form on this planet. In the same manner, in this entire creation, one *tattwa*, one element, is predominant. That tattwa has been called God. Not a manifest God, but an impersonal God. 'G' stands for generation, the quality of Brahma; 'O' for organization, the quality of Narayana or

Vishnu; and 'D' for destruction, the quality of Shiva. As a result, in this word 'God', the three qualities of the Supreme Self are defined.

The tradition explains how to manage the influences of *maya*, illusion, and connect with *atma*, the spirit. Shankaracharya says, "This whole world is illusion and the only reality is the highest consciousness." From his perspective he is right, for the object is immaterial. Objects can change, objects can be created and destroyed. The universe can be created and destroyed, the world can be created and destroyed, life can be created and destroyed, the body can be created and destroyed: everything can be created and destroyed. When everything is destroyed, everything merges into that highest self: *Kham Brahman*.

Shankaracharya says that the world is a dream. Just as you dream at night and create your own world, your own associations, you own people, your own friendships, and your own animosities, in the same manner we are living in the dream of the higher self: this world is the dance of *Ishvara*. According to Shankaracharya this creation is the dream state of that Self, the highest Self, and we are all playing our role in that dream. When that Self wakes up, the little 'i' ceases to exist.

Sannyasa today

Sannyasa Peeth, the new organization started in 2010, is devoted to maintaining the pure tradition of sannyasa. It will teach this and it will help bring forth the creative nature of every individual, which is not intellectual, artistic or mathematical; it is a simple nature wherein everything is auspicious and right. It is that quality of life which you need to develop, not only as a sannyasin, but also as a normal human being so you can experience true spirituality in your life.

As a child, Shankara had the power to invoke the divine grace. Once he went for alms to a poor family's home and said, "*Bhiksham dehi*", "Give me alms." The lady of the house came out with one *amla*, a little fruit like a gooseberry. She said, "I have nothing in my house except this amla, please accept it." Shankaracharya could not bear the poverty of this woman. His

spirit melted. He said to himself, 'She has a family, a child, a husband, and they have only this little fruit to eat among all of them? They are going to starve."

He prayed then and there to the Cosmic Shakti, "Mother, remove the poverty of these people." As the story goes, due to his prayer, there was a rain of golden coins upon that house and the family became affluent. He had the power to invoke the divine grace, he was a gifted child with great spiritual powers, yet he lived an ordinary life. Shankaracharya said to people:

Punarapi jananam punarapi maranam punarapi jananee-jathare shayanam
Iha sansaare bahu-dustaare kripyaa-apaare paahi muraare.

One takes birth and dies, one returns to the mother's womb again and again
In this samsara there is so much suffering, let Your grace fall upon us.

Appendix 1

KANAKADHAARAA STOTRAM

This is Sri Shankara's prayer of peace, plenty and prosperity, written when he was approximately seven years old. He is imploring the Devi to manifest when deeply moved by the devotion of a poor woman. The Devi became manifest in the form of a rain of golden amalakas that fell on the house of that woman and relieved her poverty.

अंगं हरेः पुलक-भूषणमाश्रयन्ती
भृंगांगनेव मुकुलाभरणं तमालम्।
अंगीकृताखिल-विभूतिरपांगलीला
मांगल्यदाऽस्तु मम मंगलदेवतायाः ॥1॥

Angam hareh pulaka-bhooshanamaashrayantee
Bhringaanganeva mukulaabharanam tamaalam.
Angeekritaakhila-vibhootirapaangaleelaa
Maangalyadaa'stu mama mangaladevataayaah. (1)

On being gazed at by his wife Lakshmi (and appearing beautiful), (Lord Vishnu) Hari's whole body gets horripilated - the hair rising on his limbs - like a black Tamala tree with an abundance of blue buds surrounded by female bees. Just her glance is capable of bestowing all sorts of prosperities. May that grace of the auspicious goddess bless me with all good things.

मुग्धा मुहुर्विदधती वदने मुरारेः
प्रेमत्रपाप्रणिहितानि गतागतानि।
मालादृशोर्मधुकरीव महोत्पले या
सा मे श्रियं दिशतु सागरसम्भवायाः ॥2॥

Mugdhaa muhurvidadhatee vadane muraareh
Prematrapaapranihitaani gataagataani.
Maalaadrishormadhukareeva mahotpale yaa
Saa me shriyam dishatu saagarasambhavaayaah. (2)

Her graceful glances, full of love and bashfulness, wander towards and away from the handsome face of that enemy of the demon Mura (Lord Vishnu). She is attracted towards him just as clusters of bees hover round the blue lotus in full bloom in the lake. May she, born in the ocean, shower prosperity on me.

विश्वामरेन्द्र-पदविभ्रमदानदक्षम्
आनन्दहेतुरधिकं मधुविद्विषोऽपि।
ईषन्निषीदतु मयि क्षणमीक्षणार्थम्
इन्दीवरोदर-सहोदरमिन्दिरायाः ॥3॥

Vishvaamarendra-padavibhramadaanadaksham
Aanandaheturadhikam madhuvidvisho'pi.
Eeshannisheedatu mayi kshanameekshanaartham
Indeevarodara-sahodaramindiraayaah. (3)

Just her playful glance is capable of showering wealth on one like Indra. Even to Lord Vishnu, the destroyer of Madhu, she gives immense pleasure through her gaze. May her eyes (Indra's sisters) turn towards me just for a second to bless me.

आमीलिताक्षमधिगम्य मुदा मुकुन्दम्
आनन्दकन्दं अनिमेषमनंगतन्त्रम्।
आकेकरस्थित-कनीनिकपक्ष्मनेत्रम्
भूत्यै भवेन्मम भुजंगशयांगनायाः ॥4॥

Aameelitaakshamadhigamya mudaa mukundam
Aanandakandam animeshamanangatantram.
Aakekarasthita-kaneenikapakshmanetram
Bhootyai bhavenmama bhujangashayaanganaayaah. (4)

On seeing Lord Mukunda lying down with drowsy half opened eyes, like a snare set by the god of love, she felt overjoyed. May the half open eyes of Lakshmi (the wife of Lord Vishnu) boost my confidence and bless me with more prosperity.

बाह्वन्तरे मुरजित: श्रितकौस्तुभे या
हारावलीव हरिनीलमयी विभाति।
कामप्रदा भगवतोऽपि कटाक्षमाला
कल्याणमावहतु मे कमलालयाया: ॥5॥

Baahvantare murajitah shritakaustubhe yaa
Haaraavaleeva harineelamayee vibhaati.
Kaamapradaa bhagavato'pi kataakshamaalaa
Kalyaanamaavahatu me kamalaalayaayaah. (5)

O Mother! You adorn the chest of Lord Vishnu (the conqueror of the demon Mura) like a beautiful turquoise necklace. The sight of you attracts your husband, even though he is the Supreme God. May that vision of Lakshmi, seated in the lotus, bring auspiciousness in my life.

कालाम्बुदालिललितोरसि कैटभारे:
धाराधरे स्फुरति या तडिदंगनेव।
मातुस्समस्तजगतां महनीय मूर्त्ति:
भद्राणि मे दिशतु भार्गवनन्दनाया: ॥6॥

Kaalaambudaalilalitorasi kaitabhaareh
Dhaaraadhare sphurati yaa tadidanganeva.
Maatussamastajagataam mahaneeya moorttih
Bhadraani me dishatu bhaargavanandanaayaah. (6)

O daughter of Rishi Bhargava, your dazzling appearance is like lightning amongst the dark rain-bearing clouds of

Lord Vishnu's chest. You are the one who protects the entire world. May your auspicious appearance reflect good things into my life.

प्राप्तं पदं प्रथमतः खलु यत्प्रभावात्
मांगल्यभाजि मधुमाथिनि मन्मथेन।
मय्यापतेत्तदिह मन्थरमीक्षणार्थम्
मन्दालसं च मकरालय-कन्यकायाः ॥7॥

Praaptam padam prathamatah khalu yatprabhaavaat
Maangalyabhaaji madhumaathini manmathena.
Mayyaapatettadiha mantharameekshanaartham
Mandaalasam cha makaraalaya-kanyakaayaah. (7)

Let the lazily slow and charming glances of the daughter of the crocodile-infested ocean (goddess Lakshmi), bless me in this life. Only because of her grace, the god of love got entrance to the heart of the abode of all auspiciousness, the killer of the demon Madhu.

दद्याद्दयानुपवनो द्रविणाम्बुधाराम्-
अस्मिन्नकिञ्चन-विहंगशिशौ विषण्णे।
दुष्कर्मधर्ममपनीय चिराय दूरम्
नारायणप्रणयिनी नयनाम्बुवाहः ॥8॥

Dadyaaddayaanupavano dravinaambudhaaraam-
Asminnakinchana-vihangashishau vishanne.
Dushkarmadharmamapaneeya chiraaya dooram
Naaraayanapranayinee nayanaambuvaahah. (8)

Oh beloved of Lord Narayana, like a fledgling bird (fallen from the nest) I am really suffering due to my evil actions which have taken me away from you. Let your glance, like water-laden clouds driven by favourable winds, rain on me your merciful wealth.

इष्टा-विशिष्टमतयोऽपि नरा यया द्राक्
दृष्टाः त्रिविष्टपपदं सुलभं भजन्ते।

दृष्टिः प्रहृष्टकमलोदर-दीप्तिरिष्टाम्
पुष्टिं कृषीष्ट मम पुष्कर-विष्टरायाः ॥9॥

Ishtaa-vishishtamatayo'pi naraa yayaa draak
Drishtaah trivishtapapadam sulabham bhajante.
Drishtih prahrishtakamalodara-deeptirishtaam
Pushtim krisheeshta mama pushkara-vishtaraayaah. (9)

(Goddess Lakshmi) whose seat is the lotus, let your eye, like the heart of a full blooming lotus, fall on me and give me wealth, progeny and whatever I desire. Your glance can lift even those unpurified by sacrifice to the heights of the Lord of the three worlds.

गीर्देवतेति गरुडध्वजसुन्दरीति
शाकम्भरीति शशिशेखरवल्लभेति।
सृष्टिस्थितिप्रलय-केलिषु संस्थितायै
तस्यै नमस्त्रिभुवनैक गुरोस्तरुण्यै ॥10॥

Geerdevateti garudadhvajasundareeti
Shaakambhareeti shashishekharavallabheti.
Srishtisthitipralaya-kelishu samsthitaayai
Tasyai namastribhuvanaika gurostarunyai. (10)

Salutations to Shri Devi known as Lakshmi, the beloved wife of he whose banner is Garuda (Lord Vishnu). She is also called Shakambhari – the destroyer of drought and cause of plentiful rain. She is also called Parvati, the wife of Shiva who always bears the moon on his head. The creation, preservation and destruction of this universe is just a play for her. I bow down to her, the ever-young wife of the Guru of the three worlds (Lord Vishnu).

श्रुत्यै नमोऽस्तु शुभकर्मफलप्रसूत्यै
रत्यै नमोऽस्तु रमणीय-गुणार्णवायै।
शक्त्यै नमोऽस्तु शतपत्रनिकेतनायै
पुष्ट्यै नमोऽस्तु पुरुषोत्तम-वल्लभायै ॥11॥

Shrutyai namo'stu shubhakarmaphalaprasootyai
Ratyai namo'stu ramaneeya-gunaarnavaayai.
Shaktyai namo'stu shatapatraniketanaayai
Pushtyai namo'stu purushottama-vallabhaayai. (11)

May I offer salutations to you, the embodiment of the Vedas and the giver of the fruits of good actions. You are Rati, the ocean of fine qualities. May my salutations be to you, the personification of Shakti, who dwells in the lotus flower. You are the strength of humankind and the consort of Lord Purushottama. My salutations are to you.

नमोऽस्तु नालीक-निभाननायै
नमोऽस्तु दुग्धोदधि-जन्मभूत्यै।
नमोऽस्तु सोमामृत-सोदरायै
नमोऽस्तु नारायण-वल्लभायै ॥12॥

Namo'stu naaleeka-nibhaananaayai
Namo'stu dugdhodadhi-janmabhootyai.
Namo'stu somaamrita-sodaraayai
Namo'stu naaraayana-vallabhaayai. (12)

Salutations to you, whose face is like a lotus. Salutations to you, born in the ocean of milk. Salutations to you, who have the moon and the nectar of immortality as brothers. Salutations to you, the beloved of Lord Narayana.

नमोऽस्तु हेमाम्बुजपीठिकायै
नमोऽस्तु भूमण्डलनायिकायै।
नमोऽस्तु देवादि-दयापरायै
नमोऽस्तु शार्ङ्गायुधवल्लभायै ॥13॥

Namo'stu hemaambujapeethikaayai
Namo'stu bhoomandalanaayikaayai.
Namo'stu devaadi-dayaaparaayai
Namo'stu shaarngaayudhavallabhaayai. (13)

Salutations to you, seated on a golden lotus. Salutations to you, goddess of the entire earth. Salutations to you,

showering wealth and grace on the gods. Salutations to you, the beloved of he who holds the Sharnga bow (Lord Vishnu).

नमोऽस्तु देव्यै भृगुनन्दनायै
नमोऽस्तु विष्णोरुरसि स्थितायै।
नमोऽस्तु लक्ष्म्यै कमलालयायै
नमोऽस्तु दामोदर-वल्लभायै ॥14॥

Namo'stu devyai bhrigunandanaayai
Namo'stu vishnorurasi sthitaayai.
Namo'stu lakshmyai kamalaalayaayai
Namo'stu daamodara-vallabhaayai. (14)

Salutations to you, daughter of Bhrigu. Salutations to you, established in the heart of Vishnu (Urasi). Salutations to you, Lakshmi, whose abode is the white lotus. Salutations to you, the beloved of Damodara.

नमोऽस्तु कान्त्यै कमलेक्षणायै
नमोऽस्तु भूत्यै भुवन-प्रसूत्यै।
नमोऽस्तु देवादिभिरर्चितायै
नमोऽस्तु नन्दात्मज-वल्लभायै ॥15॥

Namo'stu kaantyai kamalekshanaayai
Namo'stu bhootyai bhuvana-prasootyai.
Namo'stu devaadibhirarchitaayai
Namo'stu nandaatmaja-vallabhaayai. (15)

Salutations to you, the glowing lotus of desire. Salutations to you, the blissful mother of the universe. Salutations to you, worshipped by the gods and divine beings. Salutations to you, the beloved of the son of Nanda (Lord Krishna).

सम्पत्कराणि सकलेन्द्रियनन्दनानि
साम्राज्यदान-निरतानि सरोरुहाक्षि।
त्वद्वन्दनानि दुरिताहरणोद्यतानि
मामेव मातरनिशं कलयन्तु मान्ये ॥16॥

Sampatkaraani sakalendriya nandanaani
Saamraajyadaana-nibhavaani saroruhaakshi.
Tvadvandanaani duritaaharanodyataani
Maameva maataranisham kalayantu maanye. (16)

Oh mother with lotus eyes, offering salutations to you is most pleasurable for our senses and the salutations are capable of giving enormous wealth, they can even bless one with a great kingdom, they even remove dangers and bless one with all prosperity. Such is the power of offering salutations to you.

यत्कटाक्ष-समुपासनाविधिः
सेवकस्य सकलार्थसम्पदः।
सन्तनोति वचनांगमानसैः
त्वां मुरारिहृदयेश्वरीं भजे ॥17॥

Yatkataaksha-samupaasanaavidhih
Sevakasya sakalaarthasampadah.
Santanoti vachanaangamaanasaih
Tvaam muraarihridayeshvareem bhaje. (17)

By worshipping you with all the rituals, the devotee gets a favourable glance from you and this gives all the wealth one wants. O beloved of the enemy of the demon Mura, I worship you with all my devotion expressed through speech, body and mind. Such worship extends your favour again and again.

सरसिजनिलये सरोजहस्ते
धवलतमांशुकगन्धमाल्य-शोभे।
भगवति हरिवल्लभे मनोज्ञे
त्रिभुवनभूतिकरि प्रसीद मह्यम् ॥18॥

Sarasijanilaye sarojahaste
Dhavalatamaamshukagandhamaalya shobhe.
Bhagavati harivallabhe manojne
Tribhuvanabhootikari praseeda mahyam. (18)

Dwelling in the lotus, dangling from your hand a blooming lotus flower, wearing pure white silk, sandalwood paste and garlands of fragrant flowers, Bhagavati, the beloved of Lord Hari (Vishnu), the dearest to the minds of the devotees and bringer of all glory to the three worlds, shower your blessings on me.

दिग्घस्तिभि: कनककुम्भमुखावसृष्ट:
स्वर्वाहिनी-विमलचारुजल-प्लुतांगीम्।
प्रातर्नमामि जगतां जननीमशेष-
लोकाधिनाथ-गृहिणीं अमृताब्धि-पुत्रीम् ॥19॥

Digghastibhih kanakakumbhamukhaavasrishtah
Svavaarhinee-vimalachaarujala-plutaangeem.
Praatarnamaami jagataam jananeemashesha
Lokaadhinaatha-grihineem amritaabdhi-putreem. (19)

These four directions (east, west, south and north) are like four big elephants. They display four gold pots filled with pure and very pleasing waters of Ganga flowing through the heavens; and shower you with these waters from all sides. To such a one, the mother of the universe, the housewife of the master of all the worlds, and the daughter of the ocean of milk, I bow down in the morning.

कमले कमलाक्षवल्लभे त्वं
करुणापूरतरंगितैरपांगै:।
अवलोकय मामकिंचनानाम्
प्रथमं पात्रमकृत्रिमं दयाया: ॥20॥

Kamale kamalaakshavallabhe tvam
Karunaapooratarangitairapaangaih.
Avalokaya maamakinchanaanaam
Prathamam paatramakritrimam dayaayaah. (20)

Oh! Kamala (delicate as a lotus flower), Beloved of the lotus-eyed Lord Vishnu, let your compassionate glance fall on me, the most poverty-stricken; and therefore naturally the first recipient of your mercy.

This prayer is the first demonstration of Shankara's compassion and power, showing him as a siddha or enlightened one as a very young child. The miracle said to be performed here is still commemorated by family tradition in a village about 24 kilometres from Kaladi.

> The successors of that Brahmin family are even to this day well-to-do people living in the village presided over by the deity called *Kanakaambaa* (Golden Mother). This name appears to have been given to this village, in commemoration of that event.[1]

[1] Kulkarni, S.D., *Adi Sankara: The Saviour of Mankind*, Shri Bhagavan Vedavyasa Itihasa Samshodhana Mandira (Bhishma), Bombay, India, 1987, p. 99

Appendix 2

The Protocommentator in the Brahma Sutra Bhashya

Originally, as the *Brahma Yoga Sutras* is too complex for me to really understand, I thought it best not to attempt to write about Shankara's commentary on it at all. However, part of the definition of Shankara is 'the author of the *Brahma Yoga Sutra Bhashya*', so once one jumps into the task of trying to understand what he was teaching it becomes impossible not to read it. And then it was puzzling that the extant *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* seems to quote historical figures born after Shankara, rather than before, as one might reasonably expect. Also, it contains what seem to be quotes from authors from the sixth and eighth centuries AD when I was veering towards a date four or five centuries BC.

Sri Swami Satyananda was giving brief satsangs on Shankara each time I went to Rikhia, and began casually mentioning different time zones for Shankara's appearance; usually well before the 'modern' dates. I realized I had to try and understand what was going on. Then came a long struggle, grappling with the Sanskrit, looking at the references, making a determined effort to understand the differences between the *Brahma Sutras* themselves, Shankara speaking on the *Brahma Sutras* and the 'other' Shankara speaking from his hymns and prakara granthas – was it really possible for one person to have such different views?

Then came Sri Swami Satyanandaji's mahasamadhi and in the heightened awareness following that, his

previous calm insistence that Shankara lived at widely different times suddenly made absolute sense. The concept of avatara became real and explained perfectly all the different sightings of Shankara. Simultaneously there was a breakthrough with understanding Shankara's *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*: Daniel H. H. Ingalls found that on the basis of internal evidence there must have been a very much earlier commentary which was the basis for Shankara's present commentary which was probably written early eighth century AD.

As soon as Ingalls theory presented itself, previously ignored references to this Protocommentator or this much earlier *Vrittikara* (Commentator) by Shankara himself, Swami Sivananda, Swami Gambhirananda and other translators and commentators assumed greater significance. Seeing how respected saints of his tradition calmly followed our more recent Shankara's instructions to simply apply his guidelines and adapt their views accordingly, it became clear that this great personage, Shankara, was not only changing so much in himself, but was also changing the whole tradition from time to time as necessary through the ages.

Many people might find this section investigating the Vrittikara boring or inadequate but identifying the Vrittikara as the voice of the Adi Shankara, and understanding that the same Shankara later annotated the original work, gives a possible solution to the continuing debate about his dates. The struggle to understand this tiny section of the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* and its significance gave a personal breakthrough of realizing that death and rebirth is part of a cycle that the siddha gurus, such as Shankara, are masters of.

So the struggle to understand has taken the form of Appendix 2. There is a story about a frog who fell into a half full bucket of milk. He couldn't jump out and so he had to just keep swimming and floating. He swam and swam for days till finally, totally exhausted, he thought to give up. Then he thought, 'No, let me keep on struggling, after all, I was lucky enough to be born a frog. I shouldn't waste the

opportunity of such an auspicious birth – I should keep on going to my last breath.' Suddenly the texture of the milk changed like magic, and at last he was able to climb out on to the butter and jump out of the bucket.

