

Liberation in This Very Lifetime

How to Live Freely and Happily

Selected Verses From The Ashtavakra Gita

“The one who thinks he is free is free; the one who thinks he is bound is bound. It is true what they say: You become what you think.”



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CLASS ONE:
THE FALSE AND TRUE SELVES

|| aṣṭāvakra gītā ||

The Ashtavakra Gita

janaka uvāca ||

Janaka said:

kathaṁ jñānamavāpnoti kathaṁ muktirbhaviṣyati |
vairāgyaṁ ca kathaṁ prāptam etad brūhi mama prabho || 1-1 ||

Master, tell me how I can obtain wisdom, freedom, and imperturbability.

aṣṭāvakra uvāca ||

Ashtavakra replied:

muktim icchasi cettāta viṣayān viṣavattyaja |
kṣamārjavadayātoṣasatyāṁ pīyūṣavad bhaja || 1-2 ||

If, my son, you want freedom you must shun the objects of sense like they were poison, and pursue tolerance, sincerity, compassion, contentment, and truth as if they were nectar.

na pṛthvī na jalaṁ nāgnirna vāyurdyurna vā bhavān |
eṣāṁ sākṣiṇamātmānaṁ cidrūpaṁ viddhi muktaye || 1-3 ||

You are not the elements – earth, water, fire, wind, or space. In order to be free, you must know the true self, the heart of consciousness, the observer of these objects.

yadi dehaṁ pṛthak kṛtya citi viśrāmya tiṣṭhasi |
adhunaiva sukhī śānto bandhamukto bhaviṣyasi || 1-4 ||

If you don't identify with your physical body but instead stay focused on your consciousness, you will immediately become happy, at peace, and liberated from bondage.

na tvaṁ viprādiko varṇo nāśramī nākṣagocaraḥ |
asaṅgo'si nirākāro viśvasākṣī sukhī bhava || 1-5 ||

You do not belong to any of the castes, beginning with the Brahmins, nor are you in any particular stage of life. You are imperceptible, unattached, and invisible. You are the observer of all objects. So be happy!

dharmādharmau sukhaṁ duḥkhaṁ mānasāni na te vibho |
na kartāsi na bhoktāsi mukta evāsi sarvadā || 1-6 ||

Virtue and vice, pleasure and pain – these are all in the mind and they are not you, my king. You are neither the producer nor the recipient of karma. You are truly and always free.

eko draṣṭāsi sarvasya mukta prāyo'si sarvadā |
ayameva hi te bandho draṣṭāraṁ paśyasītaram || 1-7 ||

You are the one witness of everything. You are always completely free. Your only bondage is seeing yourself as something other than the witness.

ahaṁ kartetyahammānamahākṛṣṇāhidamśitaḥ |
nāhaṁ karteti viśvāsāmṛtaṁ pītvā sukhī bhava || 1-8 ||

The one who thinks “I am the actor ” has been bitten by the big black snake of egoism. Drinking the nectar of confidence, say “I am not the actor” and be happy!

eko viśuddhabodho'ham iti niścayavahninā |
prajvālyājñānagahanam vītaśokaḥ sukhī bhava || 1-9 ||

Thinking, “I am the One Pure Consciousness,” burn down the forest of ignorance with the fire of conviction. Free from grief, be happy!

yatra viśvamidam bhāti kalpitam rajjusarpavat |
ānandaparamānandaḥ sa bodhastvam sukham bhava || 1-10||

This whole world of appearances seems to be as it is imagined, like a rope mistaken for a snake. You are bliss, supreme bliss. You are that pure awareness. So be happy!

muktābhimānī mukto hi baddho baddhābhimānyapi |
kimvadantīha satyeyam yā matiḥ sā gatirbhavet || 1-11||

The one who thinks he is free is free; the one who thinks he is bound is bound. It is true what they say: You become what you think.

ātmā sākṣī vibhuḥ pūrṇa eko muktaścidakriyaḥ |
asaṅgo niḥspṛhaḥ śānto bhramātsamsāravāniva || 1-12||

The true self is the observer – all-pervading, complete in itself, one, free, aware, inactive, detached, without desire, and at peace. It's a mistake to think it's trapped in samsara.

kūṭastham bodhamadvaitamātmānam paribhāvaya |
ābhāso'ham bhramam muktva bhavam bāhyamathāntaram || 1-13||

Meditate on the true self – immutable, non-dualistic awareness. Free yourself of the mistake of thinking you are the mere appearance of you, with a self-nature either outside or inside (the body).

dehābhimānapāśena ciram baddho'si putraka |
bodho'ham jñānakhaṅgena taṅnikṛtya sukhī bhava || 1-14||

My son, for a long time now you have bound by the snare of identifying with your body. With the sword of wisdom that says, “I am pure awareness,” cut through it and be happy!

niḥsaṅgo niṣkriyo'si tvam svaprakāśo nirañjanaḥ |
ayameva hi te bandhaḥ samādhimanutiṣṭhati || 1-15||

