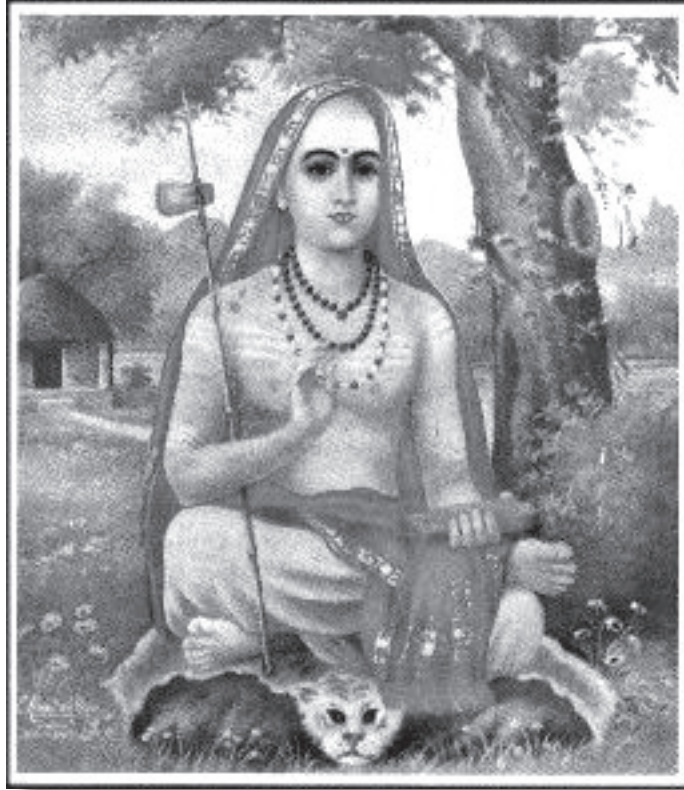


# HASTAMALAKIYAM

of  
Hastamalaka, disciple of Sri Shankara

ESSENCE OF VEDANTA IN TWELVE VERSES



॥ हस्तामलकोयम् ॥

Compiled by Dennis Hill

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**ESSENCE OF VEDANTA IN TWELVE VERSES**  
(Notes based on the Bhashya of Sri Shankara)

by  
S.N. Sastri

**Commentary by Swami Paramarthananda**



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# Essence of the Essence

## Preface

We reach the sublime pinnacle of spiritual potential living in sweet serenity free from disturbance in the mind. This begins with the longing for the peace and bliss of our true Self. Of the several paths we can take, the path of knowledge (*jnana yoga*) is the most direct. Essential to this path is right understanding. In the pursuit of right understanding we turn to the most ancient wisdom available to us today: the Vedas and their Upanishads.

The four Vedas and their Upanishads are the social, philosophical and spiritual DNA of Indic cultures in a broad geographic area including Persia and India. Let's look briefly at this body of literature to get a sense of the roots of this ancient path. There are four Vedas: Rig-Veda (1,028 hymns in 10 books), Sama-Veda (1,549 stanzas), Yajur-Veda (in two recensions) and the Atharva-Veda (730 hymns, 6,000 stanzas). The oldest, Rig-Veda, has been scientifically dated at about 6,000 years old. It began as an oral tradition and was later written out in Persian and Sanskrit languages. The principle subject of the Rig-Veda is dharma. Sama-Veda is primarily ceremonial chants; Yajur-Veda mostly ceremonial prayers, and Atharva-Veda is composed of blessings. This entire archive of wisdom is very self-consistent; as later Vedas draw from previous Vedas, primarily from the Rig-Veda.

The Upanishads, the earliest dating from about 3,000 years ago, are philosophical and spiritual discourses on Self-realization. Of the 108 Upanishads, there are twelve that are considered primary. The philosophy arising from the Upanishads is called *Vedanta* (culmination or essence of the Vedas). Even though these works are historically ancient, the principles are timeless; true today as they were millennia past.

To appreciate the place of Hastamalakiyam in its lineage of literature we must consider when, how, and by whom, this essence of the Upanishads came into being. First we will look at Adi-Shankara and the powerful effect he had on the culture of the time.

At the time of Adi-Shankara's birth (8th century CE), Vedic traditions had fallen into decline with currents of atheism and dualistic Vedanta. Through prolific writing and his brilliant debates with prominent scholars and philosophers, he established a purely non-dual tradition of Vedic thought known as Advaita Vedanta.

This was based upon the Upanishadic view of identity of *Brahman* (universal consciousness) and *Jivatma* (individual consciousness).

Even though Adi-Shankara had many thousands of devotees, there were four who are considered to be his direct disciples. There were Suresvaracharya, Padmapada, Totakacharya and Hastamalakacharya; all of whom made substantial contributions to the literature of Advaita Vedanta. The first three wrote many volumes of commentaries and authoritative treatises that were often specific and esoteric. Hastamalaka, however, is known only for one single work of twelve verses that encompasses the essential wisdom of all of Advaita Vedanta... and this from a seven year old boy. This remarkable story is detailed in the coming pages. Shankara himself was compelled to write a commentary on the Hastamalakiyam. It is extraordinary that the master of masters would compose commentary upon the work of his young student.

In the body of the present small volume is a translation of Adi-Shankara's commentary (*bhashya*) on Hastamalaka's twelve verses. Additionally, there are notes on the verses taken from Swami Paramarthananda's lectures given recently in Chennai, India, appended at the end of Shankara's commentary for each verse. This contemporary view gives us new ways to understand the terseness of Hastamalaka's original work. It also gives us a new reference for finding the truth of it as a realization in our own experience. This is in keeping with Adi-Shankara's insistence that we know these truths as verifiable beyond mere inference.

Much of the content is abstract and unfamiliar in western culture. We can only begin this exploration from the state of thought-free meditation. From this vantage point we are able to observe the arising of cognitive superimposition onto the purity of direct perception. Here we watch as the universe comes into being; then dissolves again when the wave of name and form merges back into the ocean of pure consciousness. Simultaneous with the creation of the *maya* (illusion) of name and form, arises the separate, imaginary identity of I-ness (ego) that completes the duality created by superimposition upon pure consciousness itself.

