

# Ashtavakra Gita Selected Verses – Swami Sachidananda

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Overview.....	1
Material Universe is Unreal (dream like).....	1
All Materials go thru 6 modifications (vikaras) .....	3
Ashtavakra as Stephen Hawking .....	3
Ishwara Srishti vs Jiva Srishti .....	4
Awakening ends ignorance .....	5

## Overview

This retreat explores the **Ashtavakra Gita**, an ancient Hindu text that offers a **radical, direct approach to spiritual enlightenment**. Unlike the Bhagavad Gita, which provides gradual guidance, the **Ashtavakra Gita** immediately challenges the seeker to recognize the **entire material world as a mental projection** or collective delusion. Through the story of King Janaka and the sage Ashtavakra, the speaker emphasizes that **true liberation** comes from shifting one's identity from the changing body and mind to the **permanent, unchanging witness of consciousness**. This teaching describes the universe as a "dream-like" state that spontaneously dissolves upon the rise of **self-knowledge**, much like a dream disappears when one wakes up. The speaker argues that humans suffer because they attempt to script their lives and find **permanency in temporary objects**, rather than seeking it in the infinite self. Ultimately, the source encourages listeners to **shatter their illusions** and recognize their inherent completeness as pure awareness, independent of any external circumstances.

## Material Universe is Unreal (dream like)

The Ashtavakra Gita defines the fundamental nature of the material universe as **radically unreal**, describing it as a **delusion (Brahma)** or a **dream-like entity** that appears to be solid only due to ignorance,. According to the sources, the universe is not a permanent reality but a transient appearance that vanishes upon the rise of true knowledge (**bodha**),.

The text further characterizes the universe through the following concepts:

### 1. Mental Projection (Bhavana Matraa)

The universe is defined as **bhavana matraa**, meaning it is merely a **mental projection or imagination**,. The sources explain that the world we interact with has **no independent physical reality**; instead, it ultimately appears only as a **thought**. It is often described as a **collective delusion**—though many people may perceive the same objects, the reality assigned to those objects is a shared mental error.

## 2. A Constant State of "Becoming" (Bhava)

The material world is referred to as **bhava**, which signifies something that is **constantly in a state of becoming or changing**,. Because the universe is perpetually shifting, it is categorized as **temporary and unreal**. In the vision of the Ashtavakra Gita, a fundamental rule is that **that which changes is unreal**, while only that which remains unchanging (consciousness) is real.

## 3. The Observed (Drshya) vs. The Observer (Drk)

The universe is categorized as **Drshya**—the object of observation—which is subject to **six modifications (shatvikaras)**:

- Existence
- Birth
- Growth
- Modification
- Decay
- Death.

While the material universe undergoes these constant modifications, the **Drk** (the observer or consciousness) remains the **changeless witness**,. The universe is considered **flimsy** and is even described as being **"pre-ash" (pre-basma)**, meaning everything in the material realm is already in the precondition of becoming ashes and holds no lasting substance.

## 4. Relationship to Consciousness

The universe resides in and is **illuminated by consciousness**, yet it does not affect the nature of that consciousness,. It is likened to a **movie projected onto a screen**: the light (awareness) allows the movie (the universe) to be seen, but the light itself is never birthed, sustained, or dissolved by the events of the film,. Ultimately, the Ashtavakra Gita asserts that **jagat is mitya** (the world is an illusion) and only Brahman (consciousness) is real.

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**Analogy for Clarity:** To understand this, imagine a **movie screen**. The material universe is like the **film** being projected—it is full of movement, change, and drama. However, the **light** from the projector (consciousness) is the only thing that is actually real and permanent. No matter how much "water" is shown in the movie, the screen never gets wet; no matter how much "fire" is shown, the screen never burns. The universe is just the **shifting play of light** on the unchanging background of awareness,.

