

Ashtavakra Gita



Translated by [JOHN RICHARDS](#) ;Commentary by Sukhayana
Full Text at: <http://www.realization.org/page/doc0/doc0004.htm>

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The *Ashtavakra Gita*, or the *Ashtavakra Samhita* as it is sometimes called, is a very ancient Sanskrit text. Nothing seems to be known about the author, though tradition ascribes it to the sage Ashtavakra; hence the name.

There is little doubt though that it is very old, probably dating back to the days of the classic Vedanta period. The Sanskrit style and the doctrine expressed would seem to warrant this assessment.

The work was known, appreciated, and quoted by Ramakrishna and his disciple Vivekananda, as well as by Ramana Maharshi, while Radhakrishnan always refers to it with great respect. Apart from that the work speaks for itself.

It presents the traditional teachings of Advaita Vedanta with a clarity and power very rarely matched.

The translation here is by John Richards, and is presented to the public domain with his affection. The work has been a constant inspiration in his life for many years. May it be so for many others.

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Commentary:

My Hindhu friend has asked me to write booklets on the best works I can find in Indian spiritual literature. This Gita is revered by many famous gurus of India, and as we have an English translation, so we will begin my first works outside of what Buddha taught.

Let me begin by saying that there are people hungry for bliss and liberation. They are looking for a key to open the door. Many will sacrifice anything to find that key so they can open the door. There is a massive amount of literature in the spiritual schools of thought. The vast amount of it originates from India from ancient times to the present. For these serious students, you need to quickly find the keys, and you will need to be clear about which teachers and literature are going to help you.

Here is what I have found. On your way to finding that key, you will find amazing, inspirational literature. If you are a new student, it is my advice to gain the insight as quickly as possible as to what is real and what is false. For instance, you want to go to a store, and you seriously want to go to that store, but

you don't know how to get there. You just need someone to tell you How to get there. This is the spiritual quest. It is that simple. You need to know, so you read the literature and seek out the gurus. When you do, you need to ask yourself whether the writer or speaker has the directions to the store, simple directions. The book says, “these are the directions to the store.” You don't want philosophy, you want simple directions to the store. There are incredible intellects in the history of India who have laid out the philosophy.

Take for instance the Bhagavad Gita. Most spiritual people have read it and think it is quite profound. I just read a famous Upanishad book of 833 pages. If you are serious, you keep asking yourself, “Is this the simple directions to the store?” If you look closely at every statement in the Bhagavad Gita it is highly inspirational talk, but no roadmap is there. Maybe you read it and say, “This is what Krishna says, and is a wonderful description of the various ways to God-relization.”

Then the serious person says what is my first step. What street do I take from where I am to get to the

store? All you see is, “When you get to the store, there will be great lights, you will see that all other stores are nothing, and your wisdom tells you that you have found the store you were searching for.”. This is all wonderful you say to yourself, but just tell me the directions, so I can go there. But no directions are there. The writer doesn't know how to get there, but writes incredible, inspirational slogans as if he could lead you to the store. You find such nonsense as “Believe in the store and you will find it. Cant the name of the store and you will come upon it. Be celibate, give up desire and the store comes to you. Let's be serious. You just want simple directions, not a bunch of nonsense. So this is the discrimination you will need to progress in spirituality. Otherwise, you will find yourself forgetting you just wanted simple directions, and 20 or 30 years later you will have changed your name and clothes, learned to repeat the inspirational slogans, and become a follower and believer, and still haven't found any directions to the store. So, beware of the nonsense, and save your life. Just find simple instructions and go to the store. Turn away from the nonsense.

Janaka said:

How is one to acquire knowledge? How is one to attain liberation? And how is one to reach dispassion? Tell me this, sir. 1.1

This is the great question all serious students ask, “How do I attain Liberation”. Similarly, we ask, “How do I get to 7/11 store”. Let's see what the guru says.

Ashtavakra said:

If you are seeking liberation, my son, avoid the objects of the senses like poison and cultivate tolerance, sincerity, compassion, contentment, and truthfulness as the antidote. 1.2

OK, I want directions to 7/11, and you tell me not to go to the other stores, and maybe you are saying I shouldn't want all the stuff I want. Hmmm. Do you know How I can get to 7/11?