Hastamalaka calls this ego "*chidabhasa*." This is not only an interesting word, but is a crucial concept to non-dual Advaita, known as the "reflecting principle." The Sanskrit roots of the word are *chit*, meaning knower, and *abhasa*, meaning phantom. So we have this 'phantom knower' that has no real existence in the absence of consciousness. As we shall see later, Hastamalaka uses the analogy of

our face reflected in a mirror. The reflection has no real existence, just as our ego identity would not exist in the absence of consciousness. Inherent in this reflecting principle is the premise that consciousness does not arise from the ego, the mind or even the brain. The mind (*antakarana*) does not own consciousness, but merely reflects universal consciousness (*chaitanya*). Therefore it is consciousness that imparts sentiency to the individual *jiva*. The indwelling conscious Self gives life to this insentient corpus of dirt and water.

In the stillness of meditation we come face-to-face with our true nature, the Self. As we go through the process of a shift in identity from the ego (*chidabhasa*) to consciousness itself, it is as if the mirror has broken leaving only the true Self as witness to the appearance. The gestalt has flipped bringing the invisible seer to the front while the illusory ego identity fades to a forgotten remnant.

For this shift in identity to occur we must first discriminate the knower of the mind from the mind that appears to be this self. The mind and body know the world through the senses but it is the Self that is the knower of sensory and mental impressions. Consciousness is the light by which everything else is known. Without consciousness, there is nothing. The Self can know the mind but the mind can never know the Self.

Awakening to the Self occurs as a result of two simultaneous processes: We turn inward in meditation to embrace the sweetness of peace and bliss that is our true nature; at the same time, we release our attachments and aversions to the stuff of the world and transcend the drama of our mental entanglements. As the mind becomes purified, luminous Self-radiance fills our being. We become the blissful Self.

Living continuously in the fullness of the Self we never again experience being insecure, needy or fearful. Being contented and serene brings contentment and serenity to others. Expressing the spontaneous joy of just being, brings only love from all we touch.

~Dennis Hill

## Introduction

It is well known that Sri Sankaracharya had four disciples, one of whom was named Hastamalaka. This was not his original name, but was given to him by the Acharya. How he became a disciple of Sri Sankara is described beautifully in the work entitled 'Sankara-Digvijaya' by Swami Vidyananya. It is said therein that during his stay at the famous temple at Mookambika the Acharya happened to visit a nearby village named Sri Bali. In that village there was a Brahmana by the name of Prabhakara who was noted for his learning and the regular performance of the rites enjoined by the Vedas. Though he was quite wealthy and was respected by all, he was not happy because his only son was dumb and behaved like a congenital idiot. On hearing that the great Acharya had come to his village, he decided to take his son to the Acharya in the hope that the latter's blessing would cure his child and make him a normal, intelligent boy. He went to the Acharya and prostrated before him and asked his son to do the same. The boy prostrated, but did not get up for quite a long time. The Acharya, in his unbounded compassion, lifted up the boy. The father then told the Acharya, "O Sir, this boy is now seven years old, but his mind is totally undeveloped. He has not learnt even the alphabets, not to speak of the Vedas. Boys of his age come and call him to join them in play, but he does not respond. If they beat him he remains unaffected. Sometimes he takes some food, but sometimes he does not eat at all. I have completely failed in my efforts to teach him". When the father had said this, the Acharya asked the boy "Who are you? Why are you behaving in this strange manner, as if you are an inert thing?" To this the boy replied, "I am certainly not an inert thing. Even an inert thing becomes sentient in my presence. I am of the nature of infinite Bliss, free from the six waves (hunger, thirst, grief, delusion, old age and death) and the six stages (birth, existence, growth, change, decay and destruction)". The boy then expounded the gist of all the Upanishads in twelve verses, which became famous under the name 'Hastamalakiyam'. As the knowledge of the Atman was as clear to him as an amalaka fruit in one's palm, the name "Hastamalaka" was given to him. The Acharya then told the father of the boy "This apparently dumb son of yours knows the truth of the Atman by virtue of his practices in past lives. He is totally free from all attachment and any sense of I-ness with regard to the body. Let this boy come with me". So saying, the Acharya took the boy along with him as his disciple.

Subsequently, while explaining to his other disciples how this boy had attained Self-knowledge even at this very young age, Sri Sankara says, “One day, when he was a two-year old child, his mother had taken him along with her when she went to the river for her bath. She left the child on the bank under the care of a Jnani who happened to be sitting there. The child accidentally fell into the water when the Jnani was deep in meditation. When the mother came back after her bath she was shocked to find that the child was dead and she began to cry. Moved by pity for her the Jnani, by virtue of his Yogic power, entered the body of the child, casting off his own mortal coil. The child thus became a realized soul.”

Sri Sankara was so impressed by the profundity of these twelve verses that he himself wrote an elaborate commentary on them. In this commentary Sri Sankara refers to Hastamalaka, his own disciple, as the ‘Acharya’. This indicates, not only the greatness of Hastamalaka’s verses, but also the magnanimity of the Guru, Sri Sankara. The explanation of these twelve verses, given in the following pages, is based on Sri Sankara’s commentary.

Sri Sankara, at the commencement of his commentary on Hastamalakiyam, says that the desire of every living being on this earth is to enjoy happiness all the time and to be always free from sorrow. The activities of all creatures are directed towards achieving these two objectives. But a rare human being, who has accumulated an abundant store of punya [merit] in past lives, realizes that all happiness derived from sense-objects is transitory and is bound to be followed by sorrow. As a result, he develops total detachment towards all sense pleasures and strives to bring an end to Samsara, the continuous cycle of birth and death. Since ignorance of one’s Self (Atma) is the root cause of Samsara and only Self-knowledge can put an end to Samsara, Hastamalaka, referred to here by Sri Sankara as the ‘Acharya’, teaches Self-knowledge in the following twelve verses.