**You are already unattached, free from karma, self-illuminating, and stainless.
“One must practice meditation” – this, indeed, is your bondage.**

tvayā vyāptamidaṁ viśvaṁ tvayi protaṁ yathārthataḥ |
śuddhabuddhasvarūpastvaṁ mā gamaḥ kṣudracittatām || 1-16||

**Truly, you pervade the universe and the universe is contained in you. Your
true nature is pure awareness, so don't be so small-minded!**

nirapekṣo nirvikāro nirbharaḥ śītalāśayaḥ |
agādhabuddhirakṣubdho bhava cinmātravāsanāḥ || 1-17||

**You are unconditioned, unchanging, formless, serene. Your consciousness is
unfathomable and undisturbed. Abide only in consciousness!**

sākāraṁṛtaṁ viddhi nirākāraṁ tu niścalam |
etattattvopadeśena na punarbhavasambhavaḥ || 1-18||

**You should know that whatever takes form is unreal; that which is without
form is changeless. With this teaching about reality there will be no
possibility of rebirth.**

yathaiṅgadarśamadyasthe rūpe'ntaḥ paritastu saḥ |
tathaiṅgā'smin śarīre'ntaḥ paritaḥ parameśvaraḥ || 1-19||

**Just as a form exists both within and outside the mirror that reflects it, so
does the Supreme Lord exists both within and outside of this body.**

ekam sarvagataṁ vyoma bahirantaryathā ghaṭe |
nityaṁ nirantaram brahma sarvabhūtagaṇe tathā || 1-20||

**Just as the one all-pervading space exists both inside and outside of a pitcher,
so too does the eternal and pervasive Ultimate exists in all beings.**

Exercise for Class One

For fifteen minutes each day, contemplate and meditate on the difference between the apparent, individual, egoistic self we identify with, on the one hand, and what our text declares to be the “true self.”

And then all day long, practice being the “witness self” that simply observes – without attachment, aversion, or judgment – what is happening in your mind: the reactions the mind has to outside events and circumstances; the mental afflictions that arise, last for a while, and then dissipate; and the thoughts that similarly come and go.

Notice what happens to your state of mind when instead of identifying with these mental contents you simply allow them to just pass through the consciousness.

CLASS TWO:
“I BOW DOWN TO MYSELF”

janaka uvāca ||

Janaka said:

aho nirañjanaḥ śānto bodho'ham prakṛteḥ paraḥ |
etāvantamaḥam kālān mohanaiva viḍambitaḥ || 2-1||

Ah! I've awakened! I am stainless and at peace, transcending nature. I've spent so much time duped by delusion!

yathā prakāśayāmyeko dehamenaṁ tathā jagat |
ato mama jagatsarvamathavā na ca kiñcana || 2-2||

Just as it is I alone who animates the body, so too do I animate this universe. So if there's anything I can call “mine,” it is the entire universe.

sa śarīramaho viśvaṁ parityajya mayādhunā |
kutaścit kauśalād eva paramātmā vilokyate || 2-3||

Having now really renounced the body and the world as it appears, by some skill or another I perceive my supreme true self.

yathā na toyato bhinnāstaraṅgāḥ phenabudbudāḥ |
ātmano na tathā bhinnaṁ viśvamātmavinirgatam || 2-4||

Just as waves, foam, and bubbles are not different than the water which makes them up, so too is the universe not different from the self that produced it.

tantumātro bhaved eva paṭo yadvad vicāritaḥ |
ātmatanmātramevedaṁ tadvad viśvaṁ vicāritam || 2-5||

Just as, upon analysis, clothing is made up of nothing more than thread, so too when this universe is analyzed it turns out to be nothing other than this very true self.

yathavekṣurase klṛptā tena vyāptaiva śarkarā |
tathā viśvaṁ mayi klṛptaṁ mayā vyāptaṁ nirantaram || 2-6||

Just as the sugar produced from the juice of the sugarcane is permeated with that taste, so too is this universe, produced by me, permeated through and through with me.

ātmajñānājagad bhāti ātmajñānāna bhāsate |
rajjavajñānādahirbhāti tajjñānād bhāsate na hi || 2-7||

When there is ignorance about the true self, the world as it appears seems to be real, but not when there is knowledge of the true self. Similarly, when there is ignorance about the rope it looks like a snake, but not when there is knowledge about it.

prakāśo me nijam rūpaṁ nātirikto'smyahaṁ tataḥ |
yadā prakāśate viśvaṁ tadāhaṁ bhāsa eva hi || 2-8||

My essential nature is that of light; I am nothing more than that. When the universe manifests it is really I who shines forth.

aho vikalpitaṁ viśvamajñānānmayi bhāsate |
rūpyaṁ śuktau phaṇī rajjau vāri sūryakare yathā || 2-9||

The universe, which is in me, is imagined out of ignorance to manifest externally. It's like seeing silver in mother-of-pearl, a snake in rope, or water in a mirage.

matto vinirgataṁ viśvaṁ mayyeva layameṣyati |
mṛdi kumbho jale vīciḥ kanake kaṭakaṁ yathā || 2-10||

The universe which has come forth from me will return and dissolve back into me, like a jar returning to the clay, a wave subsiding into water, or a bracelet melting back into gold.