Deliberations on Brahman

As mentioned in Chapter 15, the first chapter of the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* is called *Samanvaya*, 'the reconciliation through proper interpretation'. It begins with the topic *Deliberations on Brahman* and Shankara (whom we may call the Abhinava Shankara) comments on the first twenty-seven sutras of Vyasa, which are all related to the nature of Brahman. Shankara's references to the Vrittikara (whom we may call the Adi Shankaracharya) come at various places in the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* including 1:1:4, 1:1:11–13, 1:1:19, 1:1:23. Here is an attempt to follow the issues up to the 19th sutra (1:1:19) where the modern Shankara, on the question of whether the atma is separate from the five koshas or not, can no longer just agree with the accepted version and steps in to the arena, demanding a reinterpretation of the sutras.

Vyasa's sutras are extremely terse. The first three are:

1. *Athaato brahmajijnaasaa (Atha-atah brahmaa-jijnaasaa)*: "Now, an enquiry into Brahman."
2. *Janmaadyasya yatah (Yatah janmaadi-asya)*: "That – from which comes birth, etc."
3. *Shaastrayonitvaat (Shaastra-yonitvaat)*: "That – the Source of the scriptures." or "The scriptures are knowledge of the Source."

Shankara's commentary seeks to make Vyasa's meaning clear through a dialogue debating the points. Shankara explains that the scriptures (especially the Upanishads) are the only valid means of knowledge of Brahman as they contain the experiences of realized sages – and runs up against an opponent, who at first seems to be a Poorva Mimamsan, quoting Jaimini. The opponent says that the Vedas are meant as guides to actions, and therefore the

Upanishads, which don't give such guidance, are useless. Shankara explains that it is to clarify this point that Vyasa's next sutra says:

4. *Tattu samanvayaat (Tat-tu samanyavaat)*: Swami Sivananda's kindly translation of this sutra explains: "But that Brahman is to be known only from the scriptures (and not independently by any other means established), because it is the main purpose of all vedantic texts."[1]

Enter the Vrittikara

The *Vrittikara*, the original commentator, is specifically named in Swami Gambhirananda's very precise translation of the debate following sutra 4. His view is: not only is Brahman known from the scriptures alone, but also this knowledge is a factor in the injunctions for meditation, and therefore the discussions on Brahman in the Upanishads are not useless.

One might think our Shankara (the present commentator) would be pleased with this defence of the Upanishads by the Vrittikara, but no. There follows a lengthy argument[2] in which the present commentator denies that there is any need to associate Brahman with action:

> Had liberation been spoken of (in the scriptures) as being supplementary to action and had it been asserted as a thing to be achieved, it would become impermanent. In that case liberation would become some sort of an excellent product amidst a horde of above-mentioned products of work standing in a graded order. But all who believe in liberation admit it to be eternal. Thus (since liberation is the same as Brahman), it is not proper to talk of Brahman as though it formed a factor in some action.[3]

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[1] Swami Sivananda, *Brahma Sutras*, 10th ed., Divine Life Society, UP, India, p. 20

[2] Swami Gambhirananda (trans.), *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Shankaracharya*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, India, 1993, pp. 21–47

[3] *ibid*. Swami Gambhirananda, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Shankaracharya*, p. 28

It is a good point, and he takes it a step further, saying that therefore, anyone who knows Brahman is freed from all action in this life itself.

What's the point?

Vyasa's next sutra refers to Samkhya:

5. *Eekshaternaashabdam (Eekshateh-na-ashabdam)*: "We see that Prakriti (is not the cause of the universe) because it is not mentioned (in the Upanishads)" – and he continues his exposition with hair-splitting meticulousness without encountering the Vrittikara again for some time until eventually:

11. *Shrutatvaachcha (Shrutatvaat-cha)*: "And (Brahman) is revealed (as the cause of the universe) in the shrutis (Upanishads)."

The commentary supplies the reference in the *Shvetasvatara Upanishad* (6:9) for this point:

> In this universe He has no master, no ruler; nor has He any distinguishing sign. He is the cause and ordainer of the masters of the organs (the gods). He Himself has no originator and no ordainer.

The opponent grudgingly admits that all the Upanishads say a conscious entity is the cause of the universe and grumbles, "So why keep discussing it – what's the point of the rest of this book of Vyasa's?"

The point is

The Vedantin answers, "Well, the Upanishads agree that we know Brahman in two aspects: there is the absolute Brahman with no distinguishing signs or modifications that we just mentioned, but also we can know Brahman in a limited way through the universe. So we have the idea of a qualified and an unqualified Brahman, and both are spoken of in various scriptures." He quotes many scriptures, as is his wont, including *Taittireya Aranyaka* (3:12:7):

> The supreme Self, which after creating all forms and giving them names (enters into them as individual souls and) continues to utter those names.[4]

"So," he continues, "we should realize that it is ignorance when we think of Brahman, or relate to Brahman as being modified or limited in any way, and it is in the state of ignorance that we practise meditation on Brahman. But according to the quality of the meditation we receive the result: liberation, higher states of awareness, or greater efficiency on the phenomenal plane of action. That's why *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (3:14:1) says: 'One becomes just what one meditates Him to be', and 'After departure from this world, a man becomes what he had willed to be, or meditated upon'."

The Vedantin is getting a bit carried away here but notices the bemused expressions of the people who have gathered to listen to this scholarly debate, and comes back to earth.

"So, the rest of the book is there to make it clear whether it is the qualified or unqualified Brahman that is being spoken of in the various references. We only learn through stages, so we do need the idea of the qualified Brahman, and we can be devoted to that aspect which appeals to us naturally. Through grasping one aspect of the qualified Brahman and then another we slowly advance, and will finally arrive at the unqualified Brahman which is our innermost self. But the point is, sometimes we get confused about what is just another star and which is the real Arundhati."

There is a pause for reflection and then someone does come forward with a doubt on that very topic of whether a particular description refers to the absolute Brahman, or just to a qualified form.

An abundance of bliss or a modification of bliss?

The new topic begins in order to clarify what is meant in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. First comes a discussion on what is

[4] *ibid*. Swami Gambhirananda, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Shankaracharya*, p. 62

meant by 'anandamaya'. Is it used to mean the subtlest kosha in the series of the *pancha koshas*, the five sheaths or bodies of a human being?[5] Or is 'anandamaya' here referring to the supreme Brahman as 'the Blissful One'?

In other words, is the anandamaya kosha just the subtlest part of the human vehicle, or is it itself the indwelling spirit, the *atma*, which is free from birth, death and the whole transmigration cycle. In Swami Gambhirananda's exact translation, the Vrittikara appears again:

> *Opponent (i.e. Vrittikara)*: The Blissful One must be a secondary self other than Brahman.
> Why?
> Because He is included in a series of secondary selfs constituted by food, etc.
> *Objection*: Even so, the Blissful One must be the primary Self, He being the inmost of all.
> *Opponent*: It cannot be so . . . by the term "full of Bliss (or Blissful)" is meant the transmigrating soul.
> *Vedantin*: That being the position it is said:[6]

12. *Aanandamayo'bhyaasaat (Aanandamayah-abhyaasaat)*: "Anandamaya, from repetition."

The commentary explains that sutra 12 means 'anandamaya' is repeated again and again in various ways in the Upanishads as a name of Brahman, the highest Self, and gives many quotations from *Taittiriya Upanishad* to support this position, such as (2:9:1):

> The enlightened man is not afraid of anything after realizing the Bliss of Brahman.

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[5] The five koshas are the *annamaya kosha*, the body made of food; *pranamaya kosha*, the body composed of prana; *manomaya kosha*, the body composed of mind; *vijnanamaya kosha*, the body composed of intuitive knowledge, and *anandamaya* kosha, the body composed of bliss.

[6] *ibid*. Swami Gambhirananda, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Shankaracharya*, pp. 64–65

The commentary then backtracks to counter the argument that the Blissful One must be a secondary self because it is one in a chain of selves (that is, the finest of the five koshas) by explaining that this series is only used like the technique to find the subtle star, Arundhati, by pointing out bigger stars that focus the attention in the right direction:

> The embodiedness of the Blissful One too is spoken of in the context of the successive embodiedness of the food-self and the rest; and hence, unlike the individual soul, the Blissful Self has no real embodiedness. Accordingly, the Blissful One is the supreme Self. [7]

13. *Vikaarashabdaanneti chenna praachuryaat (Vikaara-shabdaat-na-iti chet-na praachuryaat)*: "If it be argued that 'ananda-maya' is not Brahman because it is a word denoting modification, we say, 'No, for the word is used in the sense of abundance'."

The original commentary assumption was that the suffix *maya* in *anandamaya* was used to mean 'made of'. The new explanation is that *maya* in *anandamaya* should be understood as meaning 'abundance', not 'made up of'. This would refer to the abundance of bliss in Brahman and be another name of Brahman rather than referring to the subtlest modification of the human 'body' or 'vehicle' – anandamaya kosha.

So when *maya* is used in the sense of 'composed of', then *anandamaya* refers to the last of the kosha series. If maya is used in the sense of 'abundance of', then *anandamaya* refers to the Supreme Self, Brahman. This seems to be clear, and thus there seems to be a conclusion in the next sutra:

14. *Taddhetuvyapadeshaashcha (Tat-hetu-vyapadeshaat-cha)*: Swami Sivananda translates this as[8], "And because he is

[7] *ibid*. Swami Gambhirananda, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Shankaracharya*, p. 66

[8] Swami Sivananda, *Brahma Sutras*, 10th ed., Divine Life Society, UP, India,

declared to be the cause of it (that is, of bliss) therefore 'maya' denotes abundance or fullness."

Investigating Brahman

15. *Maantravarnikameva cha geeyate*: (Mantra-varnikam-eva cha geeyate) "And (the same Brahman) spoken of in the mantra (portion of the scripture) is spoken of (in the brahmana portion)."
16. *Netaro'nupapatteh (Na-itarah-anupapatteh)*: "The other (little self – the transmigrating being) is not the supreme Self because that is illogical."
17. *Bhedavyapadeshaachcha (Bheda-vyapadeshaat-cha)*: "And there is the assertion of difference (between the individual transmigrating soul and the supreme Self)."
18. *Kaamaachcha naanumaanaapekshaa (Kaamat-cha na-anumaana-apekshaa)*: "And due to the desire (of Brahman, 'I am one; let me be many') one cannot rely on the inference (that insentient Prakriti) is the cause of the universe."

Shankara's correction

Now finally we get to the critical sutra for seeing the correction of the ancient Vrittikara by our 'modern' Shankara. Vyasa's sutra (1:1:19) runs:

19. *Asminnasya cha tadyogam shaasti (Asmin-asya cha tat-yogam shaasti*: "Moreover the scripture *(shaasti)* teaches the absolute identity of this with this."

Now Shankara makes a correction to the original commentary (the arguments of which have been preserved for us in full in the present revised commentary). This underlines the respect given to the original views and shows that Shankara's correction is not undertaken lightly. It involves a detailed restatement of all the commentary on sutras from 1:1:12 to 1:1:19.

So perhaps what we are seeing here is Shankara correcting himself in the subtleties of realization for the author of our present text can hold back no longer:

(1:1:11–14) p. 40

> Shankara's correction: But we have to say this in this connection.

The driver is subtler than the vehicle

Shankara argues that for anandamaya, pranamaya, etc., one has to understand maya as meaning 'composed of', so why the sudden jump to 'abundance of' in the interpretation of anandamaya? The Vrittikara sticks to his guns:

> Here the Opponent (Vrittikara) says: It is but proper that the selfs made of food etc. should not be Brahman, since other selfs are mentioned for them which are successively more internal. But in the case of the Blissful One, no internal self is mentioned. Thereby the Blissful One becomes Brahman. A contrary supposition will lead to the fault of giving up something under consideration and adopting some other thing not under discussion.[9]

Our new Shankara is not impressed by this. He backtracks and first corrects the equation of Brahman with anandamaya in sutra 1:1:12, and continues reinterpreting the terse sutras of Vyasa up to 1:1:19. He clarifies that when *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2:5:2) speaks of Brahman and says, "Truly, joy is his head, enjoyment his right side, hilarity his left side, bliss, *ananda*, the trunk of the body (that is, the self), and Brahman is the tail that stabilizes", it is speaking metaphorically of Brahman as the underlying reality that supports everything else (including our innermost kosha, anandamaya). He spells it out for a while, but then instructs the reader to apply the gist of his correction regarding 'the tail' to sutras 1:1:13–18 as well.

This whole re-editing of the original *Brahma Sutra Bhashya* by Shankara in our extant version is usually glossed over but can we see the controversy as really being a re-

[9] Swami Gambhirananda (trans.), *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Shankaracharya*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, India, 1993 p. 72

interpretation of the Adi Shankaracharya by the Abhinava Shankaracharya? The understanding of Shankara as an avatara explains how his views and teachings change from time to time, how references from different centuries have been incorporated in the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, and also explains the different temporal sightings of him in the spiritual traditions of India and surrounding countries.

Appendix 3

MOHAMUDGARA

The *Mohamudgara* is also translated in full here; it is irresistible simply because it is so fresh, laughingly pointing out the snares which can entrap an aspirant, and it is so evocative of the spirit of sannyasa which the Shankara of legend exemplifies. It's a simple but moving poem exhorting dispassion from the attachments of the world and seems to have been intended to be a marching song for Shankara's group of wandering sannyasins although it is addressed to an old grammarian he met in Varanasi. *Moha* means delusion, *mudgara* means hammer, *dukrinkarane*, referring to 'grammatical rules', here symbolizes all secular knowledge.

The chorus is:

भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं मूढमते।
सम्प्राप्ते सन्निहिते मरणे नहि नहि रक्षति डुकृञ्करणे ॥
भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं।

Bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam moodhamate
Sampraapte sannihite marane nahi nahi rakshati dukrinkarane.
Bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam.

Seek Govinda, seek Govinda, seek Govinda oh careless-minded fool!

When the appointed time (death) comes, grammatical rules will surely not save you. Seek Govinda, seek Govinda.

मूढ जहीहि धनागमतृष्णां कुरु सद्बुद्धिं मनसि वितृष्णाम्।
यल्लभसे निजकर्मोपात्तं वित्तं तेन विनोदय चित्तम् ॥ 1 ॥

Moodha jaheehi dhanaagamatrishnaam kuru sadbuddhim manasi vitrishnaam
Yallabhase nijakarmopaattam vittam tena vinodaya chittam. (1)

Oh fool! Give up the thirst to possess wealth. Create in your mind thoughts of reality devoid of passions. Entertain your mind (be satisfied with) whatever you get as a reward for the past. *Bhaja Govindam . . .* seek Govinda.

नारीस्तनभरनाभिनिवेशं दृष्ट्वा-माया-मोहावेशम्।
एतन्मांस-वसादि-विकारं मनसि विचिन्तय बारम्बारम् ॥ 2 ॥

Naareestanabharanaabhinivesham drishtvaa-maayaa-mohaavesham
Etanmaamsa-vasaadi-vikaaram manasi vichintaya baarambaaram. (2)

Seeing the full bosom of a young maiden, and her navel, do not fall prey to maddening delusion. "This is just a modification of flesh and fat", think well thus in your mind again and again. *Bhaja Govindam . . .* seek Govinda.

नलिनीदलगतसलिलं तरलं तद्वज्जीवितमतिशय चपलम्।
विद्धि व्याध्यभिमानग्रस्तं लोकं शोकहतं च समस्तम् ॥ 3 ॥

Nalineedalagatasalilam taralam tadvajjeevitamatishaya chapalam
Viddhi vyaadhyabhimaanagrastam lokam shokahatam cha samastam. (3)

The water drop playing on a lotus petal has an extremely uncertain existence, so also is life ever unstable. Understand that this world is completely riddled by disease, pride and pangs of suffering. *Bhaja Govindam . . .* seek Govinda.

यावद्वित्तोपार्जनसक्तः तावत् निज परिवारो रक्तः।
पश्चात् धावति जर्जर देहे वार्तां पृच्छति कोऽपि न गेहे ॥4॥

Yaavat-vitta-upaarjana-saktah taavat nijaparivaro raktah
Pashchaat dhaavati jarjara dehe vaartaam prichchhati ko'pi na gehe. (4)

As long as you have the ability to earn and save, all your dependants are attached to you. Later on, when you have an old infirm body, no one cares to share a single word with you, even at your own house. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

यावत्पवनो निवसति देहे तावत्पृच्छति कुशलं गेहे।
गतवति वायौ देहापाये भार्या बिभ्यति तस्मिन्काये ॥5॥

Yaavat-pavano nivasati dehe taavat-prichchhati kushalam gehe
Gatavati vaayau dehaapaaye bhaaryaa bibhyati tasmin-kaaye. (5)

As long as the life breath dwells in the body, they enquire of your welfare at home. Once the breath leaves and the body decays, even your wife fears that very same body. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

बालस्तावत् क्रीडासक्तः तरुणस्तावत् तरुणीसक्तः।
वृद्धस्तावत् चिन्तामग्नः पारे ब्रह्मणि कोऽपि न लग्नः ॥6॥

Baalastaavat kreedaasaktah tarunastaavat taruneesaktah
Vriddhastaavat chintaamagnah paare brahmani ko'pi na lagnah. (6)

So long as one is in one's boyhood, one is attached to play. So long as one is a youth, one is attached to one's own young woman. So long as one is in old age, one is attached to anxiety. Yet no one, alas, is ever seen attached to the Supreme Brahman. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

का ते कान्ता कस्ते पुत्रः संसारोऽयं अतीव विचित्रः।
कस्य त्वं कः कुत आयातः तत्त्वं चिन्तय यदिदं भ्रातः ॥7॥

Kaa te kaantaa kaste putrah samsaaro'yam ateeva vichitrah
Kasya tvam kah kuta aayaatah tattvam chintayah yadidam bhraatah. (7)

Who is your wife? Who is your son? Supremely wonderful indeed is this samsara! Of whom are you? From where have you come? O brother, think of that truth alone here. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

सत्संगत्वे नि:संगत्वं नि:संगत्वे निर्मोहत्वं।
निर्मोहत्वे निश्चलतत्त्वं निश्चलतत्त्वे जीवन्मुक्ति: ॥ 8 ॥

Satsangatve nihsangatvam nihsangatve nirmohatvam
Nirmohatve nishchalatattvam nishchalatattve jeevanmuktih. (8)

Through the company of the good non-attachment arises, through non-attachment arises freedom from delusion, through freedom from delusion, the experience of immutable reality, from experiencing the immutable reality, the state of *jivanmukti* (liberated while alive). *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

वयसि गते क: कामविकार: शुष्के नीरे क: कासार:।
क्षीणे वित्ते क: परिवारो ज्ञाते तत्त्वे क: संसार: ॥ 9 ॥

Vayasi gate kah kaamavikaarah shushke neere kah kaasaarah
Ksheene vitte kah parivaaro jnaate tattve kah samsaarah. (9)

When that age has passed, where is lust and its play? When water has evaporated, where is the lake? When wealth is reduced, where is the retinue? When Truth is realized, where is samsara? *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

मा कुरु धन-जन-यौवन-गर्वं हरति निमेषात्काल: सर्वम्।
मायामयमिदमखिलं हित्वा ब्रह्म पदं त्वं प्रविश विदित्वा ॥ 10 ॥

Maa kuru dhana-jana-yauvana-garvam harati nimeshaat-kaalah sarvam
Maayaamayam-idam-akhilam hitvaa Brahmapadam tvam pravisha viditvaa. (10)

Take no pride in your possessions, in the people at your command, in your youthfulness – time loots away all these in a moment. Leaving aside all these, knowing their illusory nature, realize the state of Brahman and enter into it! *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

दिनमपि रजनी सायं प्रातः शिशिरवसन्तौ पुनरायातः।
कालः क्रीडति गच्छत्यायुः तदपि न मुञ्चति आशावायुः ॥ 11 ॥

Dinamapi rajanee saayam praatahs shishira-vasantau punaraayaatah
Kaalah kreedati gachchhatyaayuh tadapi na munchati aashaavaayuh. (11)

Day and night, dusk and dawn, winter and spring, they come and depart again and again. Time sports, life ebbs away, and still one doesn't leave the gusts of desire. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

का ते कान्ता धनगतचिन्ता वातुल किं तव नास्ति नियन्ता।
त्रिजगति सज्जन संगतिरेका भवति भवार्णवतरणे नौका ॥ 12 ॥

Kaa te kaantaa dhanagata-chintaa vaatula kim tava naasti niyantaa
Trijagati sajjana sangatirekaa bhavati bhavaarnava-tarane naukaa. (12)

Oh distracted one! Why worry about wife, wealth, etc.? Isn't the Ordainer there for you? In all the three worlds, it is the association with good people alone that can serve as a boat to cross the sea of change (birth and death). *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

जटिलो मुण्डी लुञ्चित केशः काषायाम्बर-बहुकृतवेषः।
पश्यन्नपि च न पश्यति मूढः उदर निमित्तं बहुकृत वेषः ॥ 13 ॥

Jatilo mundee lunchita keshah kaashaayaambara-bahukrita-veshah
Pashaynnapi cha na pashyati moodhah udara nimittam bahukrita veshah. (13)

One ascetic with matted locks, another with shaven head, another with hairs pulled out one by one, another parading in his geru robes – these are fools who though seeing do not see. Indeed, these different disguises (apparels) are only for their bellies. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

अंगं गलितं पलितं मुण्डं दशन विहीनं जातं तुण्डम्।
वृद्धो याति गृहीत्वा दण्डं तदपि न मुञ्चति आशापिण्डम् ॥ 14 ॥