-S.N. Sastri

निमित्तं मनश्चक्षुरादिप्रवृत्तौ  
निरस्ताखिलोपाधिराकाशकल्पः।  
रविलोकचेष्टानिमित्तं यथा यः  
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥१

### Hastamalakiyam- Sloka 1; Meaning and commentary

*I am the Atma (Self) which is of the nature of eternal Consciousness and which is the cause of the functioning of the mind, eye and all other organs, in the same way as the sun is the cause of the activities of all beings on this earth. But when not associated with the limiting adjuncts (in the form of the body, mind and sense-organs), I, (Self) am like space.*

*Eternal Consciousness—* The Self (Atma) is Pure Consciousness which is present without any change in all the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. It is because of this eternal Consciousness that the sense organs appear sentient and are able to reveal their respective objects such as form, sound, smell, etc, in the waking state. In dream the sense organs are dormant, but the mind projects various objects and experiences them in the light of this same eternal Consciousness. In deep sleep the mind is also dormant, but the Self, which is pure Consciousness, exists without any change. This is proved by the fact that one remembers, on waking up, that one slept happily and did not know anything. Only what has been experienced previously by a person can be subsequently remembered by him. Therefore it is clear that the Self existed during deep sleep also.

*Cause of the activities of the mind, etc.—*The mind and all the organs are insentient. It is only by the light of the pure Consciousness which is reflected in the mind, that the mind acquires sentiency. This can be compared to a mirror on which the reflection of the sun falls. If the mirror, with the reflection of the sun on it, is turned towards a dark room, the room becomes lighted. It would then appear as if the light belongs to the mirror itself. In the same way, the mind, which receives the reflection of the consciousness of the Self, appears as if it is itself conscious. The eye and all other organs, which receive the reflection of consciousness from the mind, also appear, in turn, to have consciousness. It is because of this that it is said in this verse that the Self is the cause of the activities of the mind and



organs. But the Self is actionless. It neither acts, nor does it prompt the mind and organs to act. The Self is the cause only in the sense that in its mere presence the mind and organs act. This is explained by the analogy of the sun being considered as the cause of the activities of all beings. When the sun rises, everyone begins his work in its light, but the sun does not make anyone act in any particular manner. The sun merely provides the light for all activity. What kind of activity a person engages in depends on himself alone. The sun is not at all involved in it. The sun neither benefits nor suffers because of the activities of any person. In the same way, the Self gives the mind and organs sentiency, which makes them capable of performing action, but the Self does not make any one act in any particular manner. The Self is neither benefited by the virtuous actions of any person, nor is it adversely affected by any evil deeds of any one.

*When not associated with the limiting adjuncts the Self is like space-*

Even the statement that the Self is the cause of the activities of the mind and organs is made only from the empirical (*vyaavahaarika*) standpoint. From the standpoint of ultimate truth (*paaramaarthika*) the Self has no connection whatever with the limiting adjuncts (called *upadhi*) in the form of the body, mind and organs. The method adopted in Vedanta to impart the knowledge of Brahman is known as the method of superimposition (*adhyaropa*) and subsequent denial (*apavaada*). The Self cannot be directly described by words because it has no quality, activity or relationship with anything else. A substance which has a quality, such as redness, bigness, etc, can be described by reference to that quality. A person who performs a particular activity such as cooking can be described by reference to that activity, as a cook, etc. A stranger can be identified by reference to his relationship with a known person. Because of the absence of any of these qualities the Self cannot be described at all by any words. The method of superimposition and subsequent denial has therefore to be resorted to. The Self appears, because of our ignorance of its real nature, to be limited by the body, mind and organs. On the basis of this apparent limitation it was first said that the Self is the cause of the activities of the mind and organs. But from the point of view of ultimate reality, since the Self alone is real in the absolute sense, it can have no association with the mind, etc, which are not real from the absolute point of view, just as an object experienced in dream cannot have any association with an object known in the waking state. Space, which is infinite, is referred to as pot-space, room-space, etc,

when it is looked upon as limited by a pot, a room, etc, but these do not really limit space. In the same way the Self, which is pure consciousness, is all-pervading and is not limited by the body, mind, etc. It is only because of our ignorance of its real nature that we consider the Self as limited and separate in each body. By this comparison with space it is also shown that the Self is unattached and is not affected by the pleasures and pains experienced by the body and mind, in the same way as space is not destroyed or affected by the destruction of the pot or by any damage to it.

Are the mind, eye and other organs not capable of functioning on their own, without the help of the Self? What is meant by the statement that the Self is of the nature of eternal consciousness? These questions are answered in the verse 2.

In verses 1 to 11, the last line is the same: "I am that Atma which is of the nature of eternal Consciousness." *Atma* (Self) in Vedanta is a significant word with four definitions, each revealing a particular aspect.

1. *Aproti iti Atma*—I am the *Atma* pervading the entire world. This indicates the all pervasiveness of *Atma*. This definition brings out the *sat* (pure existence) aspect of *Atma*.
2. *Aadatte iti Atma*—I am the support or substratum into which the entire world (*jagat*) resolves at the time of dissolution (*pralayam*).
3. *Atti iti Atma*—*Atma* (Self) is the Consciousness principle which witnesses, experiences and illuminates the entire world of objects and the internal world of thoughts.
4. *Atati iti Atma*—*Atma* (Self) exists always with the universe.

### **Consciousness Principle**

Hastamalaka claims in the last line of each verse that he is the *Atma* (Self) in the form of not only the existence principle but also the consciousness principle. This teaches us that whatever we ascribe to consciousness we have to apply to ourselves.

This means I am different from the body, I am not a part/product/property of the body, I enliven the body, and I exist even after the fall of the body. But I cannot transact in the absence of the body. This is an exercise we have to do after understanding clearly the various definitions of *Atman*.

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* defines *Atma* as *sat-chit-ananda*. Hastamalaka's definition of *Atma* is fully in accord with the Upanishadic revelation. The term *Nitya* implies freedom from time-wise limitations. *Sat* indicates freedom from space-wise limitations, which is also the meaning of *anantam* (referred to as *ananda* by the Upanishad). The term *Upalabdhi* refers to the *chit* aspect of *Atma*.

Thus, the last line in each of the 11 verses reveal that I am *ananta sat chit rupah* (of the nature of eternal infinite existence, consciousness principle).

### **Akasha**

The example of space (*akasa*) given by Hastamalaka is in line with the traditional teaching, where *akasa* is often used in the process of revealing the *Atma*. This is because *akasa* (space) has several characteristics similar to those of the *Atma* like all pervasiveness, support of everything, free from modification, etc.