aho ahaṁ namo mahyaṁ vināśo yasya nāsti me |
brahmādistambaparyantaṁ jagannāśo'pi tiṣṭhataḥ || 2-11||

I am amazing! I bow down to myself, for whom there is no destruction, remaining when the entire apparent world – from Brahma down to the last blade of grass – is destroyed.

aho ahaṁ namo mahyam eko'haṁ dehavānapi |
kvacinna gantā nāgantā vyāpya viśvamavasthitaḥ || 2-12||

I am amazing! I bow down to myself, who though continually embodied remains one, who does not come or go anywhere yet continually pervades the universe.

aho ahaṁ namo mahyaṁ dakṣo nāstīha matsamaḥ |
asaṁsprīśya śarīreṇa yena viśvaṁ ciraṁ dhṛtam || 2-13||

I am amazing! I bow down to myself! There is no one as powerful as I, who forever upholds the universe without touching it with my body.

aho ahaṁ namo mahyaṁ yasya me nāsti kiñcana |
athavā yasya me sarvaṁ yad vānmanasagocaram || 2-14||

I am amazing! I bow down to myself! Nothing or everything within the scope of what can be said or thought is mine.

jñānaṁ jñeyaṁ tathā jñātā tritayaṁ nāsti vāstavam |
ajñānād bhāti yatredaṁ so'hamasmi nirañjanaḥ || 2-15||

The three spheres of the knower, that which is to be known, and the knowing, are not truly real. When this appears to be so due to ignorance, it is really me, the stainless one.

dvaitamūlamaho duḥkhaṁ nānyattasyā'sti bheṣajam |
dṛśyametan mṛṣā sarvam eko'haṁ cidrasomalaḥ || 2-16||

The root of suffering is dualism. There is no other remedy for it than to realize that all visible things exist deceptively and that I am the one pure essence of consciousness.

bodhamātro'hamajñānād upādhiḥ kalpito mayā |
evaṁ vimṛśato nityaṁ nirvikalpe sthitirmama || 2-17||

I am just pure awareness, but because of ignorance I have imagined myself to be limited. Remaining always conscious of this I will stay in place of no conceptual thought.

na me bandho'sti mokṣo vā bhrāntiḥ śānto nirāśrayā |
aho mayi sthitaṁ viśvaṁ vastuto na mayi sthitam || 2-18||

For me there is neither bondage nor liberation; confusion has lost its basis and has come to an end. Look! The universe both exists in me and does not really exist in me!

saśarīramidaṁ viśvaṁ na kiñciditi niścitam |
śuddhacinmātra ātmā ca tatkasmin kalpanādhunā || 2-19||

It is certain that the universe as a whole, including this body, are nothing, and the true self is nothing other than pure consciousness. Upon what now is there to project?

śarīraṁ svarganarakau bandhamokṣau bhayaṁ tathā |
kalpanāmātramevaitat kiṁ me kāryaṁ cidātmanaḥ || 2-20||

The body, heaven and hell, bondage and liberation, and also fear – these are all just projections. What do they have to do with me, whose nature is consciousness?

aho janasamūhe'pi na dvaitam paśyato mama |
araṇyamiva samvṛttam kva ratim karavāṇyaham || 2-21||

Oh! I don't see duality even in a crowd of people, which is like an uninhabited forest to me. To what should I be attached?

nāham deho na me deho jīvo nāhamaham hi cit |
ayameva hi me bandha āsīdyā jīvite sprhā || 2-22||

I am not the body nor do I possess a body. I am not my ego. I am consciousness. It was the craving for life that was my bondage.

aho bhuvanakallolairvicitraidrāk samutthitam |
mayyanantamahāmbhodhau cittavāte samudyate || 2-23||

Hey! In me, an endless, great ocean, suddenly arises a surge of diverse waves, whole worlds, when the wind of mind blows.

mayyanantamahāmbhodhau cittavāte praśāmyati |
abhāgyājīvavaṇijo jagatpoto vinaśvaraḥ || 2-24||

When the wind of mind dies down, then, unfortunately for the business man who is the ego, the ship sinks in the endless, great ocean which is me. (2.24)

mayyanantamahāmbhodhāvāścaryam jīvavīcayaḥ |
udyanti ghnanti khelanti praviśanti svabhāvataḥ || 2-25||

How wonderful that in me – the endless, great ocean – the waves of individual living beings naturally arise, collide and play with each other, and then dissipate.

Exercise for Class Two

Janaka declares in 2.15, “The three spheres of the knower, that which is to be known, and the knowing, are not truly real” – a reference to what is sometimes called the “emptiness of the three spheres” and points to the real meaning of “non-duality” or interdependence.

This week, pick a difficult person in your life and each day review how this doctrine can be applied to your situation. An irritating person, for example, is not irritating on their own: they need someone who is irritated to be “irritating.” Reflect on your own role in this relationship and what you could do to change the dynamic.