Angam galitam palitam mundam dashana viheenam jaatam tundam
Vriddho yaati griheetvaa dandam tadapi na munchati aashaa pindam. (14)

The body has become worn out, the hair has turned grey, the mouth has become toothless, the old man moves about leaning on his staff. Even then he doesn't leave the bundle of his desires. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

अग्रे वह्निः पृष्ठे भानू रात्रौ चिबुक-समर्पित-जानुः।
करतलभिक्षा तरुतलवासः तदपि न मुञ्चति आशापाशः ॥ 15 ॥

Agre vahnih prishthe bhaanoo raatrau chibuka-samapita-jaanuh
Karatala-bhikshaa tarutala-vaasah tadapi na munchati aashaapaashah. (15)

In front of the fire, the sun at his back, late at night he sits resting his chin on his knees. He receives alms in his own scooped palms and lives under the shelter of some tree yet the noose of desire spares him not. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

कुरुते गंगासागरगमनं व्रत परिपालनमथवा दानम्।
ज्ञानविहीनः सर्वमतेन मुक्तिः न भवति जन्मशतेन ॥ 16 ॥

Kurute gangaa-saagara-gamanam vrata paripaalanam-athavaa daanam
Jnaanaviheenah sarvamatena muktih na bhavati janmashatena. (16)

One may go on a pilgrimage to where the Ganga meets the ocean, observe vows or give gifts away in charity; if one is devoid of first hand experience of Truth, then according to all schools of thought one gains no release, even in a hundred years. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

सुर-मन्दिर-तरु-मूल-निवास: शय्या भूतलमजिनं वास:।
सर्व-परिग्रह-भोग-त्याग: कस्य सुखं न करोति विराग: ॥ 17 ॥

Sura-mandira-taru-moola-nivaasah shayyaa bhootalam-ajinam vaasah
Sarva-parigraha-bhoga-tyaagah kasya sukham na karoti viraagah. (17)

Sheltering in temples, under some tree, sleeping on the bare ground, wearing a deer skin, renouncing all idea of possession and the thirst to enjoy – to whom will *vairagya* (dispassion) not bring happiness? *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

योगरतो वा भोगरतो वा संगरतो वा संगविहीन:।
यस्य ब्रह्मणि रमते चित्तं नन्दति नन्दति नन्दति एव ॥ 18 ॥

Yogarato vaa bhogarato vaa sangarato vaa sangaviheenah
Yasya brahmane ramate chittam nandati nandati nandati eva. (18)

Let one revel in yoga or revel in bhoga, let one seek enjoyment in company or revel in solitude away from the crowd – he whose mind revels in Brahman, he enjoys, he enjoys, truly, he alone enjoys. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

भगवद्गीता किञ्चिदधीता गंगा-जल-लव-कणिका-पीता।
सकृदपि येन मुरारिसमर्चा तस्य यम: किं कुरुते चर्चाम् ॥ 19 ॥

Bhagavad Geetaa kinchit-adheetaa gangaa-jala lava-kanikaa-peetaa
Sakridapi yena muraari samarchaa tasya yamah kim kurute charchaam. (19)

To one who has studied the *Bhagavad Gita* even a little, who has sipped at least a drop of Ganga water, who has worshipped Lord Murari (destroyer of Mura) at least once – in him there is no discussion (quarrel) with Yama (the Lord of death). *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

पुनरपि जननं पुनरपि मरणं पुनरपि जननीजठरे शयनम्।
इह संसारे बहुदुस्तारे कृपयापारे पाहि मुरारे ॥ 20 ॥

Punarapi jananam punarapi maranam punarapi jananee-jathare shayanam
Iha samsaare bahu-dustaare kripayaa-apaare paahi muraare. (20)

Again birth, again death and again lying in the mother's womb – this process of samsara is very hard to cross over – save me Murari through your infinite kindness. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

रथ्याचर्पट-विरचित-कन्थः पुण्यापुण्य-विवर्जित-पन्थः।
योगी योग नियोजित चित्तः रमते बालोन्मत्तवदेव ॥ 21 ॥

Rashyaacharpata virachita kanthah punya-apunya vivarjita-panthah
Yogee yoga niyojita chittah ramate baalonmattavadeva. (21)

The yogi who wears only a shawl rejected by others, and walks the path beyond merit and demerit, whose mind is joined in perfect yoga with its aim, he revels (in God-consciousness) and lives thereafter as a child or as a madman. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

कस्त्वं कोऽहं कुत आयातः का मे जननी को मे तातः।
इतिपरिभावय सर्वमसारं विश्वं त्यक्त्वा स्वप्नविचारम् ॥ 22 ॥

Kastvam ko'ham kuta aayaatah kaa me jananee ko me taatah
Iti-paribhaavaya sarvamasaaram vishvam tyaktvaa svapna-vichaaram. (22)

Who are you? Who am I? From where did I come? Who is my mother? Who is my father? Thus enquire, leaving aside

vishvam (the world of sense experiences), as essenceless and a mere dreamland, born of imagination. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

त्वयि मयि चान्यत्रैको विष्णुः व्यर्थं कुप्यसि सर्वसहिष्णुः।
सर्वस्मिन्नपि पश्यात्मानं सर्वत्रोत्सृज भेदाज्ञानम् ॥ 23 ॥

Tvayi mayi chaanyatra-eko vishnuh vyartham kupyasi sarvasahishnuh
Sarvasminnapi pashyaatmaanam sarvatrotsrija bhedaajnaanam. (23)

In you, in me, and in all other places too, there is but one all-pervading Reality (Vishnu). Being impatient, you are unnecessarily getting angry with me. Seeking the Self everywhere, lift the sense-of-difference (plurality), born out of ignorance. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

शत्रौ मित्रे पुत्रे बन्धौ मा कुरु यत्नं विग्रहसन्धौ।
भव समचित्तः सर्वत्र त्वं वांछसि अचिराद् यदि विष्णुत्वम् ॥ 24 ॥

Shatrau mitre putre bandhau maa kuru yatnam vigraha-sandhau
Bhava samachittah sarvatra tvam vaanchhasi achiraad yadi vishnutvam. (24)

Strive not. Waste not your energy to fight against or make friends with your enemy, friend, son or relative. If you want to attain the Vishnu-status soon, be equal-minded under all circumstances. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

कामं क्रोधं लोभं मोहं त्यक्त्वात्मानं भावय कोऽहम्।
आत्मज्ञानविहीना मूढाः ते पच्यन्ते नरकनिगूढाः ॥ 25 ॥

Kaamam krodham lobham moham tyaktvaatmaanam bhaavaya ko'ham
Aatmajnaana-viheenaa moodhaah te pachyante narakanigoodhaah. (25)

Leaving desire, anger, greed and delusion, the seeker sees in the Self "I am He". They are fools who don't have self

knowledge, and consequently they are tortured as captives in hell. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

गेयं गीतानामसहस्रं ध्येयं श्रीपतिरूपमजस्रम्।
नेयं सज्जनसंगे चित्तं देयं दीनजनाय च वित्तम् ॥ 26॥

Geyam geetaa-naama-sahasram dhyeyam shreepati-roopam-ajasram
Neyam sajjana-sange chittam deyam deenajanaaya cha vittam. (26)

The *Bhagavad Gita* and *Sahasranaam* are to be chanted, the form of the Lord of Lakshmi is to be meditated upon, the mind is to be led towards the company of the good, wealth is to be distributed to the needy. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

सुखत: क्रियते रामाभोग: पश्चाद्धन्त शरीरे रोग:।
यद्यपि लोके मरणं शरणं तदपि न मुञ्चति पापाचरणम् ॥ 27॥

Sukhatah kriyate raamaabhogah pashchaaddhanta shareere rogah
Yadyapi loke maranam sharanam tadapi na munchati paapaacharanam. (27)

Very readily one indulges in carnal pleasure, later on, alas, come diseases of the body. Even though in the world the ultimate end is death, even so man doesn't leave his sinful behavior. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

अर्थमनर्थं भावय नित्यं नास्ति तत: सुखलेश: सत्यम्।
पुत्रादपि धनभाजां भीति: सर्वत्रैषा विहिता रीति: ॥ 28॥

Arthamanartham bhaavaya nityam naasti tatah sukhaleshah satyam
Putraadapi dhanabhaajaam bheetih sarvatraishaa vihitaa reetih. (28)

'Wealth is calamitous', reflect thus constantly; the truth is that there is no happiness at all to be got from it. For the rich, there is fear even of one's own son – this is the way of wealth everywhere. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

प्राणायामं प्रत्याहारं नित्यानित्यविवेकविचारम्।
जाप्यसमेतसमाधिविधानं कुरु अवधानं महदवधानम् ॥ 29 ॥

Praanaayaamam pratyaahaaram nitya-anitya-viveka-vichaaram
Jaapya-sameta-samaadhi-vidhaanam kuru avadhaanam mahat-avadhaanam. (29)

Pranayama (control of life energy) *pratyahara* (sense withdrawal) *nitya-anitya-viveka* (discrimination between the permanent and non-permanent) along with *japa* (mantra repetition) and *samadhi* – perform these with care, with great care. *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

पुनरपि रजनी पुनरपि दिवसः पुनरपि पक्षः पुनरपि मासः।
पुनरपि अयनं पुनरपि वर्षं तदपि न मुञ्चति आशामर्षम् ॥ 30 ॥

Punarapi rajanee punarapi divasah punarapi pakshah punarapi maasah
Punarapi ayanam punarapi varsham tadapi na munchati aashaamarsham. (30)

The night, the day, the *paksha* (lunar fortnight) the *maasah* (month) the *ayan* (six-monthly sun cycle) and the *varsha* (year) pass again and again. But still, even then, why do you not leave the attachment to desire? *Bhaja Govindam* . . . seek Govinda.

गुरु-चरणाम्बुज-निर्भर-भक्तः संसारादचिराद्भव मुक्तः।
सेन्द्रिय-मानस-नियमादेवं द्रक्ष्यसि निजहृदयस्थं देवम् ॥ 31 ॥

Guru charana-ambuja-nirbhara-bhakta samsaaraat-achitaraat-bhava muktah
Sendriya-maanasa-niyamat-evam drakshyasi nija-hridayastham devam. (31)

Oh only by becoming an ardent and fearless devotee at the feet of the Guru may you become liberated from this dense samsara. It is only through disciplining the senses

and the mind that you come to experience the Being of Light who lives in your own heart.

भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं मूढमते।
सम्प्राप्ते सन्निहिते मरणे नहि नहि रक्षति डुकृञ्करणे ॥
भज गोविन्दं भज गोविन्दं।

Bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam moodhamate
Sampraapte sannihite marane nahin nahin rakshati dukrinkarane
Bhaja Govindam, bhaja Govindam.

Seek Govinda, seek Govinda, seek Govinda oh careless-minded fool!
When the appointed time (death) comes, grammatical rules will surely not save you. Seek Govinda, seek Govinda!

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Phonetic Pronunciation Guide

अ	*a*	*as in* mica
आ ा	*aa*	far
इ ि	*i*	hill
ई ी	*ee*	police
उ ु	*u*	pull
ऊ ू	*oo*	fool
ऋ ृ	*ri*	clarity
ॠ ॄ	*ree*	marine
ऌ ॢ	*lri*	rivalry
ॡ ॣ	*lree*	rivalry (*prolonged*)
ए े	*e*	prey
ऐ ै	*ai*	aisle
ओ ो	*o*	go
औ ौ	*au*	cow
ं	*m*	rum
ँ	*m*	romp
ः	*h*	bah
क्	*k*	meek
ख्	*kh*	inkhorn
ग्	*g*	go
घ्	*gh*	yoghurt
ङ्	*n*	sing
च्	*ch*	check
छ्	*chh*	churchhill
ज्	*j*	jab
झ्	*jh*	hedgehog
ञ्	*n*	canyon
ट्	*t*	true
ठ्	*th*	anthill
ड्	*d*	do
ढ्	*dh*	redhead
ण्	*n*	gong
त्	*t*	water (*dental*)
थ्	*th*	nuthook
द्	*d*	bud
ध्	*dh*	adhere (*more dental*)
न्	*n*	not
प्	*p*	pay
फ्	*ph*	photo
ब्	*b*	rub
भ्	*bh*	abhor
म्	*m*	map
य्	*y*	yoga
र्	*r*	red
ल्	*l*	bull
व्	*v*	vice
श्	*sh*	shield
ष्	*sh*	assure
स्	*s*	sin
ह्	*h*	hit
क्ष्	*ksh*	kshatriya
त्र्	*tr*	track (*dental*)
ज्ञ्	*jn*	jnana

Glossary

A

Abhasa – reflection; the shining forth; immanent aspect of the ultimate reality, Brahman; in Vedanta the manifest world is said to be merely an appearance or abhasa; a glimpse; phenomenon

Abhasavada – the view that the universe consists of appearances which are nevertheless real in the sense that they are aspects of the ultimate reality

Abhava – not being, non-existence, non-entity; absence; failure; annihilation, death

Abhaya – freedom from fear or danger; secure, safe

Abheda – no sense of duality; non-separateness; non-difference, non-distinction, undivided; identity, sameness, oneness; monism

Abheda Jnana – knowledge of the identity of the individual (atman) with the absolute (Brahman)

Abhimana – egoism; identification with the body; conceit

Abhinivesha – fear of death; instinctive clinging to worldly life and bodily enjoyments and the fear that one might be cut off from them by death; a type of ignorance; one of the five kleshas described by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*; see Klesha

Abhisheka – ceremonial bath; consecration; a most important part of diksha in Buddhist and tantric traditions

Abhyasa – constant and steady practice without any interruption; to remain established in the effort of sadhana

Achala – steady, immovable, fixed, permanent

Achara – conduct; good behaviour; custom, an established rule of conduct, usual formality; a lifestyle

Acharya – one knowing or teaching the acharas; teacher, preceptor, spiritual guide
Acharya Upasanam – service to the acharaya
Achetana – unconscious
Achyuta – firm, not giving way, permanent; a name of Vishnu, a name of Sri Krishna
Adesha – order, command, instruction; precept, rule; advice
Adhara – basis, that which supports, foundation, substratum, receptacle; Brahman
Adharma – disharmony; not fulfilling one's natural role in life; unrighteousness; wickedness, injustice, sin; all that is contrary to dharma and the law; demerit
Adhikari – eligible one, qualified person
Adhishthana – background, support, basis, substratum, repository; underlying truth or essence (Brahman); power of control
Adi – beginning; first, primary; 'and so on' (of the same kind or nature, etc.)
Adivasi – tribal people, original inhabitants
Advaita – not divided into two parts, the feeling of non-duality; identity or non-difference; non-dual experience; especially referring to Brahman/atman; see Vedanta
Agama – historical sacred literature, 'that which has come down' or literally 'to carry on' or 'to go forward'; the philosophy and scriptures of tantra where Lord Shiva teaches his consort Parvati; esoteric tradition of tantra suitable for the present age (Kali yuga); testimony or proof of an acceptable authority because the source of knowledge has been checked and found trustworthy; one of the three sources of right knowledge (pramana) enumerated by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*; traditional doctrine or precept; secret writing or scripture
Agami Karma – karma produced now to be fructified in the future; see Karma
Agni – fire; the god of fire; fire of the stomach, digestive faculty; metabolism; the third mahabhuta in Samkhya philosophy with the special property of form; see Pancha Mahabhuta
Agni Tattwa – fire element, fire principle; see Pancha Mahabhuta

Aham – 'I' or ego; the personal pronoun

Aham Brahmasmi – 'I am Brahman', one of the four great vedic statements (maha vakya) used by a meditator as an aid in reaching the supreme state of existence. Found in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* of the *Yajurveda* it is also called anubhava vakya; see Maha Vakya

Ahamkara – 1. egoism or self-conceit; the self-arrogating principle 'I', 'I am-ness', self-consciousness, 2. sattwic ahamkara: egoism composed in the sense of goodness and virtue; rajasic ahamkara: dynamic egoism with passion and pride; tamasic ahamkara: egoism as expressed in ignorance and inertia, 3. universal state of existence, ceaselessly creating itself; universal 'I am' of which the individual sense of 'I-ness' is a part or manifestation, 4. in Vedanta: the base for maya's power of projection, 5. in Samkhya philosophy: the third of the eight elements of creation, i.e. the conception of individuality; the principle responsible for the limitations, division and variety in the manifest world, 6. in yoga: the rajasic state of consciousness limiting awareness of existence, 7. the pure ego that identifies itself with Brahman or the absolute

Ahara – third basic instinct, craving food or nourishment; food, nourishment, anything that nourishes the body/mind; see Pravritti

Ahimsa – absence of violence from within; non-violence; harmlessness, abstaining from killing or giving pain in thought, word or deed; general attitude of welfare for the entire world; one of the yamas as described in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; see Yama

Ajapa – involuntary, unconscious repetition, applied especially to the mantra or sound made in breathing, which is 'recited' 21,600 times every 24 hours

Ajapa Japa – continuous, spontaneous repetition of mantra; meditation practice in which mantra is coordinated with breath; a powerful technique for sense withdrawal which can induce meditation

Ajapa Mantra – involuntary, unconscious repetitive sound; 'soham' and 'hamso' (I am the universal spirit)

Ajna – command, order
Ajna Chakra – the third eye, the command or monitoring psychic/pranic centre, also known as the guru chakra. The centre of individual consciousness, it enables mind to mind communication with the external guru and one's inner self. It represents intuition or the inner pure awareness engendered by the confluence of ida, pingala and sushumna nadis. Physically, the concentration point is situated at the medulla oblongata at the top of the spinal column in the midbrain, corresponding to the pineal gland; see Chakra; see Aum, Om; see Atmic Triveni
Ajnana – ignorance, noncognizance; unawareness; especially spiritual ignorance (avidya) which makes one consider oneself distinct from the supreme reality; see Klesha
Akarta – non-doer
Akartavya – that which should not be done
Akasha – 1. element of ether, space, sky; to shine, to appear, 2. primordial state of existence, 3. in Samkhya philosophy: the first mahabhuta, its special property is sound, 4. the three internal spaces most often used in meditation are chidakasha, daharakasha and hridayakasha; see Pancha Mahabhuta
Akasha Tattwa – space element; ether principle; see Pancha Mahabhuta
Akhanda – unbroken, indivisible, whole, entire
Akhara – a place for training in combat for sannyasins; headquarters of the Naga sect
Alakha – which can not be seen; flame; inner illumination
Alakh Bara – 'invisible boundary'; place where paramahamsa sannyasins live in seclusion; a retreat
Aloka – luminous; light; investigation (in the light of)
Aloka – not of this dimension; see Loka
Amalaka – the tree Emblic myrobalan, whose fruit is good for the eyes according to ayurvedic medicine
Anadi – beginningless
Anahata – 'unstruck' or 'unbeaten' sound heard by yogis; see Nada
Anahata Chakra – psychic centre in the region of the heart, the vibration or 'beat' of which regulates life from birth to

death; corresponds to the cardiac plexus in the physical body; corresponds to hridayakasha in meditative practice; centre of emotions which, when developed, gives the psychic force to materialize desires; centre where Shiva and Shakti unite; see Chakra; see Granthi

Ananda – pleasure, happiness; pure unalloyed bliss; state of consciousness (in yoga practice); in Vedanta: a name of Shiva; one of the three attributes of the ultimate principle; see Sachchidananda

Anandamaya – the supreme state of bliss; the supreme consciousness; fullness of existence; composed of bliss; plenitude or abundance of bliss

Anandamaya Kosha – the state of bliss attained in samadhi; subtler sphere of existence, consciousness; the innermost wrapper or sheath (kosha) of the embodied spirit; causal body; see Pancha Kosha; see Karanasharira

Anekantavada – Jaina understanding justifying the different aims of all beings

Anga – limb or part of the body; a constituent part; a step

Anirvachaniya – inexpressible, beyond words

Anna – food

Annamaya Kosha – sheath or body of matter; the sphere of existence created by food, maintained by food and which ultimately becomes food, i.e. the body; see Pancha Kosha

Antah, Antar – inner, internal

Antah Chatushtaya – fourfold internal organ or mind; the inner equipment in its four aspects: manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara; see Antahkarana

Antahkarana – inner organ, instrument or tool of consciousness; mind; see Manas; see Buddhi; see Chitta; see Ahamkara

Antarmukha – introspective; gaze turned inwards

Antaryami – inner ruler; the supreme being present in every object and guiding all creatures

Anubhava – direct perception or cognition, knowledge derived from personal observation or experiment; experience; intuitive consciousness (self-realization); personal spiritual experience

Anubhava Advaita – actual living experience of oneness
Anubhuti – experience
Ap, Apas – water; the liquid state of matter; in Samkhya philosophy, the fourth mahabhuta with the special property of taste; see Pancha Mahabhuta
Apara – another; ordinary; opposite of para
Apara Brahman – Brahman with attributes or qualities (saguna Brahman), personal God (Ishwara)
Apara Vairagya – lower kind of vairagya or dispassion denoting detachment from the objects of pleasure; see Para Vairagya
Apara Vidya – intellectual (or lower) knowledge of the Vedas; intellectual knowledge
Apara – all knowledge except spiritual knowledge; worldly knowledge; ordinary
Aparigraha – freedom from covetousness; abstention from greed; non-receiving of gifts conducive to luxury; without possessions or belongings; one of the five yamas described by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as a preliminary discipline of yoga; see Yama
Aparokshanubhuti – direct, actual experience; state of intuitive experience; literally 'not indirect experience'
Apas Tattwa – water element; water principle
Aradhana – to be fully immersed in worship of the deity with intense reverence
Aranya, Aranyam – forest; the name of one of the 10 orders of sannyasins founded by Adi Shankaracharya; see Dashnami Sampradaya
Aranyaka – being in or relating to a forest; wild; third part of the Vedas. These texts are contemplative ancient scriptures containing subtle mystical interpretations of vedic rituals composed in the forest by rishis; transition from ritual to philosophy; see Veda
Ardha – half
Ardhanarishwara, Ardhanareshvara – form of Shiva which is half-male and half-female; Shiva and Shakti united in one form; concept of ida and pingala nadis in yoga philosophy
Arjuna – name of the third Pandava, he was the son of Indra and Kunti; in the *Bhagavad Gita* he received a divine revelation from Lord Krishna