This is why meditation on space (*akasa dhyanam*) is recommended for the Vedantic seeker as a means to familiarize with the nature of the Self (*Atma svarupam*).

Thus, *Atma* is also known as *chidakasa*. However, it must be understood that space (*akasa*), though proximate, is not Consciousness (*chit*), because it is an effect made up of the five elements and, therefore, inert and is objectifiable.

[Notes taken from lectures by Swami Paramarthananda, teaching in Chennai, India]

यमग्न्युष्णवन्नित्यबोधस्वरूपं  
मनश्चक्षुरादीन्यबोधात्मकानि।  
प्रवर्तन्त आश्रित्य निष्कम्पमेकं  
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥२

**Hastamalakiya- Sloka 2; Meaning.**

*I am the Self which is of the nature of eternal consciousness, which is changeless and one only (non-dual), whose very nature is eternal consciousness, in the same manner as heat is the very nature of fire, and depending on which the mind, eye and other organs, which are all insentient, function.*

*Changeless and non-dual*— The one, non-dual Self dwells in all bodies. It is ever the same and is not subject to any change whatsoever.

Heat is the very nature of fire. Heat and fire are inseparable. Heat is not an attribute of fire. An attribute is a quality which can be found in more than one substance. For example, colour is an attribute, because it can be found in many different flowers and even in other substances. But heat can never be seen separately from fire. In the same way, consciousness does not exist anywhere other than in the Self. Consciousness is therefore the very nature of the Self and not an attribute.

The mind, eye and other organs are all insentient and are therefore incapable of functioning on their own. It is only because of the reflection of the Self, which is pure consciousness, in the mind, that the mind appears to be conscious, just as the moon appears to be bright only because of the reflection of the sun's light on it. All the organs function only because they are enlivened by the Self.

Now a doubt arises. It has been said in the preceding verse that the same Self dwells in all bodies. If this is so, then, when one person is happy all others should also be happy and when one is suffering all others should also suffer. But this is not the case. So the Self in each body must be different. This doubt is answered in the following verse.

Having explained in the first verse that the Self is of the nature of eternal consciousness responsible for the functioning of the sense organs and the mind when associated with the body, Hastamalaka continues, in the second verse, the discussion of the relationship between consciousness

and the Self.

The relationship between Self and consciousness is the topic discussed in all systems of [eastern] philosophy. Though most schools accept the existence of *Atma* (Self) as a separate entity different from the body-mind complex, differences exist in their conclusions as to how the Self and consciousness are related.

*Nyaya* philosophers say that consciousness is a temporary property of the Self. Modern science holds that consciousness is a temporary property of matter. *Vedanta*, however, declares that consciousness is the very nature of the Self (*Atma*)—*svarupa* [true nature] and not a *guna* [property]. Being the very nature of the Self, consciousness is never away. As the Self is eternal, consciousness is also eternal.

Hastamalaka also makes the point that the Self is free from change (*nirvikara*) and non-dual (*advaitam*). The idea that the body-mind complex, which is intrinsically inert, functions only because of the blessing of the Self, already mentioned in the first verse, is repeated in this verse also.

The example of fire and heat is mentioned in the first line while the enlivening of the inert mind and sense organs by the Self is hinted in the second and third lines. The changelessness and the non-duality of the Self are revealed by the expression *Nisshkampam ekam*.

It is, therefore, clear that the Self, by its mere presence, activates the body-mind complex without undergoing any change.

To clarify doubt about whether there is a Self (*Atma*) in each body, thereby suggesting plurality of Self, Hastamalaka uses the expression *ekam*, which signifies the non-dual status of the Self (*Atma*).

~Swami Paramarthananda

मुखाभासको दर्पणो दृश्यमानो  
मुखत्वात् पृथक्त्वेन नैवास्ति वस्तु।  
चिदाभासको धीषु जीवोऽपि तद्वत्  
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥३

**Hastamalakiyam- Sloka 3; Meaning.**

*The reflection of a face in a mirror has no real existence apart from the reflected face. So also, the Jiva, who is only the reflection of the Self or Pure Consciousness in the intellect (or mind) has really no separate existence apart from the Self. That Self, which is of the nature of eternal consciousness, I am.*

When one face is reflected in a number of mirrors the reflections may be of different shapes and sizes, according as the mirror is plain or convex or concave. The reflection in a particular mirror shakes if that mirror shakes. The reflection is hazy if the mirror is not clean. But all these differences in the various reflections do not at all affect the face that is reflected. In the same manner the Jivas or the individual souls which are only reflections of the same Self in different minds have different characteristics, depending on the nature of each mind, but the Self which is the original does not at all take on the characteristics of the minds, but remains ever the same. The Jiva, who is also in reality Pure Consciousness and therefore eternal and infinite, wrongly identifies himself with the particular mind in which he is reflected and with the physical body associated with that mind. Consequently, he looks upon himself as a limited individual and attributes to himself the joys and sorrows, hunger and thirst and old age and death, which all pertain only to the body and mind. The aim of all the Upanishads is to remove this wrong identification.

Now another doubt arises. If the Atma is not affected by what happens to the body, mind, etc, then it means that there is no bondage at all. If so, what is the need for the Upanishads teaching about the means of removal of bondage? This doubt is answered in the next verse.

After revealing the nature of the Self (Atma svarupam) as consciousness (chaitanyam) in the first two verses, Hastamalaka introduces a technical subject matter in the third verse. Though I am the all-pervading non-dual Self (sarva gata advaita chaitanyam), a new phenomenon takes place when the empirical world is created.

All the bodies and things in the world are created from fundamental matter (prakriti or maya) and thereafter, due to the subtlety and special capacity of the mind (antakarana) to reflect consciousness (chaitanyam)—like a fine glass reflecting the sunlight—a new entity called reflected consciousness (chidabhasa) becomes available in every body (jiva) pervading, illuminating and making the inert body-mind complex sentient. Thus, I, the original consciousness (bimha chaitanyam), am responsible for the creation of the countless number of Jivas through this chidabhasa principle.

Hastamalaka explains in this verse that the reflected consciousness (chidabhasa) is always localized and can exist only where the reflecting medium (the mind) is present. Also, while the original consciousness (chit) is non-dual, the chidabhasas are many, depending upon the number of the reflecting medium (mind).