CLASS THREE:
THE MASTER OF LAZINESS

aṣṭāvakra uvāca ||

Ashtavakra said:

tadā bandho yadā cittam kincid vāñchati śocati |
kiñcin muñcati gr̥hāti kiñcid dṛṣyati kupyati || 8-1||

Bondage is when the mind likes or dislikes anything, rejects or accepts anything, or rejoices or is annoyed about anything.

tadā muktiryadā cittam na vāñchati na śocati |
na muñcati na gr̥hāti na hṛṣyati na kupyati || 8-2||

Liberation is when the mind does not want or dislike, reject or accept, rejoice or is annoyed.

tadā bandho yadā cittam saktam kāśvapi dṛṣṭiṣu |
tadā mokṣo yadā cittamasaktam sarvadr̥ṣṭiṣu || 8-3||

It is bondage when the mind attaches to any doctrine, and it is freedom when the mind detaches from all doctrines.

yadā nāham tadā mokṣo yadāham bandhanam tadā |
matveti helayā kiñcinmā gr̥hāṇa vimuñca mā || 8-4||

When there is no “I” there is liberation, and when there is an “I” there is bondage. Taking this into consideration, simply stop accepting and rejecting anything.

vāsanā eva saṁsāra iti sarvā vimuñca tāḥ |
tattyāgo vāsanātyāgātsthitiradya yathā tathā || 9-8||

Samsara is just made up of your karmic inclinations. Free yourself from all of them! When you've renounced them, you've renounced samsara and can stay happily wherever you may be.

aṣṭāvakra uvāca ||
Ashtavakra said:

vihāya vairiṇaṁ kāmamarthaṁ cānarthasaṅkulam |
dharmamapyetayorhetuṁ sarvatrānadaram kuru || 10-1||

Give up desire, the enemy, and the pursuit of power and wealth, which always entails loss. And also religion which is the cause of the other two. Be indifferent to everything.

svapnendrajālavat paśya dināni trīṇi pañca vā |
mitrakṣetradhanāgāradāradāyādisampadaḥ || 10-2||

Look upon things like friends, property, wealth, houses, wives, and gifts as being like a dream or a magic show. They last only a few days.

yatra yatra bhavettṛṣṇā saṁsāraṁ viddhi tatra vai |
pauḍhāvairāgyamāśritya vītatṛṣṇaḥ sukhī bhava || 10-3||

Know that wherever there is craving there is samsara. Practice strong detachment and be free of craving and happy.

tṛṣṇāmātrātmako bandhastannāśo mokṣa ucyate |
bhavāsaṁsaktimātreṇa prāptituṣṭirmuhurmuhuḥ || 10-4||

It's just this craving that is the very soul of bondage, and destroying it is what is known as liberation. Just by detaching from the world one obtains

perpetual contentment.

bhāvābhāvavikāraśca svabhāvāditi niścayī |
nirvikāro gatakleśaḥ sukhenavopasāmyati || 11-1||

One who knows for sure that things by their nature come into being, undergo change, and then pass away becomes imperturbable and without mental afflictions and easily comes to peace.

cintayā jāyate duḥkhaṁ nānyatheheti niścayī |
tayā hīnaḥ sukhī śāntaḥ sarvatra galitaspṛhaḥ || 11-5||

One who knows for sure that suffering is really just in the mind and nowhere else is free from it and is always happy and at peace and all discontentment just melts away.

janaka uvāca ||
Janaka said:

kāyakṛtyāsahaḥ pūrvaṁ tato vāgvistarāsahaḥ |
atha cintāsahastasmād evamevāhamāsthitaḥ || 12-1||

First I become weary of too much physical action, then of excessive speech, and finally of thinking too much. So it is that now I stay within myself.

prītyabhāvena śabdāderadṛśyatvena cātmanaḥ |
vikṣepaikāgrahṛdaya evamevāhamāsthitaḥ || 12-2||

No longer taking pleasure in sounds, sights, etc., and not fixated on the self as an object of perception, my mind is free of distractions and one-pointed. So it is that now I stay within myself.

samādhyāsādivikṣiptau vyavahāraḥ samādhaye |
evam vilokya niyamam evamevāhamāsthitaḥ || 12-3||

Understanding that meditation is the rule of practice for those for whom there are distractions due to mental projections and such, so it is that now I stay within myself.

heyopādeyavirahād evam harṣaviṣādayoḥ |
abhāvādadya he brahmann evamevāhamāsthitaḥ || 12-4||

Because, o Brahmin, I have now left behind all accepting and rejecting, all joys and sorrows, so it is that now I stay within myself.

karmānuṣṭhānamajñānād yathai voparamastathā |
budhvā samyagidam tattvam evamevāhamāsthitaḥ || 12-6||

Acting out of ignorance is the same as desisting from action out of ignorance. Knowing this to be really the way things are, so it is that now I stay within myself.

acintyaṁ cintyamāno'pi cintārūpaṁ bhajatyasau |
tyaktvā tadbhāvanaṁ tasmād evamevāhamāsthitaḥ || 12-7||

Trying to conceptualize what cannot be conceptualized, one is just stuck in conceptualization. Abandoning such thinking, therefore, so it is that now I stay within myself.

evameva kṛtaṁ yena sa kṛtārtho bhavedasau |
evameva svabhāvo yaḥ sa kṛtārtho bhavedasau || 12-8||