Artha – accomplishment; attainment in all spheres of life; material need; wealth; in yoga philosophy, the object of meditation; the basis for the mind; see Purushartha

Arundhati – name of the wife of Vasishtha (one of the seven rishis). Like her husband, she was the guide and controller of Raghu's line in her own right; the morning star personified as the wife of Vasishtha. The star Arundhati is rarely visible to the naked eye; therefore, to point it out a very big star nearby is shown. That star is then rejected and a smaller star is pointed out and so on, until the actual Arundhati is located. This method of leading from the gross to the more subtle is called Arundhati Darshana Nyaya

Asakta – unattached, unselfish

Asakti – attachment

Asambhavana – spiritual doubt, one of the obstacles (pratibandha) that stands in the way of self-realization; lack of respect; impossibility of comprehending

Asamprajnata Samadhi – stage of samadhi where the traces of the mind (samskaras) become active according to their intensity; samadhi which is experienced between the different phases of samprajnata samadhi; see Samprajnata Samadhi; see Samskara

Asamskrita – uncultured

Asana – in raja yoga, a physical posture in which one is at ease and in harmony with oneself; the third limb of yoga as described by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*; seat

Asanga – non-attachment; freedom from ties

Asat – not being or existing, not manifest; in Vedanta, the passive aspect of the ultimate principle, Brahman

Ashaya – receptacle, abode; place where the residue of karmas and unfulfilled desires or experiences are stored in a particular state of mind; karmic stock; mind; heart; intention

Ashram – place for ascetism and spiritual practice under the guidance of a guru; place for hard work externally and internally

Ashrama – hermitage, hut, cell, dwelling or abode of ascetism and spiritual practice; stage, order, or period of life, of which there are four: brahmacharya or studentship, grihastha or

household life, vanaprastha or forest-dwelling, sannyasa or total renunciation; the name of one of the 10 orders of sannyasins founded by Adi Shankaracharya; see Dashnami Sampradaya

Ashtanga Yoga – the eight limbs of yoga described by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*: 1. yama, 2. niyama, 3. asana, 4. pranayama, 5. pratyahara, 6. dharana, 7. dhyana, 8. samadhi

Ashtashraddha – eight funeral rites performed for all worldly relations, including one's previous self; ceremony performed when taking initiation into sannyasa

Asmi – I am, I exist

Asmita – sense of doership; egoism; one of the five causes of affliction (kleshas) described by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*; awareness of 'I am' superimposed on the body, action and mind; see Klesha

Asmita Samadhi – the last state of samprajnata samadhi attained by dissolution of the ego; merging of body, mind and soul; samadhi with the seed of individual self-awareness; superconscious state immediately below seedless samadhi (nirbija samadhi) see Samprajnata Samadhi

Asteya – honesty, not stealing; one of the yamas of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; see Yama

Astra – projectile weapon, like an arrow or a spear

Astradhari – weapon holder

Asura – demon, evil spirit; common name for the enemies of gods

Atharva Veda – fourth vedic text containing the tantric concepts and the collection of mantras and spells; see Veda

Atma, Atman – personal self; one's own self beyond mind and body; also called supreme consciousness, spirit, soul, etc.; the seer of turiya (reality) according to *Mandukya Upanishad*

Atmabhava – feeling of unity with all; seeing the atman (soul) equally in all beings

Atmajna – one who knows the self; seer with self-knowledge

Atma Jnana – direct knowledge of the self; see Brahma Jnana

Atmanatmaviveka – discrimination between the self and the not-self

Atma Vichara – enquiring into the self

Atmavidya – knowledge of the inner self
Atmic Triveni – Triveni is the place near Prayaga where the river Ganges (Ganga) joins the Yamuna and the underground Saraswati river. Ajna chakra is the atmic triveni where ida, pingala and sushumna nadis meet at the eyebrow centre, and meditation at this centre is the real bath for sannyasins and yogins; see Kumbhamela
Aum, Om – universal mantra; in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* repetition of Aum and meditation on its meaning is the practice resulting in union with Ishwara; in Vedanta, Aum is regarded as Shabda Brahman and as the seed of the Vedas; in *Mandukya Upanishad*, the 'A' of Aum is explained as the waking state of consciousness, the 'u' as the subconscious, the 'm' as the unconscious and the whole reverberation to represent the superconscious state; see Jagrat; see Swapna; see Sushupti; see Turiya
Avadhuta, Avadhoota – one who is free from all worldly attachments or mental illusions; an ascetic who has renounced the world and is usually naked; the sixth order of sannyasa; the highest state of asceticism or tapas; see Sannyasa
Avahana – invocation using mantras so the deity manifests during the time of worship
Avarana – covering, concealing; veil or covering which hides or excludes part of the reality; veil of ignorance; one of the two major powers of maya
Avastha – state of consciousness or condition of the mind; position; circumstances
Avasthatraya – three states of consciousness: jagrat or waking, swapna or dream, and sushupti or deep sleep
Avatara – descent, advent or incarnation of God. There are 10 widely acknowledged avataras of Vishnu: Matsya (the fish), Kurma (the tortoise), Varaha (the boar), Narasimha (the man-lion), Vamana (the dwarf), Parashurama (Rama with an axe), Rama (hero of the epic *Ramayana*), Krishna (hero of the epic *Mahabharata* and teacher of Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*), Buddha and Kalki. However Vyasa is also considered to be an avatara of Lord Vishnu and Shankaracharya is considered to be an avatara of Lord Shiva

Avidya – ignorance; lack of conscious awareness; mistaking the non-eternal for the eternal; the chief of the five kleshas or sources of trouble and confusion described by Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. In Vedanta, it is a mistake that considers the non-eternal, impure, evil and non-atman to be eternal, pure, good and atman; illusion personified or Maya; one of the five restricting cloaks of maya; see Klesha

Avinashi – indestructible

Avyakta – not manifest or apparent; uncreated; undeveloped; imperceptible; indistinct; inarticulate; undetermined; unknown; a name of Prakriti

Ayam Atma Brahma – literally 'this soul is Brahman' or 'this self is the absolute', the great statement of the identity between the individual and supreme soul found in the *Mandukya Upanishad* of the *Atharva Veda*; see Maha Vakya

B

Badarayana – founder of Vedanta philosophy as expounded in the *Shariraka Sutra*, also known as the *Brahma Sutra* or *Vedanta Sutra*. Some scholars contend that Badarayana is identical with Vyasa, (Vedavyasa) the celebrated sage who is regarded as the original compiler and arranger of the Vedas and other portions of sacred Hindu literature. An incarnation of Vishnu; see Vyasa

Badrinath – also known as the 'Valley of the Gods', a high altitude valley in the Himalayas where Jyotirmath is situated; see Jyotirmath

Bahir – outside, external

Bahudaka – supported by many; second stage of sannyasa; literally 'having much water'; a mendicant who begs for food at a bathing ghat; see Sannyasa

Bahusyam – literally 'may I be many', enunciated by Brahman in the Vedas explaining the cause of creation as being a conscious entity; see Ekoham Bahusyam

Bandha – binding, tying; connection, union; psycho-muscular energy locks which close the pranic exits (like throat, anus, etc.); psychic locks that concentrate the flow of energy in the body at one point or plexus; postural contraction of the body; see Mudra

Bhagavad Gita – 'divine song', Lord Krishna's discourse to Arjuna delivered on the battlefield of Kurukshetra during the great Mahabharata war, a major source of Hindu philosophy, containing the essence of the Upanishads and yoga; see Prasthanatraya; see Sthitaprajna; see Mahabharata

Bhagavan – illustrious one; God, deity

Bhajan – devotional song, praise, hymn; adoration, worship

Bhakta – devotee

Bhakti – complete devotion to the higher reality of life; love for all beings; devotion as service; channelling of emotion to a higher force

Bhakti Marga – the way or path to realization through adoration of a personal God; a higher principle of love expressed in positive actions

Bhakti Yoga – yoga of devotion, channelling emotional energy to a higher reality of life; a systematic path with nine steps or stages expanding, strengthening and purifying the emotions

Bharata – name of the son of Dushyanta and Shakuntala, who became a universal monarch. India was called Bharata after him

Bharati – female descendant of Bharata; without bondage; adept in Brahma Vidya; an incarnation of the goddess Saraswati; the wife of Mandan Mishra whom Adi Shankaracharya defeated in a debate; the name of one of the 10 orders of sannyasins founded by Adi Shankaracharya dedicated to preserving knowledge; see Dashnami Sampradaya; see Ubhaya Bharati; see Sureshwara

Bhasha – speech, language; dialect

Bhashya – commentary, learned text discussing a particular scripture

Bhaskara – making light, shining; the sun; a famous philosopher who wrote a commentary on the *Brahma Sutras* of Vyasa and was very critical of Shankaracharya

Bhasma – ash from a sacrificial fire; sacred ash smeared on the body

Bhava – becoming, being, existence; feeling; condition; state, inclination or disposition of mind

Bhaya – second basic instinct, fear; fear of death; see Klesha

Bheda – pass through, pierce; differentiate; purify
Bheda Buddhi – the intellect that creates differences; the relative (vyavaharika) buddhi that diversifies everything as opposed to the absolute (paramarthika) buddhi that unifies everything
Bhiksha – alms; offerings
Bhikshu – beggar, mendicant, monk
Bhoga – experience and craving for pleasure; worldly enjoyment, delight; object of pleasure; food
Bhokta – one who enjoys
Bhoota – see Bhuta
Bhrumadhya – trigger point for ajna chakra located at the eyebrow centre
Bhuh Loka – terrestrial, mortal plane of existence, also called jiva loka; Earth; see Loka
Bhujanga – a serpent, a snake
Bhukti – material enjoyment
Bhumi, Bhoomi – the earth, ground, place; degree; situation
Bhupura – the outer square and protective force of a yantra
Bhuta – existing, real; an element or elemental; state of existence, being; what has come into being; an entity as opposed to the unmanifest; the five elementary constituents of the universe: earth, water, fire, air, space (ether); see Mahabhuta
Bhuvah Loka, Bhuvarloka – intermediate realm between earth and heaven, astral plane of existence; see Loka
Bija, Beeja – seed, source; origin
Bija Mantra, Beeja Mantra – seed sound, when repeated mentally the seed thus planted in the mind germinates into one-pointedness; a basic mantra or vibration
Bijakshara, Beejakshara – the root letter or seed letter which contains the latent power of the mantra
Bindu – point; dot denoting the 'n' or 'm' vowel sounds in Sanskrit; seed, source, drop; the basis from which emanated the first principle (maha tattwa) according to the tantra shastra; psychic centre located in the brain; the most important psychic centre in nada yoga; top of the head, where Hindu brahmins wear their tuft of hair; semen
Bindu Visarga – literally the drop of special fluid secreted from

the top back of the head; centre or source of individual creation from where psychic vibrations first emanate; the flow of bindu

Bodha, Bodhi – spiritual wisdom, knowledge, intelligence; awakening

Bodhisattwa – one whose essence is perfect knowledge; one who does not leave the body after reaching nirvana, but waits in order to serve and help mankind

Brahma, Brahman – 1. God as creator, one of the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshwara (or Shiva), 2. Hiranyagarbha or cosmic intelligence; eternal, omnipresent principle of existence or ultimate reality. The all-pervading 'something' or 'nothing' from which all time, space and creatures are uninterruptedly being created. According to Vedantins, Brahman is both the efficient (nimitta) and the material (upadana) cause of the visible universe, from which all manifest things are produced and into which they are absorbed, 3. the sacred syllable Aum (Om), 4. the Vedas; see Aum; see Veda

Brahmacharin – one who is constantly reveling in Brahman (reflecting on the pure self, the supreme state of existence); student vowed to celibacy and continence; a person in the first quarter of life; see Ashrama

Brahmacharya – conduct suitable for proceeding to the highest state of existence, especially continence or absolute control of sensual impulses. One of the yamas described by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras* as resulting in indomitable courage (virya); see Yama

Brahmacharya Ashrama – first stage of life up to 25 years according to the ancient vedic tradition, devoted to study and learning; see Ashrama

Brahma Jnana – realization or immediate knowledge of Brahman

Brahmana – of the priestly caste; a person whose life is dedicated to the study of the Vedas and dispensation of the knowledge of Brahman and is thus qualified to act as a priest in vedic rituals; one of the four guilds or divisions of the caste system in India; integral part of the Vedas which elucidates the path of ritual to be followed by householders and explains the meaning and use of vedic hymns; see Varna; see Yaju; see Veda

Brahmanishtha – one who is established in the direct knowledge of Brahman

Brahma Sutras – classical Vedantic scriptures written by Veda Vyasa and commented upon by Adi Shankaracharya in his *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*; see Prasthanatraya

Brahma Vidya – science of the self; knowledge of Brahman (the supreme existence); study to attain real knowledge

Brahmin – see Brahmana

Brahmi Vritti – the aklishta (not painful) vritti that leads to identification with the drashta (witnessing consciousness or Brahman); spiritual aspect of the vrittis, the self-aware, individual consciousness; see Chitta Vritti

Brihadaranyaka – literally 'the great teaching from the forest'; name of an Upanishad from the *Shatapatha Brahmana* of the *Yajurveda*. It discusses the identity of the individual atma (soul) in relation to the universal self, different modes of worship, religion and meditation; see Aham Brahmasmi

Brihat – large, big, absolute

Buddha – the enlightened one

Buddhi – discerning, discriminating aspect of mind; the faculty of valuing things for the advancement of life; principle of universal intuition in the super-reflective state of samadhi; a faculty which enhances discriminative power; see Bheda Buddhi

C

Chaitanya – the consciousness that knows itself and knows others; absolute consciousness; consciousness, mind, intelligence; spirit

Chakra – wheel or vortex; centre of energy or psychic centre; confluence point of energy flows (nadis). The main chakras threaded in the region of the spinal column on the sushumna nadi relate to many levels of the human being. On a physical level the main areas of influence are: mooladhara chakra, pelvic plexus; swadhisthana chakra, coccygeal plexus; manipura chakra, solar plexus; anahata chakra, cardiac plexus; vishuddhi chakra, pharyngeal plexus, also connected with the thyroid

gland; and ajna chakra, plexus of command at the top of the spinal column, also connected with the pineal gland. Bindu visarga, sometimes known as bindu chakra, is at the top of the back of the head. Sahasrara, also sometimes referred to as a chakra, the thousand-petalled lotus, is the upper cerebral centre connected with the pituitary gland. Of the 28 planes of consciousness or regions, the highest seven are called loka, the next seven are chakra, the next seven patala and the lowest seven naraka; see Loka

Chandala – untouchable, an outcast

Chandana – sandalwood tree associated with divine qualities of fragrance and coolness

Chandas – delight, wish; free will, wilful conduct; meaning, intention; fraud; holy song; metre; prosody; the science of the sacred texts auxiliary to the vedic hymns, it deals with the arrangements of the consonants into the words of mantras, words into lines and lines into lyrics, and is regarded as one of the six vedangas; see Vedanga

Chandi – a manifestation of Durga, Chandi is invincible in battle against demonic forces

Chandi Yajna – a sacrifice performed in honour of the goddess Chandi, at which the *Durga Saptashati* is chanted; see Durga

Chandra – moon; shining, bright; representing mental energy

Chandra Nadi – pranic current connected with the left nostril and the lunar force, another name for ida nadi

Charvaka – a system of Indian philosophy that accepts only perceivable phenomena as valid. It is named after Charvaka, a materialistic philosopher said to have been a pupil of Brihaspati, the guru of the gods

Chatur – four

Chaturashramya – the four periods of life; see Ashrama.

Chaturmas Sadhana – a period of four months during the rainy season when sannyasins traditionally stayed in one place, giving satsang and practising intense sadhana

Chatur Santushtaya – the four prerequisites for a student of Vedanta: viveka, vairagya, shadsampatti (shama, dama, uparati, titiksha, shraddha, samadhana) and mumukshutva

Chetana – consciousness; unmanifest aspect of consciousness and energy

Chhandogya Upanishad – name of an Upanishad from the *Sama Veda* teaching the origin and significance of the mantra Aum; see Tat Twam Asi

Chidakasha – the space or sphere within, where the capacity of sense perception is internalized to observe the process and reactions of individual awareness; the inner space visualized in meditation behind the closed eyes or in the region of ajna chakra; the state of pure, unbounded consciousness; Brahman in its aspect of limitless knowledge or unbounded intelligence; the pure consciousness (chit) is, like space (akasha), an all-pervading continuum; mind conceived as all-pervading space; see Akasha

Chit – thought; perception; intelligence, intellect; understanding; the heart/mind; pure knowing beyond the division of subject and object; in Vedanta, one of the three attributes of the ultimate principle; the soul, spirit and the animating principle of life; Brahman, the pure consciousness that lies behind all phenomena; see Sachchidananda

Chitta – individual consciousness, including the subconscious and unconscious layers of mind; thinking, concentration, attention, enquiry; the stuff of the mind; storehouse of memory or samskaras; one of the four parts of the antahkarana or inner instrument; seat of consciousness, including the conscious, subconscious, unconscious and superconscious

Chitta Vritti – disposition or state of the mind; inclination; feeling, emotion; in yoga philosophy the inward working of the mind, its mental vision or inward purpose; in raja yoga Patanjali lists five main categories of chitta vritti in the *Yoga Sutras*: 1. right knowledge (pramana), 2. wrong knowledge (viparyaya), 3. imagination (vikalpa), 4. sleep (nidra), 5. memory (smriti). They can be painful (klishta), leading to an increase in karmic stock and the necessity for embodiment, or not painful (aklishta); see Brahmi Vritti; see Vritti

Chudamani – a wish fulfilling jewel

D

Daitya – class of mighty beings in whom the diabolical quality predominates; belonging to the class of demons; a giant

Daiva – belonging to gods; divine, celestial; fate; royal; relating to desires

Dakshina – situated on the right side; the right hand or arm; situated to the south, southern; sincere, straightforward, honest; epithet of Shiva or Vishnu

Dakshina – offering to the guru

Dakshinacharya – the conduct in the 'right hand' path of tantra relating to pingala nadi, vital energy and dynamic extroversion

Dakshinamarga – the 'right hand' path of tantra relating to pingala nadi, vital energy and dynamic extroversion; see Pravritti Marga

Dama – control of the outer senses; self-command through self-restraint and curbing the passions; drawing the mind away from evil deeds or curbing its evil propensities; taming, subduing; punishment, fine; one of the sixfold virtues; see Shadsampatti

Darshana – a glimpse, seeing, observing; sight, vision; knowing, understanding; philosophical system of the vedic tradition, so called because it is based on revelations or truths that were 'seen' in a higher state of consciousness; a vision of reality glimpsed in dhyana; see Shaddarshana

Dashnami Sampradaya – 10 orders of sannyasa, viz. Aranya, Ashrama, Bharati, Giri, Parvat, Puri, Sagara, Saraswati, Tirtham and Vanam, connected with the Advaita Vedanta tradition established by Adi Shankaracharya in order to protect, preserve and propagate spiritual knowledge

Deva – luminous being; a god or divine being; inner power

Deva Loka – plane of light; sphere of higher consciousness of existence; heaven

Devata – form of divine dignity or power; divine being representing the higher state of evolution; illumined form; divinity, deity

Deva Yajna – a sacrifice to the superior gods made by oblations

to fire; one of the five daily sacrifices to be performed by a householder; see Pancha Mahayajna

Devi – female deity, goddess; name of Durga, Saraswati and others; see Shakta

Dhara – stream or current of water; flow; drop; series; edge; margin

Dharana – concentration or complete attention; sixth stage of ashtanga yoga described by Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as holding or binding of the mind to one point; bearing, supporting; moulding; keeping in memory; see Raja Yoga

Dharitri – 'she who holds', a name for the planet Earth

Dharma – the natural role we play in life; ethical law; duty; the laws or fundamental support of life; usage, practice, custom; religion; virtue, righteousness, good work; regarded as one of the four aims of human existence; see Purushartha

Dharma Shastra – manual of laws, law book relating to duties of mankind; a class of works handed down by tradition and regarded as the last word in social and other conflicts, but having no authority when in conflict with the Shruti according to Adi Shankaracharya. The dharma shastras are monographs compiled to make an orderly presentation of knowledge gleaned from the Vedas. Topics include: 1. classification of society based on functional responsibilities, 2. duties of people in each class, 3. duties of kings, 4. duties of men and women, 5. the social code, 6. civil rules, 7. definition of sin and corresponding punishments; see Shruti; see Smriti

Dhatu – layers of tissue in the body; element; metal; the vital force in humans which yogis conserve through celibacy, developing vitality (ojas) and brilliance (tejas)

Dhenu – cow; the Earth

Dhyana – spontaneous state after deep concentration or meditation; the seventh of the eight steps described in raja yoga; the intermediate internal process where the power of attention becomes so steadily fixed upon the object of meditation that other thoughts do not enter the mind; natural expression of the sattwic state; see Raja Yoga; see Sattwa