Further, the chidabhasas (Jivas) are subject to gradation depending upon the quality of the reflecting medium. It is also considered inexplicable because it cannot be said whether it is identical to or different from the original consciousness. The chidabhasa has no independent existence and the original consciousness alone appears as infinite unreal (mithya) chidabhasas.

This chidabhasa is supposed to be beginningless and travel along with the subtle body from birth to birth until the jiva gains Atma Jnanam and what is known as Videha mukti (freedom from rebirth). In the first two lines, Hastamalaka uses the example of the reflection of a face in the mirror, which has no real existence apart from the original face. He points out in the third line that in the same way the chidabhasa or the jiva is only the reflection of the original consciousness (Self) in the intellect and does not exist separately. I am that original Self (Atma) of the nature of consciousness which appears in infinite forms as Jiva (chidabhasa) (reflected consciousness).

This verse may create a doubt as the Jiva is presented here as unreal (mithya) chidabhasa, while the Paramatma (Brahman) is considered real (satyam), according to the Upanishads. How can then one talk of identity between Jivatma and Paramatma? How can the Mahavakyas in the Upanishads, which reveal this identity be justified?

The question has been discussed elaborately by Sri Vidaranya Swami in his famous work Panchadasi.

He explains that while the chidabhasa can never be identical to the original consciousness, it does not exist without the presence of the latter, which is all-pervading and lends existence to the chidabhasa, wherever it is located with the reflecting medium.

Thus, in the Upanishadic statements (Mahavakyas) the word Jiva has to be understood as original consciousness by analysis and the figurative meaning of the word jiva has to be taken instead of the literal meaning.

~Swami Paramartananda



यथा दर्पणाभाव आभासहानौ  
मुखं विद्यते कल्पनाहीनमेकम्।  
तथा धीवियोगे निराभासको यः  
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥४

**Hastamalakiyam- Sloka 4- Meaning.**

*Just as when the mirror is removed the reflection of the face ceases to exist and the face alone remains without any false appearances in the form of reflections, so also, when the mind (the reflecting medium) ceases to exist, the Atma is free from all wrong notions caused by the reflection.*

The Jiva is the reflection of Brahman-Atman (Self) in the mind. Just as the reflection of a face in a mirror is not real and has no existence apart from the face itself, the Jiva has no reality apart from Brahman whose reflection the Jiva is. But because of ignorance of his real nature, namely that he is in reality none other than Brahman, the Jiva identifies himself with the body-mind complex. It is this identification which is the cause of all suffering. When, as a result of the realization of his real nature as Brahman, the identification with the body-mind complex comes to an end, all sufferings cease. This realization of one's real nature and the cessation of identification with the body-mind complex is what is spoken of as 'the mind ceasing to exist'. The cessation of the mind thus means only the loss of the mind in its present form with its accumulated Vasanas or impressions left by past actions and thoughts, which are the cause of likes and dislikes and all their disastrous consequences. When these Vasanas are eliminated, the mind becomes pure and makes the Jiva capable of realizing his real nature. He then dissociates himself completely from the body and the mind and is no more affected by what happens to them. This is the state of Jivanmukti or liberation even while living.

Some (such as the Charvakas and Buddhists) consider the mind itself to be the Self or Atma. This view is refuted in the next verse.

It must be clear to us that only the reflected face will disappear when the mirror is broken and I cannot see my face in the mirror. But this does not mean that I have no face: it still remains intact, though I do not experience this face as an object. In a similar manner, when the mind and body are re-

solved, as happens in deep sleep, death and cosmic resolution (pralayam), consciousness does not go away and it is only the reflected consciousness (chidabhasa) that ceases to exist. This is the idea brought out in the fourth verse.

Just as the reflection of the mirror is not real and has no existence apart from the original face, the reflected consciousness (chidabhasa; technically known as Jiva) has no reality apart from the original consciousness (Brahman).

The reference in philosophical texts to the “Cessation of the mind” only means the dropping of the identification with the body-mind complex and losing sight of one’s higher nature.

~Swami Paramartananda

मनश्चक्षुरादेर्वियुक्तः स्वयं यो  
मनश्चक्षुरादेर्मनश्चक्षुरादिः।  
मनश्चक्षुरादेरगम्यस्वरूपः  
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥५

### Hastamalakiyam- Sloka 5; Meaning

*I am that Self which is of the nature of eternal consciousness, which is different from the mind, eye and other organs, but is itself the mind of the mind, the eye of the eye, the ear of the ear and so on. It is however inaccessible to the mind and sense-organs.*

The Self is different from the mind and organs, that is to say, from the gross and subtle bodies. The external objects are experienced by the mind through the sense organs. The mind and the sense organs are clearly seen to be different from the experienced objects. By the same reasoning, the Self which illumines the mind and the organs must necessarily be different from them.

It is only by the light of the Consciousness that is the Self that the mind and organs, which are themselves insentient, perform their functions of thinking, seeing, hearing and so on. This is why it is said in this verse that the Self is the mind of the mind, eye of the eye and so on. This is based on the Kenopanishad which says:

“He (the Self) is the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech of speech, the vital air of the vital air and the eye of the eye.” (1.2).

The mind and the organs of sense can experience only external objects. They cannot know the Self. The mind has by itself no consciousness, but appears to be conscious only because of the reflection of the consciousness of the Self on it. The sense organs also derive their apparent sentiency only from this reflected consciousness. This being so, it is obvious that the mind and organs cannot know the Self.

Now the question arises: if the Self cannot be known by the mind and the senses, how can it be realized at all? The answer is given in verse 6.

The famous Kenopanishad mantra -*Srotrasya srotram, manaso manah...* (ear of the ear, mind of the mind...) is relied upon in this verse. *Atma* (Self) is defined as the consciousness principle different from the mind and the sense organs (which are inert by themselves and cannot experience the outside world) but illuminating the mind and organs remaining intimately associated with them but still being unconnected (*asanga*). Though the sense organs and the mind can objectify the external world, *Atma* (Self) cannot be known as an object at any point of time. Knowledge of *Atma* (Self) does not take place as an event in time as a result of a process (*Atma aprameyam*).

*Atma* (Self) is also termed as *svapракasha* (self-effulgent) in the scriptures. This only means that *Atma* (Self) is always known without an effort to know or involving a process of knowing. It is ever known to us that we are conscious.