Someone who has accomplished this has really done something; he has fulfilled his purpose in life. (12.8)

janaka uvāca ||

Janaka said:

akiñcanabhavaṃ svāsthaṃ kaupīnatve'pi durlabhaṃ |
tyāgādāne viḥāyāsmādahamāse yathāsukhaṃ || 13-1||

Even as a world-renouncer it is hard to obtain the contentment that comes from not owning anything. So I just stay happy, leaving behind both renunciation and acquisition.

kṛtaṃ kimapi naiva syād iti sañcintya tattvataḥ |
yadā yatkartumāyāti tat kṛtvāse yathāsukhaṃ || 13-3||

Realizing that truly there is nothing that is really ever done, when something arises that needs to be done I just do it and just stay happy.

karmanaiṣkarmyanirbandhabhāvā dehashthayoginaḥ |
saṃyogāyogavirahādahamāse yathāsukhaṃ || 13-4||

The practitioner of yoga who identifies with his body becomes obsessed with action and non-action. Abandoning both doing yoga and not doing yoga, I just stay happy.

sukhādirūpāniyamam bhāveṣvālokya bhūriśaḥ |
śubhāśubhe viḥāyāsmādahamāse yathāsukhaṃ || 13-7||

I have often observed that the appearance of pleasant things and events are out of my immediate control. So, not caring about whether the thing or event is agreeable or disagreeable, I just stay happy.

aṣṭāvakra uvāca ||

Ashtavakra said:

mokṣo viṣayavairasyaṁ bandho vaiṣayiko rasaḥ |
etāvadeva vijñānaṁ yathecchasi tathā kuru || 15-2||

Distaste for the objects of the senses is freedom; having a taste for sensual pleasures is bondage. Such is wisdom. Do what you want with it.

vāgmiprājñānamahodyogaṁ janaṁ mūkajaḍālasam |
karoti tattvabodho'yamatastyakto bubhukṣabhiḥ || 15-3||

This awareness of reality makes one who is talkative, clever, and busy into someone silent, stupified, and inactive. That's why it is shunned by those who just want to mindlessly live it up.

rāgadveṣau manodharmau na manaste kadācana |
nirvikalpo'si bodhātmā nirvikāraḥ sukhaṁ cara || 15-5||

Ignorant liking and disliking are states of mind, and you have never been the mind. You are awareness itself, unwavering and changeless. So go happily!

sarvabhūteṣu cātmānaṁ sarvabhūtāni cātmani |
vijñāya nirahaṅkāro nirmamastvaṁ sukhī bhava || 15-6||

Seeing yourself in all beings and all beings as being you, without a sense of “me” or “mine,” be happy!

viśvaṁsphurati yatredaṁ taraṅgā iva sāgare |
tattvameva na sandehaścinmūrte vijvaro bhava || 15-7||

You are, no doubt, consciousness itself where everything is occurring, like waves arising from the sea. So don't worry!

yattvaṃ paśyasi tatraikastvameva pratibhāsase |
kiṃ pṛthak bhāsate svarṇāt kaṭakāṅgadanūpuram || 15-14||

Whatever you see, it's just you who is appearing. How could gold be different from the bracelets, armlets, and anklets made of it?

ayaṃ so'hamayaṃ nāhaṃ vibhāgamiti santyaja |
sarvamātmēti niścītya niḥsankalpaḥ sukhī bhava || 15-15||

Give up such distinctions as, "I am so-and-so, but not such-and-such." Realize that you are everything. Be purposeless. Be happy.

ācakṣva śṛṇu vā tāta nānāśāstrāṇyanekaśaḥ |
tathāpi na tava svāsthyam sarvavismaraṇād ṛte || 16-1||

You may recite or listen to various scriptures over and over again, but unless you forget them all you will not be independent.

bhogaṃ karma samādhiṃ vā kuru vijña tathāpi te |
cittaṃ nirastasarvāśamatyartham rocayīṣyati || 16-2||

O wise one, you may strive for enjoyment, or to amass good karma, or to perfect meditation. But your mind will still long for that which is beyond all goals, where all desires have been eliminated.

āyāsātsakalo duḥkhī nainaṃ jñāti kaścana |
anenaivopadeśena dhanyaḥ prāpnoti nirvṛtim || 16-3||

Everyone is unhappy because they are always exerting themselves, and no one knows this. With this teaching, a fortunate one obtains emancipation.

vyāpāre khidyate yastu nimeṣonmeṣayorapi |
tasyālasya dhurīṇasya sukham nānyasya kasyacit || 16-4||

Happiness belongs to the master of laziness, for whom even the chore of opening and shutting the eyes is tiring – and to no other!

heyopādeyatā tāvatsamsāraṇapāṅkuraḥ |
spṛhā jīvati yāvad vai nirvicāradaśāspadam || 16-7||

As long as desire, the seat of the inability to discriminate, is alive there will be avoidance and attraction, which are the root and branch of samsara.

pravṛttau jāyate rāgo nirvṛttau dveṣa eva hi |
nirdvandvo bālavat dhīmān evameva vyavasthitaḥ || 16-8||