Digambara – naked, literally 'space clothed' (dik means

space or direction, ambara means cloth), an epithet applied particularly to those Jaina monks who claim to be from the original tradition which forbade clothing

Digvijaya – victory (over all directions); biographies of Shankara

Diksha – initiation, consecration; preparation for a sacrifice or a ceremony; dedication of oneself to a particular object; ceremony or religious rite in general; birth of a new vision

Dosha – three humours of the body described in ayurveda: mucus (kapha), bile (pitta) and wind (vata). Their imbalance prevents the flow of energy in sushumna nadi and thus one is bound to the dualities. Hatha yoga techniques are designed to correct this

Drashta – witness, uninvolved observer, onlooker, seer; the consciousness which knows what is going on; atman or purusha; see Sakshi

Duhkha – uneasy, uneasiness; difficult; unpleasant; grief, pain, suffering

Durga – impossible; inaccessible; difficulty, distress

Durga (Durgaa) – remover of difficulties, the beautiful goddess who slays the difficult and even impossible enemies and rides the lion or tiger; a name of the wife of Shiva; the higher state of human consciousness and evolution; see Chandi; see Shakta

Dvaita, Dwaita – dual

Dvandva, Dwandwa – pairs of opposites like pain and pleasure; duality; couples

Dvesha, Dwesha – repulsion, aversion; hatred, enmity, dislike, repugnance, antagonism; one of the five causes of suffering (kleshas) described by Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as aversion to the unpleasant; see Klesha

Dvija, Dwija – twice-born; person of any of the three varnas, viz. priestly caste (brahmana), kingly and warrior caste (kshatriya) or merchant caste (vaishya); brahmana; person who has been given second birth by initiation (diksha)

Dwarka, Dwarika – the harbour city of Lord Krishna, which has been rediscovered under the ocean next to the modern city in western India, where Sharada Math is situated; see Sharada Math

E

Eka – one, single, alone, only; the same, unchanged; firm; supreme, prominent

Ekadandin – name of a class of sannyasins with one staff (otherwise called hamsa)

Ekadasi – the 11th day of the waxing fortnight and the waning fortnight of the moon cycle when balance is sensitive and sadhana is considered to be very helpful

Ekagrata – one-pointedness of mind, fourth of the five states of mind where pure sattwa guna predominates enabling concentrated or meditative states of mind; see Manas

Ekanta – solitary; aside, apart; absolute; invariable, perpetual

Ekoham Bahusyam – 'may I, the One, become many', the primal idea which manifested itself from Brahman, the one undivided being, prior to creation

G

Ganapatya – pertaining to Ganesha; worshipper of Ganesha

Ganesha – 'Lord of the ganas (Shiva's attendants)', name of the elephant-headed deity who is the auspicious son of Shiva and Parvati. Ganesha is the scribe of the *Mahabharata*, deity of mooladhara chakra and is regarded as the remover of obstacles and a god of fertility

Ganga – the river Ganges, sacred river in India; the Ganges personified as a goddess, the eldest daughter of Himavat; see Triveni

Gargi – female sage whose questions and debates are recorded in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*

Gaudapada – the great yogi and philosopher who was the guru of Govindapada, who was the guru of Adi Shankaracharya

Gaudapada Karika – the commentary on *Mandukya Upanishad* written by Gaudapada, historically the first available systematic treatise on Advaita Vedanta, also known as the *Mandukya Karika*

Gautama – name of the propounder of the Nyaya system of philosophy; see Shaddarshana

Gautama Buddha – the founder of Buddhism
Gayatri – a vedic metre of 24 syllables; a most famous and sacred mantra suitable for everyone, repeated by every person of the priestly caste (brahmana) at their morning and evening devotion (sandhya); vedic goddess, mother of the Vedas; female counterpart of the Sun
Giri – hill; the name of one of the 10 orders of sannyasins founded by Adi Shankaracharya, originally living in hilly country; see Dashnami Sampradaya
Gita – song; name given to certain sacred writings in verses (often in the form of a dialogue), but especially recognized as referring to the *Bhagavad Gita*
Govardhan Math – one of the four major maths established by Adi Shankaracharya in the four geographical quarters of India, situated in Puri in the eastern quarter of India. It was assigned the *Rigveda* with its maha vakya (great statement) 'Prajnanam Brahma' (Knowledge is Brahman). Its first head was Padmapadacharya. The Vanam and Aranyam orders of the Dashnami Sampradaya emanate from there
Grantha – binding, stringing together; treatise, text book, composition; verse consisting of 32 syllables, written in the Anushtubh metre
Granthi – psychic knot; the three granthis, viz. Brahma granthi, Vishnu granthi and Rudra granthis, on the sushumna nadi hinder the upward passage of kundalini, and therefore bind one to a limited state of consciousness
Griha – house
Grihastha Ashrama – the second stage of life according to the ancient vedic ashrama tradition, i.e. household or married life from 25 to 50 years of age; see Ashrama
Guhya – secret
Guna – quality; attribute, characteristic or property of all creation. According to Samkhya philosophy, prakriti (cosmic primordial matter) is constituted of three different aspects called gunas, viz. sattwa, rajas and tamas. The three gunas undergo transformation from the unmanifest (avyakta) to the manifest (vyakta) state, produce matter and control it, thus

creating the whole cosmos with all beings, time and space; strength; see Sattwa; see Rajas; see Tamas

Gunatita, Gunateeta – freed from all properties; one who is freed and has gone beyond or crossed the three gunas of sattwa, rajas and tamas; see Sthitaprajna

Gupta – secret

Guru – one who dispels the darkness caused by ignorance (avidya); teacher; preceptor; teacher of the science of ultimate reality who, because of extended practice and previous attainment of the highest states of meditation, is fit to guide others in their practice towards enlightenment; *gu* means darkness, *ru* means dispeller

Gurukul – educational system of ancient India, where children lived in the ashram or family of the guru and were taught a comprehensive syllabus for life by the guru, including the vedanga

Guru Poornima – holy day for worship of the guru or spiritual teacher when the disciple receives blessings from the guru. It is celebrated on the full moon of the lunar month Ashada, and Chaturmas sadhana begins the next day

Guru Seva – service to the guru

H

Hamsa – swan, the vehicle of the god Brahma and the goddess Saraswati. In poetic convention it is represented as being able to separate milk from water, i.e. as possessing subtle discrimination; the title for a person able to distinguish between reality and unreality in spiritual development; third stage of sannyasa, emphasizing solitary sadhana; individual soul (jivatman); the sun; see Sannyasa

Hastamalaka – a disciple of Adi Shankaracharya who was thought to be a mute idiot before speaking to his guru. He was given the name 'the amalak in the hand' to indicate the clarity of his perception of reality. He was appointed the head of Sharada Math in the west of India at Dwarika

Hatha Yoga – *Ha* represents the solar or pranic energy (pingala) and *tha* the psychic or lunar energy (ida) in the human body,

and the union of these two forces is hatha yoga; a system of yoga which specifically deals with practices for bodily purification and balancing the prana (energy) in ida and pingala nadis so that sushumna nadi opens, enabling samadhi experiences; hatha yoga is a way towards realization through rigorous discipline

Havan – fire ritual performed for incidental purposes (naimittika karma) using the essence of butter from cow's milk (ghee) as the oblation

Hinayana – the small path for one's own liberation

Hridaya – heart; essential centre

I

Iccha – wish, desire; will

Iccha Shakti – creative force or that desire which is the first manifestation of the greater mind; omnipotent desire-force

Ida Nadi – channel of lunar energy between the left nostril and the base of the spine, governing the left side of the body and the right side of the brain. The ida energy flow criss-crosses the spine through the major chakras between mooladhara and ajna, conducting the passive aspect of prana manifesting as mental force, lunar force or chitta shakti. Ida nadi and its counterpart pingala nadi have been related to ascending and descending tracts of the autonomic nervous system. These pathways function in yoga to open both the subconscious and superconscious mind; see Pingala Nadi

Indra – king of the vedic gods, the ruler of heaven; lord of the senses; the mind or the soul; the rain god

Isha – master, lord; name of an Upanishad; powerful, supreme; the all-pervasive deity of anahata chakra

Ishta – object of desire; the chosen ideal; the particular form of God one is devoted to; a sacrificial rite; worshipped, reverenced, beloved; liked, favoured

Ishta Devata – personal deity, one's favourite god, one's tutelary deity, the aspect of God which is dear to you; see Sakara Ishta

Ishwara – higher reality; unmanifest existence; non-changing principle or quality; principle of higher consciousness defined in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as a special purusha beyond the

effect of karma and klesha; a state of consciousness beyond the physical and mental realms governing the entire physical universe; supreme being, lord, master; one who rules

Ishwara Pranidhana – cultivation of faith in the supreme or indestructible reality; one of the niyamas described by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*; complete dedication of one's actions and will to the Lord; see Niyama

J

Jagat – world; universe; the material dimension; living creatures that can move; wind

Jagat Guru, Jagadguru – one who removes the darkness from the world; world preceptor

Jagrat – first dimension of consciousness, witnessed by Vaishvanara according to *Mandukya Upanishad*; state of consciousness related to the senses and the phenomenal material universe; normal waking consciousness

Jagrita – conscious mind; sense of awakening

Jaina – ancient religion noted for strict adherence to non-violence (ahimsa)

Janah Loka – plane of rishis and munis; one of the seven higher planes of consciousness; see Loka

Japa – to rotate or repeat continuously without a break; repetition of a mantra or name of God; see Mantra

Jati – kinsman, relative; community; race, caste, lineage

Jatismarana – remembrance of incidents of one's previous births (whether spontaneously or through special voluntary effort)

Jaya – victory, success, the exclamation 'Be victorious!'; control, mastery

Jiva – principle of life, vital breath; individual or personal soul; life, existence; creature, living being; living, existing, vivifying

Jiva Loka – the world of living beings, the world of mortals, the world of earthly existence; living beings, mankind; another name for bhuh loka; see Loka

Jivanmukta – a soul who is liberated while living; a person who, being purified by true knowledge of the supreme reality, is freed from future births and all ceremonial rites while yet embodied

Jivanmukti – final liberation in the present state of life; expanded state of awareness

Jivatma – individual or personal soul

Jnana – knowing, understanding; higher knowledge derived from meditation or from inner experience; wisdom

Jnana Marga – path of knowledge by which one finds realization; see Jnana Yoga

Jnana Yoga – yoga of knowledge and wisdom attained through spontaneous self-analysis and investigation of abstract or speculative ideas; the path of knowledge; constant and serious thinking on the true nature of the self as taught by the guru; contemplation as the principal means of attaining the higher knowledge of reality; leading a discriminative lifestyle, living with wisdom

Jnana Yogi – one who practises the scheduled discipline of the path of knowledge; one who lives wisdom; one endowed with viveka and vairagya

Jnanendriya – sensory organ; five subtle organs of perception, viz. ears (karna or shrotra), skin (twacha), eyes (chakshus), tongue (jihva) and nose (nasika or ghrana); see Karmendriya; see Devata

Jnani – one who expresses wisdom in daily life

Jyoti, Jyotis – light, brightness, fire

Jyotirlinga – natural oval-shaped stone worshipped as Lord Shiva, there are 12 jyotirlingas worshipped in different parts of India; symbol of pure consciousness; the effulgent shivalingam in sahasrara symbolizes illumined consciousness; see Linga

Jyotirmath – one of the four major maths established by Adi Shankaracharya in the four geographical quarters of India, situated in Badrinath in the north. It was assigned the *Atharva Veda* with its maha vakya (great statement) 'Ayam Atma Brahma' (soul is Brahman). Its first head was Trotakacharya. The Giri, Parvata and Sagara orders of the Dashnami Sampradaya emanate from there

Jyotisha – astronomy; the eye of the Vedas; a necessary tool to ascertain the auspicious times for different techniques, etc.;

one of the six sciences auxiliary to the Vedas; the branch of vedanga that deals with astronomical and astrological matters with respect to vedic karma; see Vedanga

K

Kailasha – name of a mountain peak of the Himalayas; residence of Lord Shiva and Kubera

Kaivalya – final liberation; that state of consciousness which is beyond duality; perfect isolation; final emancipation; nirvana; the state that unifies all differences

Kali – goddess of destruction and wife of Lord Shiva; epithet of Parvati or Durga; divine mother; primal manifestation of Shakti who destroys time, space and object (i.e. ignorance); yogic state of consciousness; blackness, night; see Shakta

Kama – emotional need for fulfilment; wish, object of desire; affection, love; the god of love; desire for sensual enjoyments considered as one of the four worthwhile aims of life; see Purushartha; see Shadvairi

Kamandalam, Kamandalu – water pot, earthen or wooden, carried by sannyasins or ascetics

Kanchi Math – also known as the sarvajna peetha where only the most learned could sit. It is dedicated to Devi and Sri Vidya. The 'fifth' math where the yantra was reputedly installed by Adi Shankaracharya

Kanya – young girl; virgin

Kapala – skull, cranium, forehead from the eyebrows to bindu; earthen frying pan used to roast flour as an oblation item

Kapalika – a tantric who uses the human skull in sadhana

Karana – cause, reason; the unmanifested potential cause that in due time takes shape as the visible effect; material cause of the universe remaining during the period of dissolution

Karanasharira – causal body; also called anandamaya kosha; see Pancha Kosha

Karma – action and result; action in the manifest and unmanifest dimension; work, deed; duty; sacrifice (yajna) at the physical level; law of cause and effect that shapes the destiny of each individual with actions inevitably bearing their fruit

as the law operates inexorably throughout the universe; each individual spirit (jiva) is under the influence of four types of karma; see Sanchita; see Prarabdha; see Agami; see Kriyamana

Karma Kanda – the part of the Vedas that relates to sacrificial rules and ceremonial acts on the physical level; see Poorva Mimamsa

Karma Marga – the path of a dynamic person leading towards self-realization through action

Karma Mimamsa – another name for Poorva Mimamsa

Karmashaya – deep layers of consciousness where the karmas are stored in the form of impressions, symbols or archetypes; repository of karma; aggregate of works done

Karma Yoga – action performed with meditative awareness; yogic discipline based on the law of cause and effect; gaining immunity to karma by dedicating one's actions to God; actions performed unselfishly without attachment to the fruit of one's action and renouncing the doership and enjoyership of any action

Karma Yogi – one who practises karma yoga

Karmendriya – motor organs, five physical organs of action, viz. vocal cords (vach), hands (hasta), feet (pada), genital organ (upastha), anus (payu); see Jnanendriya; see Devata

Karta – doer, maker, creator, author, one who acts

Kartavya – performing action with knowledge; that which ought to be done; duty

Kashi – the modern Varanasi (Benares); the city on the banks of the river Ganga most sacred to Shiva

Kashmir Shaivism – a school of tantra based on the *Trika-shastra*, a division of Shaivism found in North India

Kathopanishad, Katha Upanishad – one of the principal Upanishads belonging to the *Taittiriya Brahmana* of the *Yajurveda*, written in verse and dialogue form, in which the seeker Nachiketa speaks with Yama, the god of death

Kaula Tantra – a sect of tantra in which the mother is the guru of the family lineage; tantra suitable for householders

Kaulika – a tantric who practices Kaula tantra

Kaya – the physical body

Kirtan – singing of God's name; practice in which a group of people sing a collection of mantras; see Mantra

Klesha – pain, anguish, affliction, suffering, distress, trouble; five afflictions or causes of suffering described in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, viz. ignorance (avidya), ego or sense of doership (asmita), attraction (raga), aversion (dwesha) and fear of death (abhinivesha); in yoga the five kleshas are the sources of all suffering or troubles, with ignorance (avidya) being considered the chief klesha

Kosha – body or realm of experience or existence; covering of the self which limits manifestation of the ultimate reality; sheath; vessel in general; see Pancha Kosha

Krishna – black, dark, dark blue; eighth incarnation of Vishnu, who took birth in Dwapara yuga as the son of Devaki. He was brought up in Vrindavana by Yashoda and loved Radha, and his activities there are recorded in the *Bhagavata Purana*. He later reclaimed his inheritance and married the princess Rukmini. To uphold dharma he orchestrated the Mahabharata war. His teachings to his friend and disciple Arjuna during that war are immortalized in the *Bhagavad Gita*. He seems to be an historical figure, as his capital Dwarka has been discovered at its legendary site; see Avatara; see Bhagavad Gita

Kriya – creative action or motion; in tantric literature kriya is used in the sense of activity that is eternally associated with knowledge and leads to perfection, in which knowledge and action are found to be identical; the six physical cleansing techniques (also known as shatkarma) of hatha yoga: basti, dhauti, kapalbhati, nauli, neti and trataka

Kriyamana – literally 'what is being done'; the effect of the deeds of the present life which are to be experienced in the future; the same as agami karma; see Karma

Krodha – anger, wrath, aggression; see Shadvairi

Kshatriya – the kingly or warrior caste, one of the four divisions of the caste system in India; one who protects others from injury; see Varna

Kumbhaka – internal or external retention of breath, a conscious process practised with shatkarma, asana, pranayama,

mudra and bandha that aims at either retaining breath within the body (antar kumbhaka) or keeping it outside the body (bahir or bahya kumbhaka). Kumbhaka is also a spontaneous process accompanying samadhi states

Kumbhamela – huge bathing festival held at four auspicious places on the river Ganges (Ganga) every 12 years. The pot (kumbha) of nectar (amrit) that was found after churning the ocean was placed on Earth in these four places, viz. Nasik, Ujjain, Haridwar and Allahabad (the modern name for Prayaga). Millions of devotees attend the gatherings and the heads of the sannyasa traditions meet

Kundalini – literally 'coiled' like a serpent; spiritual energy; evolutionary potential related to the capacity and consciousness of human beings; the form of divine cosmic energy lying dormant in mooladhara chakra, epithet of Varuna, regent of the ocean

Kundalini Shakti – Devi described as the potential energy of a human being dormant in mooladhara chakra, which, when awakened, works to awaken the chakras, resulting in progressive enlightenment; see Sushumna Nadi

Kundalini Yoga – path of yoga which awakens the dormant spiritual force

Kutichaka – 'hut dweller', first stage of sannyasa where one lives simply and serves the guru for 12 years; see Sannyasa

Kutir – small hut; simple dwelling

L

Laghu – small, light

Lakshmi – the goddess of fortune, prosperity and beauty, and the wife of Vishnu, she is said to have sprung from the ocean along with other precious 'jewels' when it was churned for nectar by the gods and demons; creative power of manipura chakra; see Shakta

Lalita – sportive, lovely, innocent, simple

Lalita (Lalitaa) – a wanton woman; epithet of Durga and Parvati; the goddess Lalita is red-coloured, denoting energy, and is hymned in the *Shri Lalita Pancharatnan* of Adi

Shankaracharya as the prime cause of creation, protection and destruction of the universe; the esoteric goddess of Sri Yantra

Laya – dissolution, solution; disappearance, extinction, destruction; union, fusion, melting; sticking, adherence; lurking

Laya Yoga – when the individual consciousness dissolves into the object meditated upon

Lila – literally 'play'; diversion, pleasure; activity of prakriti and its three gunas

Linga – to be absorbed; mark, sign, characteristic; sign of gender, male organ; idol of Shiva; a naturally formed oval stone; often means the Shivalingam, an archetypal symbol; see Shivalingam; see Jyotirlinga

Lobha – greed, desire; see Shadvairi

Loka – open space, place, region; plane of existence, dimension; the world, earth; people, humankind; of the 28 planes of consciousness or regions, the highest seven are called loka, viz. bhuh (or jiva), bhuvah, swah, mahah, janah, tapah and satya lokas; the next seven are chakra, the next seven patala and the lowest seven naraka; seven divine regions explained as being above sahasrara chakra; see Chakra

Lokasangraha – solidarity of the world; upliftment of society

M

Ma, Maa – mother, divine mother; see Shakta

Madya – wine, the nectar of immortality (amrit); one of the five makara of tantra; see Panchamakara

Maha – great; noble

Mahabharata – epic of ancient India said to be recorded by Vyasa, involving the history and consequences of the great battle between the five sons of Pandu (the Pandava) and the 100 sons of Dhritarashtra (the Kaurava). It consists of 18 sections and the *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of it; see Krishna

Mahabhuta, Mahabhoota – the elements (space, air, fire, water and earth); see Pancha Mahabhuta

Mahamrityunjaya – literally 'the great one who is victorious over death'; a form of Shiva

Mahamrityunjaya Mantra – the 'great victory over death' mantra, used to avoid calamities
Maha Samadhi – final liberation experienced on the departure of the spirit from the body; death; see Samadhi
Mahat – great; greater mind; the great principle; the total mind which includes manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara; universal intellect (also called buddhi); in Samkhya philosophy mahat is the first product of prakriti's process of manifestation and reflects the consciousness of purusha into the material realm of prakriti's evolutes; big; epithet of Shiva
Maha Vakya – four great statements of the Upanishads, viz. 1. Prajnanam Brahma: Consciousness is Brahman, 2. Aham Brahmasmi: I am Brahman, 3. Tat Twam Asi: You are That, 4. Ayam Atma Brahma: The soul (atma) is Brahman. Continuous meditation (nididhyasana) on these mantras can lead the qualified aspirant directly to realization; any continuous composition or literary work
Mahayana – the big path for liberating all beings
Maithuna – physical union; fusion of male and female energies; union of atma and paramatma; one of the five makara of tantra; the first basic instinct; copulation; see Panchamakara
Makara – the letter 'M'; the mystic syllable 'M', the third letter that concludes Aum or the pranava nada (original sound); indicator of sushupti avastha (the unconscious state of mind close to samadhi); the first letter of the panchamakara (five M's) of tantra; see Panchamakara
Mamsa – flesh; the tongue conquered in khechari mudra; one of the five makara of tantra; see Panchamakara
Manana – thinking, cognition, reflection, intelligence, understanding; inference arrived at by reasoning; meditation on the eternal verities; second of the three steps on the path of knowledge in Vedantic sadhana, the other two being shravana and nididhyasana; see Maha Vakya
Manas – finite mind, rational mind; the mind concerned with senses, thought and counter-thought; perception, intelligence; the internal organ of perception and cognition; the individual

mind having the creative power and faculty of attention, selection and rejection

Manasik – mental

Mandala – zone; circular or round pictorial representation; orb, globe, wheel, ring, disc; troop, group; a division of the *Rigveda*; diagram within a circumference symbolizing the deeper aspects of the human psyche and capable of invoking cosmic power; complex symbol merging macrocosmic and microcosmic realities