If *Atma* (Self) is self-evident, and therefore knowledge of *Atma* need not be acquired through a special process, why should one take to *Vedanta vichara* (Self-enquiry) if not to work for Self-knowledge (as Self is "I" and I am the ever evident individual). However, we have added the limitations of the body to the 'I' and *Vedanta's* aim is only to remove all these superimposed limitations, so that we can discover the 'I' without any limitation (limitless 'I').

The notion that "I am limited" has to be dropped and this alone is Self-knowledge. Anything appearing after "I am" is only a notion.

~Swami Paramartananda

य एको विभाति स्वतः शुद्धचेताः  
प्रकाशस्वरूपोऽपि नानेव धीषु।  
शरावोदकस्थो यथा भानुरेकः  
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥६

**Hastamalakiyam- Sloka 6; Meaning.**

*The Self, being self-luminous, shines by itself to those whose minds have become absolutely pure. Though only one, the Self appears as many and different in different intellects, in the same way as the sun, though only one, appears as many when reflected in different pots of water. I am that Self which is of the nature of eternal consciousness.*

The Self is ever the subject and cannot therefore become an object to be experienced by the sense organs. When the senses are completely withdrawn from external objects and the mind is concentrated on the Self, the Self is realized. The Kathopanishad says (II.i.1) : The Lord made the senses outgoing. Therefore they can know only external objects and not the inner Self. A rare discriminating individual, desiring immortality, turns his eyes (i.e. all the sense organs) away from external objects and sees the indwelling Self.

When the mind becomes pure, that is to say, totally free from attachment and aversion, the Self shines by itself. Sri Sankara says in his commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 4.4.20 that 'attainment of knowledge of Brahman' (or the Self) means only the cessation of identification with external things (such as the body, mind, possessions, relatives and so on). Identity with Brahman is not something that requires to be newly established, because it is always there. Everyone is in reality always identical with Brahman, but wrongly considers himself to be different because of beginningless Avidya or ignorance of one's real nature. Therefore the scriptures do not enjoin that identity with Brahman should be established, but only that the false identification with things other than Brahman should be given up. When the identification with other things ceases, the identity with one's own Self, which is natural, automatically prevails. This is what is meant by the statement in the present verse that the Self shines by itself to those whose mind has become pure.

The Self (also spoken of as Atma or Brahman) is only one, but it appears as many because of the limiting adjunct (upadhi) in the form of the body and mind. The Self reflected in the mind is the Jiva or individual soul and, since the minds are different and many, the Jivas also appear to be many and different from one another. This is comparable to the many reflections of the one sun in the water in different containers.

How does the one Self illumine all intellects simultaneously? This doubt is answered in verse seven.

The sixth verse conveys almost the same idea already explained in the third verse. The non-dual consciousness (*chit*) alone appears as manifold *chidabhasas* (reflected consciousness) because of the medium or locus of manifestation. Every mind is one such medium and consciousness is experienced therein leading to an erroneous conclusion that consciousness is located and is subject to arrival and departure. We also superimpose the attributes of the medium to consciousness. Freedom from *samsara* (bondage) is nothing but freedom from assuming bondage.

~Swami Paramartananda

यथानेकचक्षुःप्रकाशो रविर्न  
क्रमेण प्रकाशीकरोति प्रकाश्यम्।  
अनेका धियो यस्तथैकप्रबोधः  
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥७

**Hastamalakiyam- Sloka 7; Meaning.**

*Just as the sun who gives light to all eyes does not reveal the illumined objects by turns to one person after another (but all eyes are able to see at the same time), so also the Self which is only one gives consciousness to all intellects simultaneously.*

The doubt raised was how, if there is only one Self (Atma), it can illumine all intellects at the same time. This doubt has already been answered by the analogy of the same sun appearing in different vessels of water as so many reflections. The present verse gives another example.

In the first six verses of Hastamalakiyam, the author has revealed the Self as the eternal, self-evident and self-effulgent consciousness, which enlivens the body-mind complex and in whose presence the sense organs and the mind function. It is also explained that the consciousness which by itself is unattached (asanga), lends sentiency to the mind, which has the capacity to reflect the consciousness. The reflected consciousness is termed in our scriptures as chidabhasa, which alone does all transactions and is known as knower (pramata), doer (karta) and experiencer (bhokta).

When we say that the Self enlivens and illumines the mind and sense organs, a doubt may arise whether this involves any action (karma) on the part of Atma, which may affect its unattachedness. Hastamalaka explains in the seventh verse, that this enlivening is not an action on the part of Atma and not an event in time.

विवस्वत्प्रभातं यथारूपमक्षं  
प्रगृह्णाति नाभातमेवं विवस्वान्।  
यदाभात आभासयत्यक्षमेकः  
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥८

#### **Hastamalakiyam- Sloka 8; Meaning**

*Just as the eye sees clearly only objects that are illumined by the sun, but not what is not so illumined, the sun itself is able to make the eye capable of seeing objects only because it is itself illumined by the Self.*

The sun illumines all objects and makes them visible to us. But the sun itself derives its power to illumine objects only from Brahman. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says (3.7.9): “He who dwells in the sun, and is within it, whom the sun does not know, whose body is the sun and who controls the sun from within, is the Internal Ruler (Antaryami), your own (the questioner’s own) immortal self”. There are similar statements in this section of this Upanishad about the earth, water, fire, sky, air, heaven, etc. The purport of these statements is that everything in this universe is pervaded and controlled by Brahman as the inner Ruler. The sun, earth, water, etc., are what they are only because of Brahman, the substratum of all. Sri Sankara says in his commentary on this section of this Upanishad: “The body and organs of the presiding deity of the earth are regularly made to function or refrain from functioning by the mere presence of the Lord (Isvara or Antaryami, Inner Controller) as witness. Such an Isvara, called Narayana, who controls the deity of the earth, directs her from within, is the Internal Controller, who is the self of all.” The same remarks apply to water, fire, sun, etc. By the word ‘sun’ what is meant here is not the mere ball of fire which is visible to us, but its presiding deity. The inner self of the deity of the sun is the same as the inner self of all beings, namely, Brahman, as the following statement in the Taittiriya Upanishad (II.8.14) shows: “This one who is in man and that one who is in the sun, He is one (Brahman).” The Taittiriya Upanishad describes how everything in the universe is controlled by Brahman as the Inner Controller (II.8.1): “From fear of Him the wind blows, from fear of Him the sun rises, from fear of Him Agni and (perform their functions) the god of Death runs (doing his duty).”