Desire comes from activity and aversion from abstention. The wise man, like a child, is free from such dualities and is stable.

hātumicchati saṁsāraṁ rāgī duḥkhajihāsayā |
vītarāgo hi nirduḥkhastasmīnapi na khidyati || 16-9||

A passionate person wants to escape samsara out of a desire to avoid suffering. But one who is free of passion is also free of suffering and is not bothered even in samsara.

yasyābhimāno mokṣe'pi dehe'pi mamatā tathā |
na ca jñānī na vā yogī kevalaṁ duḥkhabhāgasau || 16-10||

**One who feels pride about his 'liberation,' or who feels possessive about his body is neither a wise man nor a yogi. He's just another suffering being.
(16.10)**

haro yadyupadeṣṭā te hariḥ kamalajo'pi vā |
tathāpi na tava svāस्थ्यam sarvavismaraṇādṛte || 16-11||

Even if your teacher is Shiva or Vishnu or Brahma, you cannot become independent until you have forgotten everything.

Exercise for Class Three

In this part of the text, there is a lot of discussion about the nature of the cycle of suffering (*samsara*) and its opposite, freedom or liberation. Chief among the reasons given for why we continue to suffer is perpetual dissatisfaction and “craving.”

Set aside fifteen minutes a day in which you consciously practice acceptance and contentment with life as it is. When desire or aversion – the two main forms of discontentment – arise, just notice them without taking action and return to your practice of total acceptance.

CLASS FOUR:
LIBERATED IN THIS VERY LIFETIME

aṣṭāvakra uvāca ||
Ashtavakra said:

yasya bodhodaye tāvatsvapnavad bhavati bhramaḥ |
tasmai sukhaikarūpāya namaḥ śāntāya tejase || 18-1||

**I bow down to that peace and splendor which is the very essence of happiness.
When knowledge of it arises, then confusion becomes just like a dream.**

arjayitvākhilān arthān bhogānāpnoti puṣkalān |
na hi sarvaparitājamantareṇa sukhī bhavet || 18-2||

**One gets much enjoyment from the acquisition of all kinds of worldly goods.
But it is through nothing other than the renunciation of all of them that one
becomes happy.**

kartavyaduḥkhamārtaṇḍajvālādagdhāntarātmanaḥ |
kutaḥ praśamaṇīyūṣadhārāsāramṛte sukham || 18-3||

**How can there be happiness for one whose heart is scorched by the heat of the
sun – the pain of having things that need to be done – without the refreshing
shower of the nectar of tranquility?**

samastam kalpanāmātramātmā muktaḥ sanātanaḥ |
iti vijñāya dhīro hi kimabhyasyati bālavat || 18-7||

**Knowing that everything is only a projection, the true self is free and eternal.
So it is that the wise man behaves like a child.**

kṛtyaṁ kimapi naivāsti na kāpi hṛdi rañjanā |
yathā jīvanameveha jīvanmuktasya yoginaḥ || 18-13||

For the yogi liberated in this very lifetime, just here living out his life, what is there to be done when there is no attachment in his heart?

dhīro lokaviparyasto vartamāno'pi lokavat |
no samādhim na vikṣepaṁ na lopaṁ svasya paśyati || 18-18||

The wise man, even though he may be living like an ordinary person, is completely different. He sees no stillness, no distraction, and no deficiency in himself.

bhāvābhāvavihīno yastrpto nirvāsano budhaḥ |
naiva kiñcitkṛtaṁ tena lokadrṣṭyā vikurvatā || 18-19||

The wise man, free from the duality of existence and nonexistence, content and without desire, does nothing even though in the eyes of the world he is an actor. (18.19)

pravṛttau vā nivṛttau vā naiva dhīrasya durgrahaḥ |
yadā yatkartumāyāti tatkr̥tvā tiṣṭhate sukham || 18-20||

For the wise man there is no stress either in activity or non-activity. When it's time to act he acts and stays happy.

nirvāsano nirālambaḥ svacchando muktabandhanaḥ |
kṣiptaḥ saṁskāravātena ceṣṭate śuṣkaparṇavat || 18-21||

Desireless, free, spontaneous, liberated from all bondage, he moves like a dried leaf blown by the wind of karmic imprints.

kṛtaṁ dehena karmedaṁ na mayā śuddharūpiṇā |
iti cintānurodhī yaḥ kurvannapi karoti na || 18-25||

One who when acting thinks, “This action is done by the body, not by my purified form,” doesn’t act at all.

atadvādiva kurute na bhavedapi bālīśaḥ |
jīvanmuktaḥ sukhī śrīmān saṁsarannapi śobhate || 18-26||

He acts like one who is unable to say why he does things, although he is not a fool. Liberated while living, happy, illustrious, he thrives even while in samsara.

yasyāntaḥ syādahaṅkāro na karoti karoti saḥ |
nirahaṅkāradhīreṇa na kiñcidakṛtaṁ kṛtam || 18-29||

One who grasps to an “I” acts even when he does nothing, while for the wise man who doesn’t grasp to an “I” nothing at all is done even when he acts.