Mandan Mishra – also known as Vishvarupa, a famous scholar and champion of Poorva Mimamsa and vedic rituals and the husband of Ubhaya Bharati. He was defeated in debate by Adi Shankaracharya and became one of his foremost disciples with the name Sureshvaracharya and was the first pontiff of Shringeri Math after his master

Mandukya Upanishad – one of the major Upanishads which describes the three states of consciousness represented by the three sacred letters composing Aum and the fourth which unites yet transcends them; see Jagrat; see Swapna; see Sushupti; see Turiya; see Ayam Atma Brahma

Manipura Chakra – psychic/pranic centre situated behind the navel in the spinal column, corresponding to the solar plexus and associated with vitality and energy; centre of willpower; literally 'city of jewels'; see Chakra; see Sankalpa

Manomaya Kosha – mental sheath or body; one of the five sheaths (kosha) covering the self. It is investigated with the aid of pratyahara and dharana techniques and manifests in the dream state and during meditation; mental sphere of life and awareness; see Pancha Kosha

Mantra – subtle sound vibration; tantric tool which liberates energy from the confines of mundane awareness and expands the consciousness when repeated; a word or sentence propounded by liberated souls to help spiritual aspirants and ordinary people in gaining perfection, health or supernatural powers; vedic hymn; a sacred text; word of power; divine power transmitted through word; incantation; see Manana

Mantra Diksha – initiation through mantra

Math – monastery; the four major math said to be established by Adi Shankaracharya in the four geographical quarters of India are 1. Shringeri Math, located at Shringeri in the south, 2. Sharada Math, located at Dwarka in the west, 3. Govardhan Math, located at Puri in the east, and 4. Jyotirmath, located at Badrinath in the north, originally headed by Sureshvaracharya, Hastamalakacharya, Padmapadacharya and Trotakacharya respectively. He is also said to have founded the Kanchi Math in honour of the Devi, and to have originally installed Ubhaya Bharati as its head. There are numerous smaller maths throughout India

Matra – unit of time; time interval in pronouncing a vowel; standard measure, rule; unit; moment; particle, atom, element; alone

Matsya – fish; the control of inhalation and exhalation so as to awaken sahasrara chakra; one of the five makara of tantra; see Panchamakara

Maya – the cause of the illusion of the phenomenal world due to the power of veiling (avarana shakti) and the power of projection (vikshepa shakti); made of, consisting of

Mayavada – Shankara's understanding of the world as an illusion

Mimamsa – deep reflection, inquiry; name of one of the six systems (darshana) of vedic philosophy. It was originally divided into two systems: 1. the Poorva or Karma Mimamsa founded by Jaimini concerning itself chiefly with the correct interpretation of the rituals of the Veda and the settlement of dubious points in regard to vedic texts, 2. the Uttara or Brahma Mimamsa ascribed to Badarayana (Vyasa), dealing chiefly with the nature of Brahman or the supreme spirit. Today only Poorva Mimamsa is usually called Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa is ranked separately and called Vedanta; see Poorva Mimamsa; see Vedanta

Mithyavada – the doctrine of the phenomenal nature of this world, theory of illusion, also known as mayavada; see Maya

Moha – delusion, error; infatuation; attachment; state of mind; see Shadvairi

Mohamudgara – a song spontaneously composed by Adi Shankaracharya and his disciples urging dedication to the

eternal reality rather than to the phenomenal reality; literally 'the rod or club to beat blind attachment'

Moksha – liberation, freedom, release; state of existence; in yoga, final emancipation, liberation from the wheel of births and deaths, the aim of yogic practices

Moola, Mula – root; basis

Mooladhara Chakra, Muladhara Chakra – the basic psychic and pranic centre in the human body situated in the perineum in men and the cervix in women and also connected to the coccygeal plexus, it is the seat of kundalini (the primal evolutionary energy in human beings); see Chakra; see Granthi

Mudra – 'gesture'; physical, mental and psychic attitude which expresses and channels cosmic energy, (therefore technically bandhas are also a type of mudra); psychophysiological posture, movement or attitude; a movement or position made or taken by the fingers or limbs in meditation as a result of the circulation of kundalini shakti; a seal, which seals energy, etc., in place; the attitude of constant identification with the Self in sahasrara chakra; grain; one of the five makara of tantra; see Bandha; see Panchamakara

Mukta – liberated

Mukti – release, liberation; according to Vedanta, liberation is due to right knowledge, or intuition of truth (tattwa jnana); final absolution of the self from the chain of birth and death

Mumukshu – seeker of liberation

Mumukshutva – intense longing for liberation; fourth kind of necessary spiritual effort; see Sadhana Chatushtaya

Mundaka Upanishad – belongs to the *Atharva Veda* and teaches the difference between intellectual studies of the Vedas and their supplementary texts, and intuitive knowledge

Mundana Karana – shaving (of the head)

Muni – one who contemplates; one who has conquered the mind; one who maintains silence or stillness of mind; an ecstatic person; sage; ascetic; impulse

Murti – body; form, shape, figure, statue, person; symbol; idol

N

Nada – subtle sound vibration created by the union of Shiva and Shakti tattwas; subtle sound vibration heard in the meditative state; voice, sound, cry, roaring; nasal sound represented by the semi-circle or half moon (ardha chandra) beneath the point (bindu) in the Sanskrit symbol for Aum or Om (ॐ); the prolongation of the sound in mantras such as Aum or mystic sounds (representing the eternal); the primal sound or first vibration from which all creation has emanated; the first manifestation of the unmanifested absolute; Aumkara (Omkara) or Shabda Brahman; the inner sound on which the yogi concentrates in meditation; flow

Naga – militant sannyasa sect, an order of sadhus distinguishable by their nakedness

Namas – bow, pay obeisance to; to adore, reverence

Nastika – atheist, non-believer, one who denies the authority of the Vedas or the existence of a supreme ruler or creator of the universe

Neti Neti – literally 'Not this! Not this!'; as the experience of samadhi is not like any other experience which can be described in words, the sages thus declare that state of consciousness to be neti, neti

Nididhyasana – profound, deep meditation; third step in vedantic sadhana, after hearing (shravana) and reflection (manana); see Maha Vakya

Nigama – vedic knowledge; ritual procedures

Nimitta – cause; instrument

Nirakara – without form, formless, devoid of form; unmanifest

Nirakara Brahman – state of pure being without attributes or qualities

Niranjana – stainless, unstained, untainted; free from falsehood; pure, simple; an epithet of Brahman

Nirbija, Nirbeeja – seedless, without any seeds

Nirbija Samadhi, Nirbeeja Samaadhi – final state of samadhi in which there is absorption without seed; total dissolution (niruddha avastha); see Sabija Samadhi

Nirguna – without quality or attribute, formless; see Saguna

Nirguna Brahman – Brahman without attributes or form, powers or predicates; a state of pure being without qualities (gunas); the impersonal, attributeless absolute; see Saguna Brahman

Nirodha, Nirodhanam – complete cessation of the patterns of consciousness when the mind is under perfect control; confinement, locking up, imprisonment; enclosing, covering up; suppression, control, restraint, check; state in which the mind is completely manageable; beyond the three qualities (gunas); fifth of the five states of mind, in which the awareness of consciousness alone prevails; see Gunatita; see Manas

Nirukta – knowledge of (Sanskrit) words leading to understanding of vedic concepts

Nishkama – selfless, unselfish; free from wishes, desireless

Nishkama Karma – action without expectation of fruits and done without personal interest or egoism. This type of action purifies the mind and heart without creating new bondage; see Karma Yoga.

Nishtha – steadfastness; being established in a certain state

Nitya – continual, perpetual, constant, uninterrupted; everlasting, eternal

Nityakarma – any daily and necessary rite; a constant act of duty; eternal actions

Nivritti – no vritti; see Vritti

Nivritti Marga – path of non-indulgence; path of introversion; literally 'path without vrittis'

Niyama – observances or rules of personal discipline to render the mind tranquil in preparation for meditation; the second step of ashtanga yoga mentioned by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*. He enumerates five rules of conduct that apply to individual discipline, viz. 1. purity (shaucha), 2. satisfaction or contentment (santosha), 3. austerity or penance (tapas), 4. self-study (swadhyaya), and 5. renunciation of the fruits of action or dedication to the Lord or to the highest principle (ishwara pranidhana); inner discipline; vedic text or explanation; doctrine; in yogic philosophy it means restraint of the mind or self-purification by discipline

Nyasa – renunciation; laying down; placing; planting; a pledge; entrusting; committing; giving up, resigning, relinquishing; assigning the various parts of the body to different deities, which is usually accompanied with mantras and corresponding gestures or mudras

Nyaya – one of the six darshanas or systems of Indian philosophy, logical realism founded by Gautama; recognition of real spiritual experience by the omniscient mind that is all-encompassing and all-pervading; the correct way; see Shaddarshana

O

Om, Aum – bija mantra of ajna chakra; the universal cosmic mantra representing the four states of consciousness; the sound indicating the supreme sublime reality or Brahman; the sound representing the first formation from formless existence; word of power; it means 'all' and conveys concepts of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence; existence; see Mandukya Upanishad; see Aum

Oordhvaretas, Urdhvaretas – one who sublimates and raises his/her energy to higher levels

P

Pada, Paada – foot, the organ of locomotion and one of the five organs of action (karmendriyas); part or chapter of a book.

Pada – feet, step, post, verse or line of a stanza

Padma – lotus, the form or figure of a lotus, the root of a lotus

Padmapada – a disciple of Adi Shankaracharya previously named Sadananda. He was given the name 'lotus-foot' when his faith and devotion to his guru caused lotus plants to support him as he walked on water towards his master. He was appointed the head of Govardhan Math, located at Puri in the east of India

Pancha – five

Panchadashi – a highly respected book of Advaita Vedanta philosophy written by Swami Vidyaranya, who became Shankaracharya of Shringeri Math

Panchagni – five fires

Panchagni Vidya – knowledge or science of the five fires; esoteric explanation of five processes of sacrifice; sadhana of sitting in the middle of four burning fires with the summer sun of India acting as the fifth fire

Pancha Klesha – five afflictions or causes of suffering described in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, viz. ignorance (avidya), ego or sense of doership (asmita), attraction (raga), aversion (dwesha), and fear of death (abhinivesha); see Klesha

Pancha Kosha – five sheaths, bodies or realms of experience and existence, viz. 1. physical dimension (annamaya kosha), 2. mental dimension (manomaya kosha), 3. energetic and emotional dimension (pranamaya kosha), 4. intuitive dimension (vijnanamaya kosha), 5. blissful dimension (anandamaya kosha)

Pancha Mahabhuta, Pancha Mahabhoota – the five gross or atomic states of nature, consisting of space (akasha), air (vayu), light or fire (agni), water (apas) and solids or earth (prithvi). They are an extension of the tanmatras into the physical world; see Vyakta

Pancha Mahayajna – literally 'the five great sacrifices', the acts of piety to be performed daily by every householder, viz. 1. bhoota yajna, 2. manushya yajna (also called atithi yajna and nriyajna), 3. pitri yajna, 4. deva yajna, 5. Brahma yajna

Panchamakara – five elements used in tantric ritual sadhana, all of which begin with the letter 'm' (hence makara), viz. mudra, mamsa, maithuna, matsya and madya. The category of aspirant determines the interpretation; see Mudra; see Mamsa; see Maithuna; see Matsya; see Madya

Pancha Prana – five major divisions of the pranic energy located in the physical body, viz. apana, prana, samana, udana, vyana

Pancharatram – the tantric system which discusses five kinds of knowledge: adhyatmic jnana, haribhaktipada jnana, muktipada jnana, yogayukta jnana and samsara vishyak jnana; the tantric system which discusses the fivefold manifestation of God: para, vyuha, vibhava, antaryamin and archa

Pancharatri – a tantric mode of worship in which Lord Vishnu hands down supreme knowledge through Lord Shiva to the world; five nights of creation

Pancha Tanmatra – five pre-atomic states of nature, viz. sound (shabda), touch (sparsha), form (roopa), taste (rasa) and smell (gandha). They are the subtle states of the physical mahabhuta: space, air, fire, water and earth

Pancha Tattwa – the five elements; fivefold state; collection of five; to be resolved into the five elements of which the body consists; see Pancha Mahabhuta

Panchaupasaka – different groups worshipping five different deities, viz. Ganapathya, Saurya, Shakta, Vaishnava, Shaiva

Panchaupasana – five different kinds of worship related to worshipping five deities, viz. Ganapati, Surya, Shakti, Vishnu and Shiva

Panchayatma – worship of five different deities, viz. Ganesh (Ganapathya), Sun (Saurya), Shakti (Shakta), Vishnu (Vaishnava), Shiva (Shaiva)

Pandit – priest; learned man; scholar; man of wisdom

Panini – celebrated author of the sutras on Sanskrit grammar known as *Ashtadhyayi*

Para – used in the *Bhagavad Gita* to indicate the supreme goal of life; distant, removed, remote; beyond; subsequent; higher, superior; highest, greatest; predominant, principal; opposite of apara

Para Bhakti – supreme devotion (bhakti). It is said to accompany or follow the highest knowledge and be a state of consciousness which is self-contained; see Bhakti

Parakayapravesha – entering into another body; the power by which the yogi can leave his/her own body and enter into another body

Paramahamsa – literally 'supreme swan', a swan is reputed to be able to separate milk from water, i.e. reality from unreality; one who controls or subdues their passions; a sage, an ascetic; title of a person in the fourth stage of consciousness; see Sannyasa

Paramahamsa Sannyasa – a stage of sannyasa where, having completed one's work, one approaches the final goal of moksha or self-realization

Paramartha – transcendentsl reality; Reality; absolute truth; see Paramarthika Satta; see Vyavahara

Paramartha Drishti – right vision; intuition

Paramarthika – spiritual aspects; in an absolute sense (as opposed to relative or vyavaharika); related to reality (paramartha)
Paramarthika Satta – absolute reality; transcendental truth; Reality
Paramatma – cosmic soul or consciousness, supreme self; the atma (self or soul) of the entire universe, of the individual as well as of the cosmos; liberated state of the inner self
Paramguru – guru of the guru
Parampara – tradition
Para Vairagya – absence of attachment in any form; highest type or state of dispassion (vairagya); the mind turns away completely from worldly objects and cannot be brought back to them under any circumstances; renunciation of a liberated person in which no selfish motive can exert influence
Para Vidya – higher knowledge, transcendental direct knowledge of Brahman
Parivrajaka – wandering mendicant; ascetic; stage of life lasting for 12 years in the traditional training of a sannyasin
Parvata – mountain range, mountain, hill, rock, height; name of one of the 10 orders of sannyasins established by Adi Shankaracharya, which originally drew members from the mountainous areas; see Dashnami Sampradaya
Pasha – noose, snare, net for catching birds
Pashu – animal, brute, beast; often added to words meaning 'man' to show contempt; in tantra it refers to a person living at the instinctive animal level of consciousness
Pashupata Astra Yajna – a fire ritual to invoke the pashupata waepon which can destroy Tripura (representing the three granthis or knots of ignorance)
Pashupati – Lord of the Beasts; an epithet of Shiva showing his mastery of the lower instinctive nature
Patanjali – author of the *Yoga Sutras*; an ancient rishi who codified the meditative stages and states of samadhi into the system of raja yoga and is famous as the propounder of ashtanga yoga. According to many authorities, the same person was also the author of *Mahabhashya* (a classical treatise on Sanskrit grammar), as well as a treatise on medicine. Some believe he was a contemporary of Lord Buddha

Pati – lord, ruler, husband

Phala – fruit; kernel; consequence, retribution, reward, punishment

Pingala Nadi – a major pranic channel in the body that flows from mooladhara chakra on the right, criss-crossing all the major chakras to ajna chakra. It conducts the dynamic pranic force manifesting as prana shakti, and governs the right side of the body and left side of the brain. It is associated with the mundane realm of experience and externalized awareness; also called surya nadi, as the solar energy flows through it; see Ida Nadi; see Sushumna Nadi

Pooja, Puja – honour, respect; rites; worship; see Yajna

Poornima, Purnima – the full moon day when sadhana is considered to be very beneficial

Poorva Mimamsa, Purva Mimamsa – often simply called Mimamsa, Poorva Mimamsa is one of the six systems of Indian philosophy (darshana) in the form of questions and contains the theory of traditional rituals (karma kanda); the philosophy of the sage Jaimini regarding the portion of the Vedas on sacrificial works and other religious ceremonies; also called Karma Mimamsa; see Mimamsa; see Shaddarshana

Prajna, Prajnaa – knowledge with awareness; awareness of the one without a second; individual consciousness, intelligence, understanding, intellect, wisdom; discernment, discrimination, judgement; intention; device; a name according to Vedanta philosophy for an individual in the causal state (as in sound sleep), when the supreme reality is veiled by the causal body; the seer who observes the state of deep sleep (sushupti), the third state of consciousness expressed by the all knowing 'm' of Aum according to *Mandukya Upanishad*; see Avasthatraya

Prajnanam Brahma – 'Knowledge is Brahman', one of the four maha vakyas (great statements) of the Upanishads, the expression of the identity of the individual soul and the supreme consciousness found in *Aitareya Upanishad* of the *Rigveda*; see Maha Vakya

Prakara – informative pamphlet

Prakriti – individual nature; manifest and unmanifest nature; cosmic energy; the active principle of manifest energy; nature or primordial matter (source of the universe); according to Samkhya philosophy, insentient prakriti consists of three aspects or qualities called gunas: sattwa, rajas and tamas. They remain unmanifest (avyakta) when in equilibrium, but when this equilibrium is disturbed by the proximity of the purusha consciousness, manifestation, creation and evolution set in; see Purusha

Pralaya – periodic dematerialization of the entire universe at the end of a set period of time when creation merges back into the unseen source

Prana – vital energy force, essence of life permeating both the macrocosmos and microcosmos; in the unmanifest and manifest states; breath, respiration; principle of life; vital energy that functions in various ways for the preservation of the body and is closely associated with the mind; one of the five vital airs (pancha prana vayu), which operates in the region of the heart and lungs; see Pancha Prana

Pranamaya Kosha – energy sheath, or vital or pranic body; the sheath (kosha) covering the self which is composed of pranic vibration and the rhythm of pranic forces; see Pancha Kosha; see Prana

Pranapratishtha – tantric ritual by which an image or symbol of God or any deity is vitalized

Pranava – another word for the sacred syllable Aum (Om), the primal sound vibration

Pranayama – a series of techniques using the breath to control the flow of prana within the body; expansion of the range of vital energy; a systematic and scientific breathing technique by which one can control, conduct and conquer the flow of the life-force in the body; prana means life-force, ayama means expansion; in the Upanishads pranayama is said to have the ability to cut through mountains of karma

Prarabdha Karma – actions already performed which, like arrows shot from the bow, cannot be retrieved; that portion of one's actions which is bound to fructify in the present life and cannot be averted; see Karma

Prasthanatraya – the three authoritative landmarks in spiritual literature: the Upanishads, the *Brahma Sutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, on which Vedantic philosophy is based

Pratibhasika Satta – dream-reality; apparent or unreal as a dream

Pratyahara – drawing back, retreat; restraining the sensory and motor organs; withdrawal and emancipation of the mind from the domination of the senses and sensual objects; training the senses to follow the mind within; fifth stage of raja yoga; see Ashtanga Yoga

Pravritti – rise; origin, source; flow; continued; advance, progress; tendency, inclination; conduct, behaviour; employment, occupation, activity; continued effort, perseverance

Pravritti Marga – path of extroversion; path of action of life in worldly society or according to the nature of the world

Prithvi – Earth, literally 'the broad one'; earth, the solid state of matter, in Samkhya philosophy it is the fifth mahabhuta with the special property of smell; see Pancha Mahabhuta

Purana – past event; ancient, old; name of a class of sacred texts believed to be composed by Rishi Vyasa – 18 ancient texts containing the earliest mythology of the tantric and vedic traditions, viz. 1. *Brahma Purana*, 2. *Padma Purana*, 3. *Vishnu Purana*, 4. *Shiva Purana*, 5. *Bhagavata Purana*, 6. *Narada Purana*, 7. *Markandeya Purana*, 8. *Agni Purana*, 9. *Bhavishya Purana*, 10. *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, 11. *Linga Purana*, 12. *Varaha Purana*, 13. *Skanda Purana*, 14. *Vamana Purana*, 15. *Kurma Purana*, 16. *Matsya Purana*, 17. *Garuda Purana*, 18. *Brahmanda Purana*

Purascharana – observance consisting of the repetition of a mantra

Puri – town, city; name of one of the 10 orders of sannyasins founded by Adi Shankaracharya; see Dashnami Sampradaya

Puri, Jagannath Puri – holy city in Orissa where Govardhan Math is situated; see Govardhan Math

Purusha – literally 'who dwells in the city', the body being the dormant receptacle of consciousness, the soul; the totality of consciousness; male, man, mankind; the supreme being, God; in Samkhya philosophy purusha designates pure con-

sciousness, undefiled and unlimited by contact with prakriti or matter; see Prakriti

Purushartha – human attainment; the four goals to be fulfilled in life: 1. wealth (artha), 2. desire (kama), 3. duty (dharma) and 4. liberation (moksha)

Purushottama – 'highest purusha (supreme spirit)'; an epithet of Lord Rama who embodied the highest qualities in man

R

Rahasya – secret, private, clandestine; mysterious; mystic spell or incantation; esoteric teaching; doctrine

Rajas – one of the three constituent qualities (gunas) of nature (prakriti), and all matter; dynamism; state of activity; creativity combined with full ego involvement; emotion; restlessness; oscillation; as a personality trait it is expressed by the desire to dominate; see Guna

Rajasic – pertaining to rajas

Raja Yoga – the royal yoga; yoga of awakening the psychic awareness and faculties through meditation; the scientific method of union with the supreme universal being through control of the mental processes; enquiry into the inner awareness of samadhi; the most Authoritative text is Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. The famous ashtanga yoga forms a small part of this work

Rama – the hero of the epics *Ramayana* and *Ramacharitamanasa*, the seventh incarnation of Vishnu as the son of Dasharatha and Kaushalya and the most dutiful disciple of Vishwamitra; rejoicing, delighting; beautiful, charming; obscure, dark-coloured, black; white; see Avatara

Ramayana –literally 'the path of Rama', one of the most famous Indian epics.