In this verse, Hastamalaka points out that when the eyes come into contact with an object, the process of perception takes place. When it takes place, we lose sight of sunlight assisting the process and we look at only our eyes and the object as the main actors. Sunlight is a general experience in and through all the particular experiences and is generally lost sight of by us. Hastamalaka uses this example to illustrate the role of the Self in all the cognitions of our mind and how we miss it in our daily experience.

In fact, even sunlight is possible only because of the all-pervading consciousness (*chaitanyam*), which, merely by its presence, illumines all the other three entities (sunlight, eyes, and the object) involved in the process of every cognition. Only the highly subtle and refined mind exposed to the scriptural teaching can recognize the role of consciousness in all this cognition, just as we need a subtle mind to discern the role of sunlight, air, space, etc., in our worldly transactions.

This is the reason why our teaching tradition stresses meditation on space, air and fire (*akasa, vayu* and *agni*) to train our mind to discern the role of *Atma* at a later stage when we get committed to Self-enquiry (*Atma vichara*). It is clear that there can be no special cognizance without the general consciousness. The teaching, therefore, is that I am not the eye, the form or the sunlight but I am the formless consciousness, which illumines and enlivens all these three inert entities.

यथा सूर्य एकोऽप्स्वनेकश्चलासु  
स्थिरास्वप्यनन्वग्विभाव्यस्वरूपः।  
चलासु प्रभिन्नासु धीष्वेवमेकः  
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥९

**Hastamalakiyam- Sloka 9; Meaning.**

*The one sun appears as many reflections in different containers of water, moving or still, but the sun remains unaffected by the nature of the water in which it is reflected. Similarly, the one Self, though reflected in different intellects that are ever-changing, remains changeless and untainted by the character of the intellects.*

The Self (or Brahman) reflected in the intellect is the Jiva, or individual soul. The intellects vary in nature, but Brahman is ever the same and is not in the least affected by the characteristics of the intellects. The Jiva, through ignorance, identifies himself with the body-mind complex and attributes to himself the joys and sorrows of the body-mind complex. When the Jiva gives up his identification with the body-mind complex he realizes that he is Brahman.

Hastamalaka explains in the ninth verse that I, the consciousness accommodates and illumines everything in creation, but I myself am unaffected by whatever happens to the various entities in creation.

It is I, the consciousness, who forms the reflected consciousness (*chidabhasa*) in every mind and that this *chidabhasa* alone is subject to change, motion and all other transactions. The *chidabhasas* are many, and based on the numerous minds, which are the media of reflection. A question often discussed in Vedanta is—when I say I am the *Atma*, who is the one claiming so? Is it the original consciousness (*bhima chaitanyam*) or the reflected consciousness (*pratibhima chaitanyam* or *chidabhasa*)? On enquiry, we find that the original consciousness need not, and anyway cannot, make this claim, being unattached (*asanga*), incapable of engaging in any transaction, non-doer, non-experiencer and finally, non-knower. The reflected consciousness also cannot obviously claim that it is the *Atma* as it only perpetuates bondage by its very nature.

Sri Vidaranya Mahaswamigal deals with this question elaborately in his famous work, *Panchadasi*, and explains that the original consciousness and the reflected consciousness are intimately mixed up in an individual. You can never have one without the other. Thus, the term 'I' is always the mixture of reflected consciousness and original consciousness and the meaning of 'I' will depend on the context and what we are referring to.

When I say, "I am fat," "I am lean," the reference is obviously to the body and the meaning of 'I' has to be taken as such. On the other hand, when I say, "I am sad," "I am angry," the expression, 'I' refers to the reflected consciousness. When I claim "I am Atma," "I am eternal," here the original consciousness is referred to by the expression of 'I'.

This process of identifying the correct meaning of 'I' in different contexts is known in our scriptures as *Bhagatyaga-lakshana* (giving up that part of the meaning which does not fit the context and taking that part which is appropriate to the context.)

घनच्छन्नदृष्टिर्घनच्छन्नमर्कं  
यथा निष्प्रभं मन्यते चातिमूढः।  
तथा बद्धवद्भाति यो मूढदृष्टेः  
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥१०

### Hastamalakiyam- Sloka 10; Meaning

*Just as a very ignorant person whose vision is obstructed by a cloud thinks that the sun, covered by a cloud, is devoid of brilliance, so also, to a person who is deluded by Avidya the Atma appears as bound. That Atma which is of the nature of eternal consciousness I am.*

Due to Avidya, ignorance of one's real nature, a person identifies himself with the body-mind complex and looks upon himself as a limited being, in bondage. Even when a person thinks of himself as bound and suffering, he is really the ever-blissful Brahman. It is not as if he is initially in bondage and becomes liberated when he realizes that he is in fact Brahman itself. It is only the ignorance of one's real nature that has to be removed. When what appears to be a snake is realized to be only a rope, it is not as if the snake has gone away and a rope has come in its place. It was only the rope that was always there, but was wrongly seen as a snake. So also, it is not as if there was really bondage earlier, and liberation was attained on the dawn of Self-knowledge.

After revealing the scriptural teaching of the essential identity of *Jivatma* and *Paramatma*, which understanding is claimed in the last line of each verse, Hastamalaka in the tenth verse illustrates how an ignorant person misses this perception.

Hastamalaka gives an example to show how the error takes place in regard to our vision of our real Self. When we are unable to see the sun clearly during daytime, because of the engulfing clouds, we say the clouds obstruct the sun. On enquiry, it will be seen that this statement is wrong as a short patch of clouds cannot cover the all-pervading sunlight. What has really happened is that my vision of the sun alone has been obstructed by the cloud patch. When the clouds disperse, I am able to see the sun, which is always there.