nodvignaṁ na ca santuṣṭamakartṛ spandavarjitam |
nirāśaṁ gatasandehaṁ cittam muktasya rājate || 18-30||

Neither agitated nor pleased, the one who has abandoned activity is a non-actor. The mind of the liberated one shines forth without expectation or doubt.

nāpnoti karmaṇā mokṣaṁ vimūḍho'bhyāsarūpiṇā |
dhanyo vijñānamātreṇa muktastiṣṭhatyavikriyaḥ || 18-36||

The fool does not obtain liberation through the karma that comes from practice. The auspicious one stays unchangingly in liberation through wisdom alone.

mūḍho nāpnoti tad brahma yato bhavitumicchati |
anicchannapi dhīro hi parabrahmasvarūpabhāk || 18-37||

The fool does not reach the Ultimate because he wants to become the Ultimate. The wise one, without wanting at all, realizes the true nature of the supreme Ultimate.

na muktikārikām dhatte niḥśaṅko yuktamānasaḥ |
paśyan śṛṇvan spṛśan jighrannaśnannāste yathāsukham || 18-47||

One who is free from all doubt and who has his mind completely disciplined does not bother with the liberation business. He lives happily just seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting.

vastuśravaṇamātreṇa śuddhabuddhirnirākulaḥ |
naivācāramanācāramaudāsyam vā prapaśyati || 18-48||

The one whose mind is pure becomes unconfused just by hearing about reality. He does not distinguish between good and bad behavior. He is indifferent to indifference itself.

yadā yatkartumāyāti tadā tatkurute ṛjuḥ |
śubham vāpyaśubham vāpi tasya ceṣṭā hi bālavat || 18-49||

The master does whatever comes to him to do, whether it's good or bad. His conduct is like that of a child.

svātantryātsukhamāpnoti svātantryāllabhate param |
svātantryānnirvṛtim gacchetsvātantryāt paramam padam || 18-50||

Because he is free, he obtains happiness; because he is free he achieves the highest. Because he is free, he is in nirvana; because he is free he goes to the highest state.

akartṛtvamatṛtvaṁ svātmano manyate yadā |
tadā kṣīṇā bhavantyeva samastāścittavṛttayaḥ || 18-51||

**When one realizes that his true self is neither the doer nor recipient of karma,
then the distortions of the mind are completely destroyed.**

kartavyataiva saṁsāro na tām paśyanti sūrayaḥ |
śūnyākārā nirākārā nirvikārā nirāmayāḥ || 18-57||

**Samsara is nothing other than having something that needs to be done. The
sages do not see that. They conform to emptiness and are formless,
unchangeable, and taintless.**

akurvannapi saṅkṣobhād vyagraḥ sarvatra mūḍhadhīḥ |
kurvannapi tu kṛtyāni kuśalo hi nirākulaḥ || 18-58||

**One whose mind is bewildered is always distracted because of his agitation,
even when not doing anything at all. The skilfull one remains calm even when
doing what must be done.**

sukhamāste sukhaṁ śete sukhamāyāti yāti ca |
sukhaṁ vakti sukhaṁ bhunkte vyavahāre'pi śāntadhīḥ || 18-59||

**One whose mind is completely at peace stays happy in his everyday life. He
sleeps happily, he comes and goes happily, he speaks happily, and he eats
happily.**

buddhiparyantasāṁsāre māyāmātraṁ vivartate |
nirmamo nirahaṅkāro niṣkāmaḥ śobhate budhaḥ || 18-73||

**When samsara has been terminated by the mind, it is only the play of illusion
that remains. The wise man shines forth free of desire and attachment to
“me” and “mine.”**

na svargo naiva narako jīvanmuktirna caiva hi |
bahunātra kimuktena yogadr̥ṣṭyā na kiñcana || 18-80||

There is no heaven or hell. There even is no liberation in this lifetime! What more need be said? For one in yogic direct perception, there is nothing.

dhīro na dveṣṭi saṃsāramātmānaṃ na didṛkṣati |
harṣāmarṣavinirmukto na mṛto na ca jīvati || 18-83||

The wise man neither abhors samsara nor longs to perceive his true self. Liberated from joy and sorrow, he's not living and he hasn't died.

niḥsnehaḥ putradārādau niṣkāmo viṣayeṣu ca |
niścintaḥ svaśarīre'pi nirāśaḥ śobhate budhaḥ || 18-84||

Free from attachment to his wife and sons and so on, without desire for the objects of the senses, unconcerned even with his own body, the wise man shines forth without expectation.

tuṣṭiḥ sarvatra dhīrasya yathāpatitavartinaḥ |
svacchandaṃ carato deśān yatrastamitaśāyinaḥ || 18-85||

Always content, the wise man lives on whatever comes to him. He wanders spontaneously from place to place, sleeping wherever he finds himself when the sun sets.

patatūdetu vā deho nāsyā cintā mahātmanaḥ |
svabhāvabhūmiviśrāntivismṛtāśeṣasamsṛteḥ || 18-86||

Samsara completely left behind, resting on the foundation of who he is, the great man doesn't care if the body lives or dies.

nirmamaḥ śobhate dhīraḥ samaloṣṭāśmakāñcanaḥ |
subhinnahṛdayagranthirvinirdhūtarajastamaḥ || 18-88||

The wise man shines forth without a sense of “mine.” A clod of earth, a stone, or a gold nugget are all the same to him. He has cut through the knot at his heart and has shaken off torpor and agitation.