Ratra – dogma

Ratri – night

Rigveda – oldest of the four Vedas and the most ancient sacred book of the Hindus. It contains hymns to the deities or guardians of the law, such as Agni, Varuna, Indra and Mitra, and presents nature as an eternal force working in the interests of humanity; see Veda

Rishi – inspired poet, ascetic, anchorite, seer; realized sage; one who contemplates or meditates on the self; one who experiences other dimensions; see Loka

Ritambhara – full of experience; cosmic harmony

Ritambhara Prajna – that power or truth obtained in the super-reflective state of samadhi; cosmic experience; according to the raja yoga of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, the repeated experience of nirodha in samadhi eventually itself becomes the dynamic truth-bearing samskara called ritambhara prajna, which blocks other samskaras, vrittis, etc., giving birth to seedless samadhi (nirbija samadhi); see Nirodha; see Samskara; see Vritti

Rudra – howling energy; deity of manipura chakra; name of Lord Shiva in the *Rigveda* meaning 'He who proclaims himself aloud'; signifies transformation through dissolution

S

Sabija Samadhi, Sabeeja Samadhi – with seed (sabija), the state of samadhi in which the seeds of desire remain in the mind, thus the seed of actions (karma) is not destroyed; see Nirbija Samadhi; see Samadhi

Sachchidananda – the supreme reality as self-existent existence-consciousness-bliss; see Sat; see Chit; see Ananda

Sadhaka – one who practices sadhana; spiritual aspirant, seeker; efficient, effective, skilful; adapting; assisting, helping

Sadhana – fulfillment, accomplishment, complete attainment of an object; expedient tool, implement, means of accomplishing anything; worship, propitiation; spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly for the attainment of inner experience and self-realization

Sadhana Chatushtaya – the four kinds of necessary spiritual effort, viz. 1. discrimination (viveka), 2. dispassion (vairagya), 3. the sixfold virtues (shadsampatti), 4. intense desire for liberation (mumukshutva); necessary qualifications for a student of Advaita Vedanta; see Shadsampatti

Sadhu – good, excellent, perfect; fit, proper, right; enough; virtuous, righteous, honourable; kind, well disposed; good or virtuous or holy person; sage, saint; Jaina saint

Sagara – sea, ocean; one of the 10 orders of sannyasins founded by Adi Shankaracharya, originally inhabiting coastal regions; see Dashnami Sampradaya
Saguna – with form or attribute; with qualities; see Nirguna
Saguna Brahman – Brahman with attributes, forms, powers and predicates; reality conditioned by qualities such as bliss, and perhaps even form (sakara), as distinguished from the ultimate reality which is beyond all attributes whatsoever; see Nirguna Brahman
Sahaja – spontaneous, easy, natural; true; native
Sahasrara Chakra – the thousand-petalled lotus; abode of Shiva or superconsciousness; highest chakra or psychic centre, which symbolizes the threshold between the psychic and spiritual realms and is located at the crown of the head; see Chakra
Sakara – with form; manifest
Sakara Ishta – the preferred deity (Ishta) with form; the form of the beloved
Sakshi – eternal witness; witnessing principle; seer; that which observes the actions of the body, emotions, mind and the senses without being affected at all; see Drashta
Samadhana – maintaining awareness of the higher reality; one of the sixfold virtues; see Shadsampatti
Samadhi – culmination of meditation; state of unity with the object of meditation and the universal consciousness; final step of raja yoga; self-realization; a state in which the mind is either completely concentrated on its object of contemplation (savikalpa samadhi), or ceases to function and only pure consciousness or pure awareness remains, revealing itself to itself (nirvikalpa samadhi); see Samprajnata Samadhi; see Asamprajnata Samadhi; see Sabija Samadhi; see Nirbija Samadhi; see Samapatti
Samadhi Prajna – higher knowledge attained through samadhi
Samapatti – complete absorption; samadhi; a state of mind where there is complete acceptance and equilibrium, like the ocean fully accepting the water of a river and not keeping it separated from itself; samapatti or samadhi includes a wide range of superconscious states in which absorption becomes deeper and deeper; see Samadhi

Samatva – equanimity under all conditions; equanimity of outlook making no distinction between friend and foe, pleasure and pain, etc.
Samavastha – state of equilibrium; fixed condition; similar condition or state
Sama Veda – third of the vedic texts, the Veda of chants and hymns, it deals mainly with devotion, worship and contemplation; see Veda; see Chhandogya Upanishad; see Stotra
Samhita – collection of hymns, prayers and mantras, structured using rules of grammar and tone. They are called stotras, suktas, etc. and are chanted during sacrifice (yajna). They are the oldest part of the Vedas; see Veda
Samkhya – one of the six systems of Indian philosophy (shaddarshana), attributed to the sage Kapila. Samkhya is a spiritual science dealing with the 25 elements of creation; relating to number, calculating, enumerating; discriminative, deliberating, reasoning; a reasoner; the philosophical basis of the yoga system, continually reverified by yoga practices; the philosophy underlying the tantras; see Purusha; see Prakriti; see Guna
Sampradaya – tradition; sect, denomination; custom; conventional procedure or course of action
Samprajnata Samadhi – samadhi with prajna (intuitive awareness); transcendental state. It alternates with asamprajnata samadhi and culminates in nirbija samadhi (samadhi without seed); see Asamprajnata Samadhi
Samsara – illusory world, the manifest gross world; cycle of birth, death and rebirth, transmigration, metamorphosis, metapsychosis; passage; the course or circuit of worldly life, secular life, mundane existence; curse
Samsari – the transmigrating soul
Samskara – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype; form, mould; operation, influence; idea, notion, concept; effect of work, merit of action; the faculty of recollection; impression on the memory of all patterns and mental impressions of the past, which remain unnoticed in the mind, yet set up impulses and trains of thought; unconscious

memories; impressions that do not fit into the known categories of our present personality; 16 traditional rituals marking different stages in life observed in Hindu culture in a process of purification undergone by the soul after arrival in the body of a human being; process of consecration performed on an item of oblation; see Sanskrita

Samyama – conscious oscillation of awareness between the states of dharana, dhyana and samadhi.

Sanatana Dharma – system of eternal values underlying the vedic civilization

Sanchita Karma – the sum total of all actions done by the living being (jiva) during countless previous births, out of which a portion is allotted for every new birth; see Karma

Sandhya – spiritual practice required to be practised by a student after the upanayana samskara at three conjunction times of dawn, noon and dusk; rite performed by rishis; early morning or evening twilight; union; division; the period of time between one yuga and the commencement of another; the union of ida and pingala nadis in sushumna; see Upanayanam

Sankalpa – will, volition, positive resolve; purpose, aim, intention; determination, conviction; desire, wish; thought, idea, reflection, fancy, imagination

Sankshepa – summary

Sannyasa – dedication; complete renunciation of the world, its possessions and attachments; abandonment of the temporal; the six stages of sannyasa life are known as kutichaka, bahudaka, hamsa, paramahamsa, turiyatita and avadhuta; the fourth of four stations (ashramas) in the vedic concept of a full life

Sannyasa Ashrama – traditionally the fourth stage of life for everyone from 75 years onwards; total renunciation classified into various types, viz. vairagya sannyasa, jnana sannyasa, jnana-vairagya sannyasa, vividisha sannyasa, vidvat sannyasa, atura sannyasa; see Ashrama

Sannyasin, Sannyasi – one who has taken sannyasa initiation (sannyasa diksha); a yogi; one who is not dependent on the results of action

Sanskriti – culture; social environment conducive for total evolution of individuals and especially their spiritual development

Santosha – contentment, satisfaction; one of the five niyamas enumerated by the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali; also known as the 'sword of Rama' due to its ability to cut through illusion (maya); see Niyama

Sanyam – self restraint

Saraswati – goddess of knowledge, speech and learning represented as the daughter of Brahma; speech, voice, words; name of a river (which is submerged beneath the sands of the great desert); sushumna nadi; soma; the name of one of the 10 orders of sannyasins founded by Adi Shankaracharya, which is dedicated to preserving spiritual wisdom; see Dashnami Sampradaya; see Triveni; see Shakta; see Ubhaya Bharati

Sarvajna – omniscient, knowing everything

Sat – true; that which really exists; entity; essence; in Vedanta, one of the three attributes of the ultimate existence or reality (Brahman); see Sachchidananda

Sat Chandi Mahayajna – a powerful fire sacrifice performed in honour of Chandi during which the Durga Saptashati is chanted 100 times over several days; see Chandi Yajna

Sat Guru – the guru who directs the disciple towards the truth (sat); the dispeller of darkness and ignorance (avidya); inner guru

Satsang – gathering in which the ideals and principles of truth are discussed; spiritual association; association with the wise and the good, along with the resolve and effort to express this in life

Sattwa – in Samkhya, one of the three constituent qualities (gunas) of nature (prakriti) and all matter; state of luminosity, harmony, equilibrium, steadiness and purity; being, existence, reality, true essence; in yoga the natural quality of purity, balance or goodness, which binds one by attachment to goodness and learning; life, spirit, breath, principle of vitality; consciousness, mind, sense; see Guna; see Gunatita

Satya – true, real, genuine; honest, sincere, truthful, faithful; virtuous, upright; absolute truth; reality; as one of the yamas described by Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, it leads to a state where

actions are based on and culminate in the truth; in life it is a vow to follow truth and renounce untruth in thought, word and action; see Yama

Satya Loka – one of the seven higher dimensions of consciousness; also called Brahma loka; see Loka

Satyam – the unchanging principle; the relative aspect of creation perceptible by the senses and understood by the mind; truth; sincerity; goodness, virtue, purity

Saubhagya – one of good destiny; a married woman

Saubhagya Chakra – the 14 triangles of Sri Yantra

Saundarya – beauty, loveliness, elegance, gracefulness

Saurya – pertaining to the sun; worshipper of the sun

Seva – offering oneself wholly for His cause; doing work for the Lord; selfless service

Shabda – sound; object of the sense of hearing and property of space (akasha); note (of birds, human voice, etc.); sound of musical instrument; word, significant word; see Mantra; see Pancha Tanmatra

Shabda Brahman – the Vedas; spiritual knowledge conveyed in words; knowledge of the supreme existence or the spirit; the eternal sound that is the first manifestation of reality and lies at the root of all subsequent creation; see Om; see Nada; see Veda

Shad, Shat – six

Shaddarshana – the six systems of Indian philosophy, viz. Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa (technically this is Poorva Mimamsa) and Vedanta (also known as Uttara Mimamsa); see Darshana

Shadsampatti – one of the four necessary qualifications for a serious spiritual aspirant according to *Aparokshanubhuti* of Adi Shankacharya, literally it means 'sixfold virtues': 1. equanimity (shama), 2. self-control (dama), 3. sensory withdrawal (uparati), 4. endurance (titiksha), 5. faith (shraddha), 6. constant concentration on reality (samadhana); see Sadhana Chatushtaya

Shadvairi – six 'enemies' of man, viz. 1. lust (kama), 2. anger (krodha), 3. greed (lobha), 4. delusion (moha), 5. arrogance (mada), 6. jealousy (matsarya)

Shaiva – pertaining to Shiva; worshipper of Lord Shiva
Shaka – an alternate Hindu calendar which commenced 78 years after the Christian era
Shakta – one who worships the various manifestations of Shakti in the form of Kali, Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, etc.; a sect in which Shakti (Devi or Ma) is worshipped as the supreme reality; see Panchaupasana
Shakti – primal energy; manifest consciousness; power, ability, capacity, strength, energy; the power of composition, poetic genius; in Samkhya, the power inherent in a cause to produce its necessary effects; the female aspect of creation and divinity worshipped by the Shakta sect; power that is eternal and supreme and of the nature of consciousness; counterpart of Shiva; the moving power of nature and consciousness; in Hindu mythology Shakti is often symbolized as a divine woman; see Sri Yantra; see Shiva
Shaktipeetha – place where Shakti is worshipped, there are 64 main shaktipeetha in India
Shakti Tantra – tantric practice for worship of the deities or the attainment/awakening of 'superhuman' power
Shama – maintaining equanimity; one of the sixfold virtues; see Shadsampatti
Shankara – name of Shiva, referring to his auspicious nature; a short name of Shankaracharya, an avatar of Lord Shiva
Shanti – pacification, allayment, removal; peace, calmness, tranquillity, quiet, ease, rest; cessation, end; absence of passion, complete indifference to all worldly enjoyment
Sharada Math – one of the four maths said to be established by Adi Shankaracharya, situated in Dwarka in the western quarter of India. It was assigned the *Sama Veda* with its maha vakya (great statement) 'Tat Twam Asi' (You are That). Its first head was Hastamalakacharya. The Tirtha and Ashrama orders of the Dashnami Sampradaya emanate from there
Sharira – the body (of animate or inanimate objects); the constituent element; bodily strength
Shastra – order; sacred book; any department of knowledge, science
Shastradhari – knower or 'holder' of the scriptures

Shastra (Shaastra) – weapon, arms; iron
Shastradhari (Shaastradhari) – a person who holds a weapon
Shatkarma, Shatkriya – the original group of six purificatory techniques of hatha yoga. There are many variations of each of the six scientific yogic techniques using solid objects, water, heat and air as cleansing agents. When practised correctly, they are sufficient for perfect purification of the body and removal of disorders from different organs and from the metabolism, as they are based on deep yogic studies of the human body, viz. dhauti, basti, neti, nauli, trataka and kapalbhati
Shat Sampatti – see Shadsampatti
Shaucha – cleanliness of the body and mind, purity (internal and external); one of the niyamas as described by Patanjali in the ashtanga yoga of the *Yoga Sutras*; see Niyama
Shikha – tuft of hair kept by Hindu brahmins on the top of the back of the head; peak; flame
Shikha Sutra Sannyasa – shaving the tuft of hair and removing the sacred thread which are the symbols of caste, showing readiness to go beyond all barriers towards unlimited and unconditioned consciousness
Shishya – literally 'one who is under discipline'; pupil, disciple; scholar
Shiva – 'auspicious one' or 'good'; name of the god of the sacred Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the work of destruction, as Brahma and Vishnu are with the creation and preservation of the world; destroyer of ego and duality; the first or original yogi; cosmic consciousness, counterpart of Shakti; see Rudra; see Ardhanarishwara; see Tantra; see Shaiva
Shivalingam – black oval-shaped stone (those occurring naturally in the Narmada river are especially revered); symbol of Lord Shiva; symbol of consciousness; see Jyotirlinga; see Linga
Shivoham – 'I am Shiva', an ancient mantra
Shloka – verse of praise; hymn; fame, renown; object of praise
Shoonya, Shunya – void state of transcendental consciousness; state of darkness prior to enlightenment referred to as 'the dark night of the soul'; mental vacuum; non-existent, empty, deserted, wholly destitute; solitary; state of nothingness, zero

Shraddha – trust, faith, belief, confidence; belief in divine revelation, religious faith; sedateness, composure of mind; respect, reverence; one of the sixfold virtues; see Shadsampatti
Shree – see Sri
Shruti – the Vedas (created through revelation which was heard), literally 'what has been heard', the most sacred scripture, having authority over the Smriti when there is need to reconcile their teachings; hearing; the musical notes; sacred knowledge; reported, heard of, learnt, ascertained, understood; well-known, famous, celebrated; see Veda
Shuddha – pure in nature
Shudra – one of the four varnas or divisions of the caste system in India; one whose consciousness is least developed, due to which one remains in ignorance, causing one to weep and mourn; in the *Rigveda* it refers to the soul yet to be purified by samskaras; one with a service-oriented tendency of mind or one engaged in such a profession; see Samskara; see Varna
Siddha – perfected being; sage, seer; semi-divine being of great purity and holiness; accomplished soul particularly characterized by eight supernatural faculties called siddhis
Siddhanta – the established end; the demonstrated conclusion of an argument, the true logical conclusion; an established textbook resting on conclusive evidence; a proven fact
Siddhi – paranormal or supernatural accomplishment; control of mind and prana; psychic abilities; eight supernatural powers obtained by yogis as a result of long practice. They are associated with opening of the chakras and the resultant power over the elements, viz. 1. anima, 2. laghima, 3. prapti, 4. prakamya, 5. mahima, 6. ishitvam, 7. vashitva, 8. garima; other siddhis include the power of entering other bodies, the ability to read another person's thoughts, clairvoyance, clairaudience, omniscience, effulgence, vanishing from sight, etc. They are considered to be obstacles on the path to realization because they maintain interest in samsara
Sita – literally 'a furrow'; ploughed land, agriculture; the name of the daughter of Janaka and the wife of Rama. Sita is the heroine of the epic *Ramayana*, who remained faithful

and undaunted though captured by terrorists (Ravana) and maligned by evil-thinking people

Sloka – see Shloka

Smriti – tradition, law, the body of traditional or memorial law; canon; a class of works called dharma shastra handed down by tradition; memory; one of the five vrittis listed in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; remembrance, recollection, thinking of, calling to mind; see Vritti; see Dharma Shastra

Soham – literally 'That am I', 'so' representing cosmic consciousness and 'ham' representing individual consciousness; mantra used in ajapa japa, said to be the unconscious repetitive prayer produced by the breath itself, the inhalation sounding 'so' and the exhalation 'ham' (also the reverse according to some texts)

Sri, **Shri, Shree** – wealth, riches, affluence, prosperity; beauty, grace, splendour, lustre; the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu; the word Sri is often used as an honorific prefix

Srikantha – name of Shiva; the four downward pointing triangles in Sri Yantra, so called because they belong to Shiva

Sringeri Math, Sringeri Peeth – one of the four maths said to be established by Adi Shankaracharya, situated in Shringeri in the southern quarter of India. It was assigned the *Yajurveda* with its maha vakya (great statement) 'Aham Brahmasmi' (I am Brahman), and its first head was Sureshvaracharya. It still functions actively today. Saraswati, Puri and Bharati orders of the Dashnami Sampradaya emanate from there

Sripancha – governing body in the akhara system consisting of five persons representing Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti and Ganesha

Sri Yantra – geometrical diagram representing the divine 'female' energy; highly respected esoteric vehicle for meditation; see Tripura Sundari

Sthira – firm, steady, fixed; immovable, permanent, eternal, everlasting; name of Shiva; name of Kartikeya

Sthitaprajna – one whose wisdom is firmly established and does not waver (due to fluctuations of the gunas), who is unmoved by the dualities of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, joy and

sorrow, victory and defeat and is unshakably established in superconsciousness. Such a person is described in the *Bhagavad Gita*; stabilized consciousness; see Gunatita

Stotra – group of mantras sung in praise of a deity; the singing of mantras (hymns) from the *Sama Veda* during a shrauta yajna

Sukha – happiness, delight, joy, suitability, comfort

Sukshma – subtle; subtle dimension; relating to the world of the psyche

Sukshmasharira – subtle body or part of the subconscious which manifests in the dream state; the subtle body composed of pranamaya, manomaya and vijnanamaya koshas; see Kosha

Sukta – set of hymns composed by rishis in adoration of deities as an expression of their perception in deep meditation

Sureshwara, Sureshvara, Sureshwaracharya, Sureshvaracharya – Lord of the gods, Indra; according to tradition, the sannyasa name given to Mandan Mishra, husband of Ubhaya Bharati. He was a highly respected scholar who became a disciple of Adi Shankaracharya on being defeated by him in debate and was later installed as the first pontiff of the Shringeri Math. He is the author of *Naishkarmyasiddhi*, a treatise on Vedanta, and also wrote commentaries on Adi Shankaracharya's explanations of the *Taittiriya* and *Brihadaranyaka Upanishads*, also on his *Dakshinamurti Stotram* and on the *Pancheekaranam*; see Math; see Bharati

Surya – sun; vital pranic energy; the sun god; symbol of the atma

Surya Nadi – another name for pingala nadi, literally 'energy flow of the sun'; see Pingala Nadi