## All Materials go thru 6 modifications (vikaras)

The Ashtavakra Gita, as explained in the sources, utilizes a model from the Shastras known as the **six modifications (shatvikaras)** to describe the lifecycle of all objects in the material realm. These modifications belong strictly to the realm of the **observed (Drshya)** and do not affect the **observer (Drk)**, who remains a changeless witness to these transformations,.

The six modifications are:

1. **Existence (Asti):** This is the first stage where an object exists in its subtlest form, such as a child in the womb or a seed before it sprouts. It represents the "isness" of the object before it manifest.
2. **Birth (Jayate):** The second modification occurs when the object is born or manifests into the world. The sources use the analogy of a seed sprouting to illustrate this stage.
3. **Growth (Vardhate):** Once born, the object grows in size, volume, and complexity.
4. **Modification (Parinamate):** Having grown, the object undergoes various structural changes and modifications. For example, a sapling develops defined branches and leaves.
5. **Decay (Apakshiyate):** Eventually, a stage comes where the object begins to decay or decline.
6. **Death or Dissolution (Vinashyati):** The final modification is when the object dies or is destroyed, such as a tree falling in a forest fire.

According to the sources, while every material entity—from a water bottle to the human body—must inevitably pass through these six stages, the **conscious self (Atma)** stands steady and unchanged throughout all three periods of time,,. Understanding that these modifications belong only to objects helps the seeker disidentify from the changing body and locate themselves in the **permanent, infinite consciousness**,.

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**Analogy for Clarity:** Think of these modifications like the **phases of a storm**—it forms, breaks, grows in intensity, changes direction, weakens, and eventually dissipates. While the storm undergoes constant modification, the **sky** in which the storm occurs remains completely unaffected and unchanging throughout the entire process,.

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## Ashtavakra as Stephen Hawking

The text compares **Ashtavakra to Stephen Hawking** primarily to illustrate the concept of **transcending the physical body** to access profound insights.

According to the sources, the comparison is based on the following parallels:

- **Physical Deformity vs. Intellectual/Spiritual Depth:** The name "Ashtavakra" literally means "eight deformities," referring to a sage whose body was deformed in

eight places. Similarly, Stephen Hawking is noted for his severe physical condition. The text suggests that in both cases, their **physical state had no relationship to their insights**, as they operated in a "very different realm" where the body was no obstacle.

- **Tremendous Insights:** The sources describe Hawking as a "modern-day sage" or a "modern Ashtavakra" because of his vast scientific insights into the material universe. This mirrors Ashtavakra's "tremendous insights" regarding the inner life and the spiritual world.
- **The Body as "Skin" Only:** The text recounts a story where courtiers laughed at Ashtavakra's deformities, to which he responded by calling them "leather merchants" who were only interested in his skin rather than his wisdom. By comparing him to Hawking, the speaker emphasizes that the **true self (or the intellect) is independent of the physical form**.

In summary, the text uses Hawking as a contemporary example to help the audience understand that a person's physical condition does not define or limit their ability to perceive the highest truths, whether they are scientific (like Hawking) or spiritual (like Ashtavakra).

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**Analogy for Clarity:** To understand this comparison, imagine a **brilliant pilot** (the mind or consciousness) navigating a **damaged aircraft** (the deformed body). While the aircraft may be broken and limited in its movements on the ground, the pilot's knowledge of the sky and their ability to navigate the heavens remains entirely unaffected by the condition of the plane's exterior.

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## Ishwara Srishsti vs Jiva Srishti

The speaker distinguishes between **ishwarasrishti** (God's creation) and **jivasrishti** (the individual's creation) by defining them as the objective reality versus the subjective mental world we superimpose upon it. While the former is the natural order of the universe, the latter is the source of human suffering and bondage.

According to the sources, the distinctions are as follows:

### 1. Ishwarasrishti: The Objective Order

- **Definition:** This refers to the physical universe and the fundamental laws of nature created by a power higher than the individual.
- **Examples:** It includes the sun, moon, stars, the five elements (*panchabhutas*), and basic biological functions like hunger.
- **Role in Life:** It is the "order of things." For instance, the fact that there is hunger and there is food is a part of *ishwarasrishti*.

