

Viveka Chudamani

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Sankara Bhagavatpada's Viveka Chudamani, or The Crown - gem of Discrimination, was translated into Tamil Prose by Sri Ramana Maharshi while he was living in Virupaksha Cave in Tiruvannamalai, South India. The following introduction which Sri Ramana wrote when his translation was to be printed, captures the spirit of the great work comprising 581 verses and is reproduced here from the Collected Works, edited by Arthur Osborne.

Every being in the world yearns to be always happy and free from the taint of sorrow, and desires to get rid of bodily ailments, etc. which are not of its true nature. Further, everyone cherishes the greatest love for himself, and this love is not possible in the absence of happiness. In deep sleep, though devoid of everything, one has the experience of being happy. Yet, due to the ignorance of the real nature of one's own being, which is happiness itself, people flounder in the vast ocean of material existence, forsaking the right path that leads to happiness, and act under the mistaken belief that the way to be happy consists in obtaining the pleasures of this and the other world.

Unfortunately, however, there is no such happiness, which has not the taint of sorrow. It is precisely for the purpose of pointing out the straight path to true happiness that Lord Siva, taking on the guise of Sri Sankaracharya, wrote the commentaries on the Triple Canon (*Prasthāna Traya*) of the Vedānta, which extol the excellence of this bliss; and that he demonstrated it by his own example in life. These commentaries, however, are of little use to those ardent seekers who are intent upon realizing the bliss of Liberation but have not the scholarship necessary for studying them.

It is for such as these that Sri Sankara revealed the essence of the commentaries in this short treatise, *The Crown-gem of Discrimination*, explaining in detail the points that have to be grasped by those who seek Liberation, and thereby directing them to the true and direct path.

Practice of Enquiry

Sri Sankara begins by observing that it is hard indeed to attain human birth, and that, having attained it, one should strive to achieve the bliss of Liberation, which is really only the nature of one's being. By *jnana* or Spiritual knowledge, alone is this Bliss to be realized, and *Jnana* is achieved only through *vichāra* or steady enquiry. In order to learn this method of enquiry, says Sri Sankara, one should seek the grace of a Guru; and he then proceeds to describe the traits of the Guru and his disciple and how the latter should approach and serve his master.

He emphasizes that, in order to realise the bliss of liberation, one's own individual effort is an essential factor. Mere book-learning never yields this bliss; it can be realized only through Self-enquiry or *vichara*, which consists of *sravana* or devoted attention to the precepts of the Guru, *manana* or deep contemplation and *nididhyasana* or cultivation of equanimity in the Self.

The three bodies (physical, subtle and causal) are non-self and are unreal. The Self, that is the *Aham* or 'I' is quite different from them. It is due to ignorance that the sense of Self or the 'I' notion is foisted on that which is not Self, and this indeed is bondage. Since from ignorance arises bondage, from Knowledge ensues Liberation. To know this from the Guru is *sravana*.

The process of *manana*, which is subtle enquiry or deep contemplation, consists in rejecting the three bodies consisting of the five sheaths (physical, vital, mental, intellectual and blissful), as not 'I' and discovering through subtle enquiry of 'Who am I?' that which is different from all three and exists single and universal in the hearts as *Aham* or 'I', just as a stalk of grass is delicately drawn out from its sheath. This 'I' is

denoted by the words *tvam* (in the Scriptural dictum '*Tat-tvam-asi*' That thou art.)

The world of name and form is but an adjunct of *Tat* or Brahman and, having no separate reality, is rejected as reality and affirmed as nothing else but Brahman. The instruction of the disciple by the Guru in the *Mahavakya Tat-tvamasi*, which declares the identity of the Self and the Supreme, is this *upadesa* (spiritual guidance). The disciple is then enjoined to remain in the beatific state of *Aham-Brahman*, (*I* the Absolute). Nevertheless, the old tendencies of the mind sprout up thick and strong and constitute an obstruction. These tendencies are three fold and ego is their root. The ego flourishes in the externalized and differentiating consciousness caused by the forces of projection due to *rajas* and veiling due to *tamas*.

To fix the mind firmly in the heart until these forces are destroyed and to awaken with unswerving, ceaseless vigilance the trend and cognate tendency which is characteristic of the Atman and is expressed by the saying: *Āham Brahmasmi* (*I* am Brahman), and *Brahmaivaham* (Brahman alone am I) is termed *nididhyasana* or *Atmānusandhdna*, that is constancy in the Self. This is otherwise called *bhakti*, *yoga* and *dhyana*.

Atmānusandhana has been compared to churning curds in order to make butter, the mind being compared to the churn, the heart to the curds, and the practice of concentration on the Self to the process of churning. Just as butter is made by churning the curds and fire by friction, so the natural and changeless state of *nirvikalpa samadhi* is produced by unswerving vigil and concentration on the Self, ceaseless like the unbroken flow of oil. This readily and spontaneously yields that direct, immediate, unobstructed, and universal perception of Brahman, which is at once knowledge and experience and which transcends time and space.

Liberated while Alive

This perception is Self-realization. Achieving it cuts the knot of the heart. The false delusions of ignorance, the vicious and age-long tendencies of the mind which constitute this knot are destroyed. All doubts are dispelled and the bondage of *karma* is severed.

Thus in this Crown-gem of Discrimination has Sri Sankara described *samadhi* or spiritual trance which is the limitless Bliss of Liberation, beyond doubt and duality, and at the same time has indicated the means for its attainment. To attain this state of freedom from duality is the real purpose of life, and only he who has done so is *a Jivanmukta*, liberated while yet alive.

Thus defining *a Jivanmukta*, Sri Sankara declares him to be free from the bonds of three-fold karma (*sanchita*, *āgami* and *prārabdha*). The disciple attains this state and then relates his personal experience. He who is liberated is indeed free to act as he pleases, and when he leaves the body, he abides in Liberation and never returns to this birth, which is death.