CONCLUSION:
EXTRACTING THE SPLINTER OF DIVERSE OPINIONS

janaka uvāca ||
Janaka said:

tattvavijñānasandaṁśamādāya hṛdayodarāt |
nānāvidhaparāmarśaśalyoddhāraḥ kṛto mayā || 19-1||

With the tweezers of the knowledge of reality I have extracted the splinter of diverse opinions from the recesses of my heart.

kva cātmā kva ca vānātmā kva śubhaṁ kvāśubhaṁ yathā |
kva cintā kva ca vācintā svamahimni sthitasya me || 19-4||

**What do I care if you say “there is a self” or if you say “there is no self”?
What do notions of good and evil mean to me? Anxiety or non-anxiety? I rest
in my own greatness!**

kva mṛtyurjīvitam vā kva lokāḥ kvāsya kva laukikam |
kva layaḥ kva samādhirvā svamahimni sthitasya me || 19-7||

Life and death, worlds and worldly things, dissolution and meditative concentration – this are all meaningless to me. I rest in my own greatness!

alam trivargakathayā yogasya kathayāpyalam |
alam vijñānakathayā viśrāntasya mamātmani || 19-8||

Enough talk about the three goals of life, about yoga and wisdom! I take repose in myself!

kva bhūtāni kva deho vā kvendriyāṇi kva vā manaḥ |
kva śūnyam kva ca nairāśyam matsvarūpe nirañjane || 20-1||

What are the elements, the body, the senses, or the mind to me? What do I care about emptiness? What meaning does despair have to me, when my true nature is stainless?

kva śāstram kvātmavijñānam kva vā nirviṣyam manaḥ |
kva tṛptiḥ kva vitṛṣṇātvam gatadvandvasya me sadā || 20-2||

What do scriptures, knowledge of the true self, or a mind free of sense objects matter to me? What do contentment or freedom from craving matter to me? I've permanently transcended these dualities.

kva vidyā kva ca vāvidyā kvāham kvedam mama kva vā |
kva bandha kva ca vā mokṣaḥ svarūpasya kva rūpitā || 20-3||

There is no knowledge or ignorance, no “me” or “mine,” no bondage or liberation, no attributes ascribed to my true nature.

kva prārabdhāni karmāṇi jīvanmuktirapi kva vā |
kva tad videhakaivalyam nirviśeṣasya sarvadā || 20-4||

What do concepts such as “karmas that have already begun to flower,” or “liberation in this very lifetime,” or “final liberation after death” mean to me? I'm forever beyond making such fine distinctions!

kva kartā kva ca vā bhoktā niṣkriyam sphuraṇam kva vā |
kvāparokṣam phalam vā kva niḥsvabhāvasya me sadā || 20-5||

For me, who has realized that there is no self-nature to things, there is no meaning to “doer” or “recipient” of karma, karma which is “inactive” or “arising,” or karma which is “manifest” or “coming to fruition later.”

kva lokam kva mumukṣurvā kva yogī jñānavān kva vā |
kva baddhaḥ kva ca vā muktaḥ svasvarūpe'hamadvaye || 20-6||

There is no world or seeker of liberation, no yogi or wise man, no one bound and no one free. I reside in my own non-dual true nature!

kva sṛṣṭiḥ kva ca saṁhāraḥ kva sādhyam kva ca sādhanam |
kva sādhaḥ kva siddhirvā svasvarūpe'hamadvaye || 20-7||

There is no creation or destruction of the universe. There is no goal, no method, no pursuer of the goal, and no achievement. I reside in my own non-dual true nature!

kvopadeśaḥ kva vā śāstram kva śiṣyaḥ kva ca vā guruḥ |
kva cāsti puruṣārtho vā nirupādheḥ śivasya me || 20-13||

There are no teachings or scriptures, no disciple or guru. There are no goals of life for me, Limitless Shiva.

kva cāsti kva ca vā nāsti kvāsti caikaṁ kva ca dvayam |
bahunātra kimuktena kiñcinnottiṣṭhate mama || 20-14||

There is no existence or non-existence, no unity or duality. What more is there to say? Nothing arises in me.

Exercise for Class Four

In this part of the *Ashtavakra Gita* we get a description of how a liberated person would act in the world – freely, spontaneously, joyously, and without being motivated by the intention to achieve a specific outcome or result.

Such a description of what the *Bhagavad Gita* calls “karma yoga” – “action for its own sake” without attachment to the “fruits” of action – is what we do when we are at play.

So spend some time every day this week “just playing around.” Do something you enjoy (a hobby, game, recreational pastime, or whatever) and really “get into it” while suspending any thoughts about what “you’ll get out of it.”

Then reflect on how you might incorporate more of such a playful attitude to all activities in life.