### 2. Jivasrishti: The Subjective Projection

- **Definition:** This is the world of mental conceptions, labels, and personal "scripts" that an individual spins out of their own thoughts.
- **Examples:** While hunger is *ishwarasrishti*, the insistence that "I must have Thai green curry" or "I only like dark chocolate" is *jivasrishti*. It also includes the specific roles and expectations we project onto others, such as "my daughter must live her life this way".
- **The Cause of Bondage:** The speaker explains that the world itself has "loops," but the individual provides the "hook". This "hook"—our subjective attachments and opinions—is what makes the world feel troublesome or binding.

### 3. The Spiritual Path (Sadhana)

The speaker suggests that the first step in spiritual practice (*sadhana*) is to move from a life dominated by *jivasrishti* to one located in *ishwarasrishti*.

- **"More of Ishwara, Less of Me":** This means accepting the world as it is (objective reality) while reducing subjective opinions, ego-based desires, and the "stubbornness" that life must follow a specific personal script.
- **Negation of Labels:** The goal is to see the "isness" (*asti*) of things without the labels and names we supply, as these labels are often just "spinning of words" with no fundamental reality.

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**Analogy for Clarity:** Think of a **blank canvas and a painting**. *Ishwarasrishti* is the **canvas and the paint**—the raw materials and the space provided for existence. *Jivasrishti* is the **specific, messy story** we choose to paint over it. We often get upset because our "painting" doesn't look the way we wanted, forgetting that the canvas itself remains perfectly fine regardless of the image we've projected onto it.

## Awakening ends ignorance

According to the Ashtavakra Gita, the world appears dreamlike primarily due to **ignorance (*avidya*)** and the lack of **true knowledge (*bodha*)**. The text explains that just as a dream ends when one wakes up, the universe is recognized as a **delusion (*Brahma*)** or a dreamlike entity only upon the "rise of knowledge".

The sources identify several specific factors that cause this dreamlike appearance:

### 1. Mental Projection (*Bhavana Matraa*)

The text describes the world as **bhavana matraa**, meaning it is essentially a **mental projection or imagination**. The sources state that there is "no physical reality to the world whatsoever" and that everything we interact with ultimately appears only as a **thought**. Because we spin these worlds through our own thoughts, the universe is compared to a "collective delusion" where multiple people assign solid reality to things that are not fundamentally real.

## 2. The Fallacy of Permanence

The world appears solid and real because of a **wrong conclusion** regarding change. The Ashtavakra Gita uses a "thumb rule" to distinguish reality: **that which changes is unreal (temporary)**, and that which does not change is real (permanent). Because the material world—the **observed (Drshya)**—is in a constant state of "becoming" and modification, it is categorized as unreal. We experience a "dream" because we mistakenly seek permanency in things that are inherently decaying and temporary, such as the body.

## 3. Superimposition of Personal "Scripts"

The world feels real and binding because individuals superimpose their own **subjective scripts** and labels onto reality. This personal creation, known as *jivasrishti*, consists of our desires, stubbornness, and the insistence that life should unfold in a specific way. The sources suggest that as long as one is making an effort to "supply a script to this logicless movie," they remain trapped in the dream of suffering (*samsara*).

## 4. Identification with the Observed

The dreamlike state is maintained because we identify with the **body-mind complex** rather than the **witnessing consciousness**. The text explains that the world is like a movie projected by the "light of awareness". While the "movie" (the world) involves birth, death, and drama, the "light" (the self) remains unaffected. The illusion of the world's reality shatters instantaneously when one stops identifying with the "movie" and realizes they are the unchanging observer.

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**Analogy for Clarity:** To understand this, imagine a **movie theater**. The world is like the **action on the screen**—it feels incredibly real while you are immersed in it, and you may even cry or feel afraid. However, the only reason the movie can be seen at all is because of the **projector's light**. The light is the true reality, while the movie is just a "dreamlike" play of shadows that disappears the moment the theater lights are turned on.