Similarly, the all pervading and self-effulgent consciousness (*Brahma/Atma*) cannot be affected even by ignorance. The covering is only in our intellect. By taking to *Vedantic* studies under the guidance of a competent teacher (*guru*) who reveals the teaching by way of analysis of the *maha-vakyas*, such as *Tat twam asi* and *Aham Brahmasmi*, the intellect gets refined and is able to understand the higher nature of the *jiva* and claim his real nature. The bondage of the *jiva* is just apparent and once right knowledge arises the everfree nature of the *jiva* is understood and claimed.

समस्तेषु वस्तुष्वनुस्यूतमेकं  
समस्तानि वस्तूनि यं न स्पृशन्ति।  
वियद्वत्सदा शुद्धमच्छस्वरूपः  
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥११

### Hastamalakiyam- Sloka 11; Meaning

*The one Self which pervades everything in this universe, but which nothing can taint, which is always pure like space, which is free from the impurity in the form of attachment and aversion, which is immortal, that Self of the nature of eternal consciousness, I am.*

Space pervades all objects, but is never tainted by the impurities in those objects. So also the Self is never tainted by the defects such as attachment, aversion, anger, greed, etc., in the minds of living beings which the Self pervades. It is always absolutely pure, changeless and immortal.

In this verse, Hastamalaka highlights an important feature of consciousness (*chaitanyam*), namely, transcendence. He explains that though the witness consciousness (*sakshi chaitanyam*) is intimately associated with the body-mind complex in all its transactions, it remains unaffected by them. He gives the example of space, which is always pure and unpolluted, though it is all-pervading. Similarly, the unattached consciousness (*asanga Atma*) remains pure without being tainted by the day-to-day activities in the world.

In scriptural tradition, ignorance of the Self is called impure because of the bondage arising therefrom. The author clarifies that the Self (*sakshi chaitanyam*) is free from such impurity.

Hastamalaka concludes his work with the 12th verse:

उपाधौ यथा भेदता सन्मणीनां  
तथा भेदता बुद्धिभेदेषु तेऽपि।  
यथा चन्द्रिकाणां जले चञ्चलत्वं  
तथा चञ्चलत्वं तवापीह विष्णोः॥१२

**Hastamalakiyam- Sloka 12; Meaning**

*O All-pervading Lord [Vishnu]! Just as a crystal looks different due to different limiting adjuncts, you also appear to be different because of being reflected in different intellects. Just as the reflections of the moon in different vessels of water also move in accordance with the movement of the water, you also appear to undergo change because of association with different intellects.*

A crystal appears red when it is in the proximity of a red piece of cloth, green when in contact with a green piece of cloth and so on. By itself it is colorless, but takes on the color of the substance with which it is in contact. A substance which imparts its quality to another thing in contact with it is called an 'upadhi'.

This upadhi is what is known as the limiting adjunct. The crystal which is colorless takes on different colors according to the limiting adjunct. Similarly, Brahman or the Self which is changeless, appears to take on the attributes of the intellect (or mind) in which it is reflected. The reflection of Brahman in the intellect is the Jiva or individual soul. The Jivas, as such, appear to be different from one another, but this difference is due only to the intellect which is the upadhi or limiting adjunct. In essence, every Jiva is Brahman who is changeless.

The verses hitherto have been in the nature of answer to Adi Shankara's question as to who Hastamalaka was. The concluding verse, however, is in the form of regular teaching and Hastamalaka goes to the extent of declaring that not only is he of the nature of consciousness (*Atma*) but Adi Shankara also is of a similar nature. In fact, he addresses Shankara as "Hey Vishnu." Hastamalaka gives the example of the crystal, which is pure by itself and appears to be of different colours because of the flowers proximately placed.

In the same manner, he says, pure consciousness, when associated with the body-mind complex, the reflecting medium, appears distorted, having exalted qualities or inferior qualities depending upon the quality of the me-

dium. He tells Shankara that his superior intellect belongs to his body-mind complex medium (*ahankara*) and not to his real nature, the consciousness (*Atma*), which is free from all qualities.

Hastamalaka also gives the example of the moonlight appearing to move in a moving source of water and says that the modifications of the mind of an individual are wrongly superimposed on the non-moving consciousness (*Atma*).

It is significant that while all the earlier verses concluded with the statement "I am the *Atma*," in the concluding verse Hastamalaka addresses Shankaracharya and says "You are the *Atma*."

This work, which contains the essence of the *Vedantic* teachings, will be useful for the seeker in the form of recalling the teaching and dwelling on his higher nature, an exercise technically called *nididhyasam*. The author has used the traditional examples of the space and sunlight (*akasha* and *Prakasha drishtanta*) repeatedly to bring out the purity and illumining capacity, which are the prime features of the Self (*Atma*).

Om Tat Sat  
॥ ॐ तत् सत् ॥



## Epilogue: Adi-Shankara's Question

Imagine the auspiciousness of the scene; Hastamalaka sitting before the great acharya, Shankara, awaiting the unfolding of his destiny. In the same moment, Shankara, already seeing everything, knows exactly what to do. Shankara asks Hastamalaka, "Who are you?" This question is the fundamental practice of *vichara* (self-inquiry). It is the way in which we discover our true identity and come to *Atmavidya* (full identity of the Self).

We can consider the question, *Who are you?* as the secret handshake of an exclusive *sangham* of mystics. The asker of the question already knows the answer; and the answerer who replies with, "I am *Atma*, the Self," closes the embrace into the association of fully realized beings.

This was exactly how the seven year old Hastamalaka answered Shankara with the first words he ever uttered: "I am *Atma*." With that, Shankara knew he must mentor Hastamalaka in completing his *sadhana*.

In a charming echo of this 8th century drama, Lewis Carroll, in his contemporary classic, *Alice in Wonderland*, places Alice (in a state of wonderment) in the presence of a caterpillar perched on a mushroom smoking a hookah. Repeatedly, he inquires of Alice; "Who are you?" And repeatedly, Alice says she doesn't know. She is distracted that her body is changing sizes in the wonderland; but she never inquires about *that* in her which is eternally unchanging.

Hastamalaka has shown us that he is that unchanging Self that has been the same even through changing bodies from lifetime to lifetime. So, too, are we. Our *sadhana* is to become that eternal Self so completely, that when we are asked, "Who are you?" we will know the answer without hesitation... in this lifetime, or another.

~Dennis Hill