Sushumna Nadi – central energy flow (nadi) in the spine which conducts the kundalini or spiritual force from mooladhara chakra to sahasrara chakra. It is the main energy flow related to transcendental awareness. It is 'situated' in the spinal cord of the human body, and opens when balance is achieved between ida and pingala nadis. Within it lie three more important subtle energy flows responsible for transcendental experience

Sushupti – third dimension of consciousness, witnessed by prajna according to *Mandukya Upanishad*; deep sleep or unconscious realm of mind; profound repose undisturbed by the senses

Sutra – a brief statement which explains the ancient spiritual texts; thread, string, line, cord, fibre; short rule or precept; aphorism or condensed statements strung together to give an outline of a philosophy, such as the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali or *Narada Bhakti Sutras*

Syadavada – Jaina understanding that one's deepest beliefs and convictions may be true but not be the whole truth; the theory of relativity

Swa – one's own innate, real force; soul, self

Swabhava – one's own nature

Swadharma – one's own duty in life; one's own real nature

Swadhisthana Chakra – literally 'one's own abode'; psychic/pranic centre situated at the base of the spinal column in the lumbar region (level of the generative organs), associated with the storehouse of subconscious impressions; see Chakra

Swadhyaya – self-study; continuous conscious awareness of what one is doing; one of the niyamas recommended by Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; education of the self; study of the scriptures and texts of yoga and self-knowledge; see Niyama

Swah Loka – one of the seven higher dimensions of consciousness; see Loka

Swami – literally 'mastery over the mind'; master of the self; title of sannyasins; an honorific denoting respect; see Sannyasa

Swapna – second dimension of consciousness, witnessed by taijasa according to the *Mandukya Upanishad*; subconscious realm of mind, state of dreaming

T

Taittiriya Upanishad – an Upanishad of the *Krishna Yajur Veda* in the form of a lesson to a student. The first chapter, Si*ksha Valli*, is on right education, the second, *Brahmananda Valli*, is on bliss, and the thrird *Bhrigu Valli* is the story of the learning of Varuna's son Bhrigu

Tamas – in Samkhya philosophy, one of the three constituent qualities (gunas) of nature (prakriti), and all matter; inertia, stability, stillness; ignorance, darkness; the gloom or darkness of hell; mental darkness; illusion, error; in yoga it is characterized

by inertia, laziness, mental dullness, unwillingness to change; electrically neutral; see Guna

Tamasic – pertaining to tamas

Tanoti – to expand, stretch, extend, spread, endure, perform

Tantra – most ancient universal science and culture which deals with the transition of human nature from the present level of evolution and understanding to a transcendental level of knowledge, experience and awareness; loom, thread, warps of thread extended lengthwise in a loom; main point, principle doctrine, rule; theory; science forming a set of rules for ritual worship, discipline, meditation and the attainment of supernatural powers; a particular path of sadhana laying great stress upon mantra japa and other esoteric upasanas; from the roots tanoti (to expand) and trayate (to liberate); see Upaya

Tantra Shastra – specific scripture of the fourth or present age (Kali yuga) cast in the form of a dialogue between Shiva and his female consort, Shakti or Parvati; tantras were the encyclopedias of knowledge of their time. The seven marks or topics of a tantra are: 1. creation (srishti), 2. destruction of the universe (pralaya), 3. worship of the gods (devatanam-archanam), 4. spiritual exercises (sadhana), 5. rituals (purascharana), 6. the six supernatural powers (siddhi), 7. meditation (dhyana)

Tantric – belonging to tantra

Tapas – austerity; process of burning the impurities; heat, fire; suffering; penance; meditation connected with the practice of personal self-denial; a burning effort which involves purification, self-discipline and austerity in which impurities covering the inner personality are completely eliminated; cleansing for the perfection of body and senses; one of the five niyama described by the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali; see Niyama

Tapasya – practice of austerity

Taraka – ferrying, carrying over; rescuing, protecting, preserving; ferrying one across the ocean of samsara

Tarka, Tarkah – logic; process of understanding through discussion and analysis; reasoning, supposition, conjecture, speculation, discussion, abstract reasoning; doubt

Tat – that; That (Brahman); the beyond; other than 'this'
Tattwa – 'that-ness'; the truth about something, or the thing-in-itself; an element, a primary substance; essence, truth, reality; principle, category; in Samkhya 25 tattwas are mentioned, and in common parlance five of these, the pancha mahabhuta, are often referred to as the five tattwas; true state or condition, fact; true essential nature; the real nature of the human soul and the material world as being identical with the supreme spirit pervading the universe
Tat Twam Asi, Tat tvam asi – literally 'That you are' or 'Thou art That', one of the four great vedic statements (maha vakya). Found in *Chhandogya Upanishad* of the *Sama Veda*, it is the instruction given by the self-realized sage to the disciple (upadesha vakya) that the real nature of the human soul or the individual soul (jiva) is identical with the supreme spirit pervading the universe; see Maha Vakya
Tirtha – passage, road, way; fort; descent into a river, the stairs of a ghat; place of water; holy or sacred place of pilgrimage, a shrine dedicated to a holy object (especially on or near the bank of a sacred river), a sacred or holy personage, or object of veneration; name of one of the 10 orders of sannyasins founded by Adi Shankaracharya; see Dashnami Sampradaya
Tirthasthana – a holy place of India; a pilgrimage centre
Titiksha – endurance with no complaint; one of the sixfold virtues; see Shadsampatti
Trayate – frees, liberates; to protect, rescue or save from
Trayi – the three Vedas taken collectively (the *Rigveda*, *Sama Veda* and *Yajurveda* are the three original, ancient and most revered vedas, with the *Atharva Veda* being a relatively later addition); a triad; a triplet; intellect, understanding
Tri – three
Trikona – triangular, forming a triangle
Tripura Sundari – highest truth; the devi of the Sri Yantra; the divine mother
Trishula – trident (often used as a symbol of the gunas or some other triad)

Triveni – the place near Prayaga (modern Allahabad) where the Ganges river joins the Yamuna and receives the underground Saraswati (often used as a symbol of the confluence of ida, pingala and sushumna nadis at the ajna chakra); see Atmic Triveni

Tulsi – the holy basil plant of India, sacred to Lord Vishnu and venerated by the Vaishnavas as divine, she is symbolically married to Shalagrama (a symbol of Lord Vishnu); a herb with many healing capacities; the wood is considered to be very pure and is made into rosary beads (mala) used for mantra japa

Turiya – fourth dimension of consciousness, witnessed by atma according to *Mandukya Upanishad*; superconsciousness; simultaneous awareness of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind which links and transcends them; a quarter, a fourth part, fourth

Turiyatita, Turiyateeta – 'beyond the fetters of nature'; the fifth stage of sannyasa; see Sannyasa

Turiyavastha – the fourth state of existence, combining yet transcending the other three states of waking, dreaming and sleeping, and related to the full understanding or reverberation of the mantra *Aum* according to *Mandukya Upanishad*; the state of samadhi; see Atma; see Avasthatraya

Tyaga – renunciation or gradual dissociation of the mind from worldly objects and the seeds of desire; leaving, separation; resigning, renouncing; giving away as charity; generosity

Tyagi, Tyagin – one who has renounced; heroic, brave; one who does not look to any reward or result from the performance of ceremonial rites

U

Ubhaya – both, of both kinds, in both manners

Ubhaya Bharati – she was titled 'Ubhaya' as she had mastered both kinds of wisdom and was respected as an incarnation of the goddess of knowledge, Saraswati. When her husband, Mandan Mishra, was defeated in debate by Adi Shankaracharya, she insisted on her qualifications to challenge him herself. It is

generally said he won the debate and that he installed Ubhaya Bharati as head of a math; see Bharati; see Math

Upadesha – instruction, teaching, advice, communication of an initiatory mantra or formula

Upadhi – superimposed thing or attribute that veils and gives a coloured view of the substance beneath it; limiting adjunct; instrument, vehicle, body; a technical term used in the philosophy of Vedanta for any superimposition that gives a limited view of the absolute and makes it appear as relative, e.g. a jiva's upadhi is avidya; Ishwara's upadhi is maya

Upanayanam – literally 'to lead near (to the spiritual teacher)'; the sacred thread ritual to initiate participants into sacred learning, a samskara in the vedic tradition; see Sandhya; see Samskara

Upanishad – derived from the prefixes 'upa', meaning near, and 'ni', meaning down, added to the root 'shad', meaning to sit, thus it means sitting down near a guru to receive spiritual instruction; ancient vedic text containing intimate dialogues and discussions between guru and disciple on the nature of the absolute and the path leading towards it; Vedantic texts conveyed by ancient sages and seers containing their experiences and teachings on the ultimate reality; the Upanishads are the philosophical portion of the Vedas, the most ancient and sacred literature dealing with the nature of human beings and the universe; see Advaita Vedanta

Uparati – desisting from worldliness; ceasing, stopping; death; abstaining from sexual enjoyment; indifference; also called uparama; one of the sixfold virtues; see Shadsampatti

Upasana – personalized form of worship; sitting near, worshipping or contemplating on God or a deity; devout meditation; see Panchaupasana

Upaveda – class of writings subordinate to the Vedas. There are four Upavedas, one attached to each Veda: Ayurveda belongs to *Rigveda*, Dhanurveda to *Yajurveda*, Gandharva Veda to *Sama Veda* and Sthapatya Shastra Veda to *Atharva Veda*

Upaya – approach, means, an expedient remedy; beginning; effort, exertion; there are four main upaya sadhanas in tantra,

viz. anavopaya, shaktopaya, shambhavopaya, anupaya (although anupaya requires no means or effort)
Uttara – higher
Uttara Mimamsa – one of the six principal systems of Indian philosophy (darshanas), also called Vedanta; see Vedanta; see Mimamsa

V

Vach, Vak – word, sound; talk, language, speech, voice; assertion, statement; phrase, proverb, expression, saying; name of Saraswati, the goddess of speech
Vairagya – non-attachment, dispassion, detachment from the world and its cause; it is spoken of as lower (apara), when it denotes detachment from the objects of pleasure, and higher (para), when referring to a cleansing detachment from the gunas or nature (prakriti) due to the attraction to purusha; see Sadhana Chatushtaya; see Para Vairagya
Vaisheshika – a treatise by the sage Kanada on the subtle, causal and atomic principles in relation to the five elements; one of the six principal systems of Indian philosophy (darshanas); see Shaddarshana
Vaishnava – those who worship Vishnu in the form of Rama, Krishna, Narayana, etc.; the sect that reveres incarnations of Vishnu as the supreme reality, and who worship God in his supreme form; see Panchaupasana; see Panchaupasaka
Vaishvanara – the seer who observes the manifest universe or the external, waking consciousness (jagrat), the first state of consciousness discussed in *Mandukya Upanishad* as relating to the 'A' of Aum; a name according to Vedanta philosophy for an individual in the gross (waking) state, where reality appears through the veil of an individual gross body; epithet of the god of fire; general consciousness (in Vedanta philosophy); the sum total of created beings; Brahman in the form of the universe (Viratpurusha); the supreme being; see Jagrita; see Jagrat
Vaishya – one of the four divisions of the caste system (varnas) in India, those who specialize in trade or undertake the responsibility of caring for society; see Varna

Vama – left side; being or situated on the left side; reverse, contrary, opposite, adverse; lovely, beautiful, charming
Vamachara, Vama Marga – the 'left hand' ritual of the tantras relating to ida nadi, mental and introverting experiences
Vanam – forest; name of one of the 10 orders of sannyasins founded by Adi Shankaracharya, whose members originally came from forest regions; see Dashnami Sampradaya
Vanaprastha – forester; one who retires to the forest
Vanaprastha Ashrama – third stage of life, traditionally from 50 to 75 years of age, where one retires from worldly life in order to practise sadhana in relative seclusion; see Ashrama
Varna – colour, hue; class of men, tribe, caste (especially applied to the four principal castes); race, kind, species; groups of letters in the Sanskrit alphabet; colour of a mantra
Varna Ashrama – the four principal castes (varnas) in India, viz. priest (brahmana), warrior or ruling (kingly) class (kshatriya), merchant (vaishya) and servant (shudra); the laws of the caste and stage of life; see Ashrama
Vartika – sub-commentary; see Bhashya
Vasana – knowledge derived from memory; imagination, idea; false idea, ignorance; wish, desire, inclination; a tendency created in a person by performing an action or by enjoyment, which then induces the person to repeat the action or to seek a repetition of the enjoyment; subtle impressions acting like seeds in the mind capable of germinating or developing into action; the cause of birth and experience in general; desires that are the driving force behind every thought and action in life; passion
Vasishtha– a celebrated sage or seer (brahmarishi), the family priest of the solar race of kings and the author of several vedic hymns, particularly the seventh mandala of the *Rigveda*. He was a typical representative of brahmanic dignity and power and is one of the seven sages who are identified with the stars of the Great Bear. The rivalry between him and the royal sage (rajarishi) Vishwamitra forms the subject of many legends; see Arundhati
Vayu Tattwa – air element; see Pancha Mahabhuta

Veda – knowledge; sacred knowledge, holy learning; the most ancient and authentic scripture of the sanatana dharma composed before 5,000 BC, revealed to sages and seers and expressing knowledge of the whole universe. The Vedas are not written by any human (apaurusheya), having been directly revealed by the supreme being, Brahman. They are what is heard or revealed (shruti), as distinguished from that constructed from memory (smriti). The Veda is therefore free from the imperfections to which human productions are subject. As the sounds forming the text of the Veda occur in the same order and are pronounced in the same manner, it is said to be eternal. It teaches who and what Brahman is, and how Brahman should be worshipped. Smritis, Itihasas and Puranas only amplify its teachings; see Rigveda; see Yajurveda; see Sama Veda; see Atharva Veda; see Samhita; see Aranyaka; see Brahmana; see Upanishad; see Upaveda

Vedanga – an auxiliary to the Vedas. The vedangas number six: 1. the science of proper articulation and pronunciation (shiksha), 2. rituals and ceremonies (kalpa), 3. grammar (vyakarana), 4. etymological explanation of different vedic words (nirukta), 5. the science of prosody (chandas), 6. astronomy (jyotisha)

Vedanta – literally 'the last part of the Vedas'; the Upanishads; Vedanta teaches the ultimate aim and scope of the Vedas. It states there is one eternal principle (Brahman); philosophy of realization of Brahman; the end of perceivable knowledge, where the mind experiences its own limits and one goes beyond them, gaining realization and understanding through that exploration; the school of Hindu thought based primarily on the Upanishads. It upholds the doctrine of either pure non-dualism (Advaita Vedanta) or conditional non-dualism (Vishishta Advaita). Vedanta is also called Uttara Mimamsa; one of the six principal systems of Hindu philosophy (darshanas); see Shaddarshana; see Prasthanatraya; see Maya; see Upadhi; see Turiya

Vedanta Sutra – see Brahma Sutra

Vedavyasa – see Vyasa

Vibhuti, Vibhooti – sacred ash; psychic glory and power; divine power; pervasion; the special forms in which the Lord exhibits himself; might, power, greatness; outer expression of the inner reality; supernatural powers acquired by a yogi in the course of the journey towards perfection through purification of the mind; prosperity, welfare

Vichara – reflection; enquiry into the nature of the self, Brahman or truth; ever-present reflection on the why and wherefore of things; enquiry into the real meaning of the maha vakya (great saying) 'Tat Twam Asi'; contemplation on the real and the unreal

Vidya – from the root 'vid' or inner knowledge; knowledge, learning, lore, science; higher knowledge, spiritual knowledge; a spell, an incantation; the goddess Durga; see Avidya

Vijaya – victory

Vijnana – intuitive ability of mind; essential knowledge, higher understanding; knowledge, wisdom; the principle of pure intelligence; understanding; discrimination, discernment; secular knowledge of the self; worldly or profane knowledge derived from worldly experience; science

Vijnanamaya Kosha – astral or psychic (higher mental) sheath or body (kosha); one of the sheaths of the soul, consisting of the principle of intellect or buddhi, the subtler level of our own existence with its vision, intuition, wisdom and power of understanding; the covering of the self which is made of knowledge; see Pancha Kosha

Vikara – phenomena

Vishnu – vedic deity; preserver of the universe; supreme consciousness; the second deity of the Hindu trinity, entrusted with the preservation of the world, a duty which obliges him to appear in several incarnations; deity often associated with water; name of Agni; see Avatara

Vishuddhi Chakra – literally 'centre of purification', the psychic/pranic centre located at the level of the throat pit or the thyroid gland and associated with the cervical and laryngeal plexus at the base of the throat. It is the psychic centre particularly connected with purification and communication; see Chakra

Vishva – cosmos, universe, the whole world; name of the jiva in the waking state; every, everyone; eternal; all, whole, entire; universal; see Vaishvanara

Vivarana – sub-commentary

Vivarta – doctrine of Advaita Vedanta stating that creation is only an illusory appearance of the absolute Brahman; unreal change; superimposition

Viveka – discrimination; right knowledge or understanding; sense of discrimination between the self and the not-self, between the eternal and the transitory, between consciousness and unconsciousness, between prakriti and purusha; judgement; consideration, discussion, investigation; distinction, difference; true knowledge; see Sadhana Chatushtaya

Vritti – a modification arising in consciousness; circular movement of consciousness; five mental modifications described in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; attitude; operation of mind; thought waves; the power or force of a word by which it expresses, indicates and suggests a meaning; patterns, circles; a whirlpool; see Chitta Vritti

Vyakta – manifest, seen; manifest universe

Vyasa – name of a great sage who wrote the *Brahma Sutra* and the *Mahabharata* (which includes the *Bhagavad Gita*), and codified the four Vedas, etc.; also called Rishi Apantaratamas, Krishnadvaipayana, Rishi Veda Vyasa and Badarayana, and considered to be an avatara of Lord Vishnu; see Purana

Vyavahara – behaviour; worldly activity, relative activity as opposed to absolute being; worldly relation; phenomenal world; practical, phenomenal, empirical, relative (as opposed to absolute or paramarthika); see Paramartha

Vyavaharika Satta – empirical reality

Y

Yajna, Yajana – sacrifice or sacrificial rite; vedic sacrifice; offering oblations to the sacred fire; yajna consists of three syllables, *ya*, *ja* and *na*, which refer to the three processes involved in every act performed and which must be balanced – production (ya), distribution (ja) and assimiliation

(na); yajna has three components: ritual or worship (pooja), satsang and unconditional giving (dana); see Samhita; see Yajurveda

Yajnopavita – sacred thread worn by a new initiate into Gayatri mantra; see Upanayanam

Yajurveda – literally 'knowledge of sacrifice'; Veda containing all the rituals, mantras, karmas and resulting fruits or effects of karmas (karmaphala) relating to sacrifice. The second of the four principal Vedas, it is a collection of sacred texts in prose relating to sacrifices; see Veda; see Brihadaranyaka; see Kathopanishad; see Yajna

Yama – self-restraints or rules of conduct which render the emotions tranquil; the first of eight limbs or means of attaining samadhi in the ashtanga yoga of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; universal ethical disciplines transcending creed, country, age and time; restraint, forbearance, self control

Yama (Yamah) – the god of death; the planet Saturn; the weather; see Kathopanishad

Yantra – geometric symbol designed for concentration or meditation in order to unleash the hidden potential within the consciousness; visual form of mantra used for concentration and meditation; astronomical diagram; an amulet; any prop or support; any machine; that which restrains or fastens

Yatra – going on a pilgrimage; a journey; going, motion; march of an army, expedition, invasion; kind of dramatic entertainment, festival, fair, festive or solemn occasion; course of time; common practice; livelihood

Yoga – the root is 'yuj', meaning 'to join, to yoke, to concentrate one's attention'; a method of practice leading to conscious union of the human being (atman) with the universal existence or Brahman; practices, philosophy and lifestyle to achieve peace, power and spiritual wisdom as well as perfect health, a sound mind and a balanced personality; methods and practices leading to a state of union between two opposite poles, i.e. individual and universal awareness; union, communion; one of the six main systems of philosophy (darshanas) of India; see Shaddarshana

Yogabhyasa – practice of yoga
Yoga Darshana – yoga philosophy, yogic vision of reality
Yoga Shastra – the yoga system of philosophy and practice where the chief aim is to teach the means for the human soul to unite completely with the supreme spirit; elaborate rules for the proper practice of concentration of mind; deep and abstract meditation; contemplation of the absolute reality
Yoga Sutra – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by sage Patanjali, it consists of 105 aphorisms on yoga and is divided into four parts dealing respectively with samadhi, the means by which yoga is attained, the powers the seeker comes across in the quest and the final state of liberation (kaivalya); see Raja Yoga
Yogi, Yogin – an adept in yoga; follower of the yoga system of philosophy and practice; one connected or endowed with yoga
Yuga – aeon; there are four yugas: 1. Krita or Satya Yuga, 2. Treta Yuga, 3. Dwapara Yuga and 4. Kali Yuga – and we are presently in Kali Yuga.

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Yoga philosophy and the study of Sanskrit have been areas of special interest and Swami Yogakanti continues to contribute her extensive knowledge to many of the ashram publications.



The Adi Shankaracharya founded the Dashnami tradition of sannyasa, to which many of India's great spiritual leaders have belonged over the centuries. These masters preserved and propagated the vedic lifestyle and yogic sadhanas which open up the mind, heart and one's whole life.

Even today some teachers of this essential goodness exist. *Living Shankara* tells the story of Shankara's life – following his footprints, for they have formed the path that a growing number of people treasure. This book may be dry and dusty because the trail is old, but people who are sincerely interested in changing themselves and their lifestyle can still find guides to light the way: and that is the living legacy of Shankara.



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