You do not consist of any of the elements -- earth, water, fire, air, or even ether. To be liberated, know yourself as consisting of consciousness, the witness of these. 1.3

Oh. You say the way to 7/11 is to know that I am at 7/11. I know I am not at 7/11, and I just need to know I am at 7/11. That's an interesting idea. I wouldn't have thought anybody would say that to me, when I am looking for directions.

If only you will remain resting in consciousness, seeing yourself as distinct from the body, then even now you will become happy, peaceful and free from bonds. 1.4

Yes. I know I will be happy when I get to 7/11. Do you happen to know where it is?

You do not belong to the brahmin or any other caste, you are not at any stage, nor are you anything that the eye can see. You are unattached and formless, the witness of everything -- so be happy. 1.5

Huh? Listen, sir. I am lost, and I need to find 7/11 to get some cold water. It is too much suffering in this heat. I already know I will be happy when I get to 7/11, that's why I am looking for it. Do you understand English?

Righteousness and unrighteousness, pleasure and

pain are purely of the mind and are no concern of yours. You are neither the doer nor the reaper of the consequences, so you are always free. 1.6

You are the one witness of everything and are always completely free. The cause of your bondage is that you see the witness as something other than this. 1.7

What? You say that it is my mind that causes me to believe I am not already at 7/11? And believing I am not at 7/11 is the cause of my not being at 7/11? Do you have any water? It may be my lack of awareness that I don't see 7/11 here, but I need water.

Since you have been bitten by the black snake, the opinion about yourself that "I am the doer," drink the antidote of faith in the fact that "I am not the doer," and be happy. 1.8

Faith in 7/11 and water will get me the water?

Burn down the forest of ignorance with the fire of the understanding that "I am the one pure awareness," and be happy and free from distress. 1.9

My ignorance keeps me from 7/11, and understanding I am already at 7/11 solves my problem? You are

right. I don't know where 7/11 is, and when I get there I will be happy, but you just speak nonsense. Are you drunk?

That in which all this appears is imagined like the snake in a rope; that joy, supreme joy, and awareness is what you are, so be happy. 1.10

I am just imagining I am not at 7/11?

If one thinks of oneself as free, one is free, and if one thinks of oneself as bound, one is bound. Here this saying is true, "Thinking makes it so." 1.11

I get it. You are a nut-case, and all I have to do is think of 7/11 and it is magically here. What drug are you on?

Your real nature is as the one perfect, free, and actionless consciousness, the all-pervading witness -- unattached to anything, desireless and at peace. It is from illusion that you seem to be involved in samsara. 1.12

Oh my Lord! Why do I listen to you? Yes, 7/11 is wonderful, but you don't know where it is, right?

Meditate on yourself as motionless awareness, free from any dualism, giving up the mistaken idea that you are just a derivative consciousness or anything external or internal. 1.13

OK. This is cool. Meditate on 7/11, and give up the mistaken idea that I am not at 7/11. How spiritual!

You have long been trapped in the snare of identification with the body. Sever it with the knife of knowledge that "I am awareness," and be happy, my son. 1.14

I see your technique. I think I am here, not at 7/11, I just need to know I am already at 7/11. That's helpful.

You are really unbound and actionless, self-illuminating and spotless already. The cause of your bondage is that you are still resorting to stilling the mind. 1.15

Oh! I am already at 7/11. The problem is my mind. OK.

All of this is really filled by you and strung out in you, for what you consist of is pure awareness -- so don't be small-minded. 1.16

Yes, I got it. I am small-minded. That's why there is no 7/11. You are fun. I don't meet many insane people.

You are unconditioned and changeless, formless and immovable, unfathomable awareness, unperturbable: so hold to nothing but consciousness. 1.17

Yes, hang on to 7/11. Should I chant “7/11, 7/11, 7/11?” This should help, huh?

Recognise that the apparent is unreal, while the unmanifest is abiding. Through this initiation into truth you will escape falling into unreality again. 1.18

OK. OK. Enough nonsense. I know, 7/11 is right here, but I am ignorant.

Just as a mirror exists everywhere both within and apart from its reflected images, so the Supreme Lord exists everywhere within and apart from this body. 1.19

Yes, you are right. 7//11's are everywhere, but you don't know where one is. Too much cheap street whiskey, I think.

Just as one and the same all-pervading space exists

within and without a jar, so the eternal, everlasting God exists in the totality of things. 1.20

Lord, I will never find 7/11 this way. Thank you for your help. It was fun talking with you. You have quite a way of talking. I have never heard such things before. I'll just go walking, and see if I can find a 7/11. Thank you. Bye.