

Bitten by the Black Snake

The Ancient Wisdom of Ashtavakra

By Manuel Schoch

The First Sutra

Janaka asked, “ Oh Lord, how does one attain liberation, and how is non-attachment attained? Please tell me this.”

Ashtavakra replied, “Oh beloved, if you want liberation, then renounce the passions as poison and take forgiveness and innocence, compassion, contentment and truth as nectar.

You are neither earth nor air nor fire nor water nor ether.

To attain liberation, know yourself as the witnessing consciousness of all these. If you separate yourself from the physical body and rest in consciousness, then this very moment you will be happy, at peace, and free of bondage.

You are not a Brahmin or other caste. You are not in any of the four stages of life.

You are not perceived by the eyes or other senses.

Unattached and without form, you are the witness of the whole universe.

Know this and be happy.

Oh expansive one, religion and atheism, happiness and misery, order of the mind – they are not for you.

You are neither the doer nor the enjoyer.

You have always been liberated.”

The Second Sutra

You are the one observer of all, and in reality always free.

Your bondage is this – you see the other, not yourself, as the observer and doer; thus has the black snake of ego bitten you.

I am not the doer.

Drink this divine nectar of fruit and be happy.

I am the one pure awareness, thus I have burnt the forest of your ignorance with this fire of certainty.

Being beyond sorrow, be happy.

You are that bliss, that ultimate bliss within which this imaginary world is projected, like a snake and a rope.

Knowing this, wonder happily.

He who considers himself free is free, and he who considers himself bound is bound, because in this world the proverb is true, “As you think, so you are.”

The soul is the witness, all pervading one, free consciousness; free from doing, absolutely alone, non-attached, desireless, peaceful.

Because of illusion, it looks like the world.

I am an individually projected life.

Drop this illusion and also this feeling of inner and outer, and awaken in the thought that you are the unchanging, conscious, and non-dual soul.

The Third Sutra

Oh son, long have you been caught in the bondage of perceiving yourself as the body.

Cut this bondage with the sword of knowing I am awareness, and be happy.

You are alone, void of action, self-illuminated, and innocent.

Your bondage is this – that you practice Samadhi.

You are permeating this universe. You are the thread within it.

You are pure consciousness by nature. Do not become small-minded.

You are without expectations, unchanging, self-sufficient, the abode of serenity, of boundless intelligence and unperturbed.

Hence have faith only in consciousness.

Know that which has form is false, and know the formless as unchanging and everlasting.

From this true understanding, one is not born in the world again.

Just as a mirror exists in the image reflected in it, and also exists apart from the reflection, God is within and outside this body.

Just as the one all-pervading sky is the same within and outside a pot, the eternal everlasting Brahman is the same in all.

The Fourth Sutra

Stillness.

All things arise, suffer, change, and pass away.

This is their nature.

When you know this, nothing perturbs you, nothing hurts you, you become still.

It is easy.

Sooner or later, fortune or misfortune may befall you.

When you know this, you desire nothing, you grieve for nothing.

Subduing the senses, you are happy; whatever you do brings joy or sorrow, life or death.

When you know this, you may act freely, without attachment.

What is there to accomplish?

All sorrow comes from fear, from nothing else.

When you know this, you become free of it, and desire melts away.

You become happy and still; the world with all its wonders is nothing.

When you know this, desire melts away, for you are awareness itself.

When you know in your heart that there is nothing, you are still.

The Fifth Sutra

Forget everything.

My child, you may read or discuss scriptures as much as you like, but until you forget everything, you will never live in your heart.

You are wise, you play and work and meditate, but still your mind desires that which is beyond everything.

Where all desires vanish, who is lazier than the master? He has trouble even blinking, but only he is happy, no one else.

Seeing this, neglecting that.

But when the mind stops setting one thing against another, it no longer craves pleasure.

It no longer cares for wealth or religious duties or salvation.

Craving the pleasures or the senses, you suffer attachment, disdaining them you learn detachment, but if you desire nothing and disdain nothing, neither attachment nor detachment binds you.

If you desire liberation but you still say mine, if you feel you are the body, you are not a wise man or a seeker; you are simply a man who suffers.

Unless you forget everything, you will never live in your heart.

The Sixth Sutra

The clear space of awareness.

You are not your body, your body is not you.

You are not the doer, you are not the enjoyer.

You are pure awareness, the witness of all things.

You are without expectation, free.

Wherever you go, be happy.

Desire and aversion are of the mind, the mind is never yours.

You are free of its turmoil.

You are awareness itself, never changing.

Wherever you go, be happy, for, see, the self is in all beings, and all beings are in the self.

Know you are free, free of I, free of mine; be happy.

In you the worlds arise like waves in the sea.

It is true, you are awareness itself, so free yourself from the fever of the world.

If the body lasted till the end of time, or vanished today, what would you win or lose?

You are pure awareness, you are the endless sea in whom all the worlds, like waves, naturally rise and fall.

You have nothing to win, nothing to lose.

Child, you are pure awareness, nothing else.

You and the world are one, so who are you to think you can hold on to it or let it go, how could you?

You are the clear space of awareness, pure and still, in whom there is no birth, no activity, no I.

You are one and the same, you cannot change or die.

The world only arises from ignorance, you alone are real.

There is no one, not even God, separated from yourself.

You are pure awareness; the world is an illusion, nothing more.

When you understand this fully, desire falls away, you find peace, for indeed there is nothing.

In the ocean of being there is only one, there was and there will be only one.

You are already fulfilled, how can you be bound or free?

Wherever you go, be happy.

Never upset your mind with yes or no.

Be quiet, you are awareness itself.

Live in the happiness of your own nature, which is happiness itself.

What is the use of thinking?

Once and for all, give up meditation, hold nothing in your mind.

You are the self, and you are free.