

# **THE NATURE OF THE 'LIMITED SELF'**

**A New Clarification of  
the Logic and Dialectics of  
Shaiva Advaita Philosophy**



**Peter Wilberg**

**2009**

## **A New Clarification of the Logic and Dialectics of Shaiva Advaita Philosophy**

*“In this world there are some devoted people, who are undeveloped in reflection and have not taken pains to study difficult works like Logic and Dialectics, but who nevertheless aspire after Samavesha with [immersion in] the Supreme Lord.*

From Kshemaraja’s introduction to the *Pratyabhijnahridayam*

If what Indian thought understands as the ‘bounded’, ‘limited’ or ‘contracted’ self or *jiva* is conceived as awareness contained within a limiting boundary perimeter such as a circle, sphere or body surface of any type, and if, in contrast, ‘uncontracted’ consciousness is conceived as the unbounded space or field of awareness around that circle, sphere or surface perimeter, the question still remains as to the nature and function of any boundary perimeter as such. Does it separate or unite what lies on either side of it?

I argue that any such bounding perimeter both *distinguishes* the awareness it bounds from the unbounded field around it, and at the same time *unites* them. For being *inseparable* from both the awareness it bounds and the unbounded awareness around it, it renders the bounded and unbounded, ‘contracted’ and ‘uncontracted’ dimensions of awareness both distinct *and* inseparable. The understanding of Advaita or ‘non-duality’ (a-dvaita) itself as a state of *inseparable distinction* ie. *neither* a state of oceanic boundlessness lacking all internal *distinction* or ‘differentiation’ nor a multiplicity of *separable* consciousnesses contained within ‘their’ own boundaries - this is the key to simplifying the logic and dialectics of Shaiva Advaita.

The principle of ‘inseparable distinction’, gifted by the new *dialectical logic* of Michael Kosok, explains exactly *why*, in Shaiva Advaita, the ‘contracted’ awareness of the ‘bounded’ self or *jiva* is understood as ultimately ‘identical’ with the unbounded awareness that is Shiva. This is *not* because the awareness of the *jiva* has no bounding surface perimeter or ‘sheath’, but because that very perimeter – though it bounds a field

of awareness, is not itself anything bounded. For by its very nature, *any* bounding surface or perimeter is *not itself* anything bounded! A circle drawn on a piece of paper for example, does indeed seem to bound an area of space on the page – but it does not bound itself, as a circle, in doing so! This is *why* it is that if we understand every self, body and being *as* the very surface perimeter bounding a field of awareness, there is *no longer* any question of how this boundary can be transcended, or how the awareness it bounds can be said to be ‘identical’ with the unbounded awareness around it - for they are both distinct and inseparable.

In the language of Shaiva Advaita, the terms ‘Self’ and ‘Consciousness’ are often used interchangeably to refer to *both* the bounded and unbounded, contracted and uncontracted dimensions of the universal awareness (chit). Thus there is talk of a bounded or contracted dimension of *both* Self and Consciousness in the form of individualised consciousness (chitta) of the jiva or of separable beings (bhava) in general, and there is talk of the unbounded dimension of Self and Consciousness (chetana) identical with Parama Shiva. Here it is helpful and simplifying to understand the distinction between ‘Self’ and ‘Consciousness’ in terms of the ‘perimeter model’ explained above. From this point of view ‘Consciousness’ may be defined as any field of awareness contained within or surrounding a bounding perimeter or surface boundary. A ‘Self’ on the other hand, may be understood as any bounding perimeter or surface boundary of awareness *as such*. Since any such perimeter is not itself anything bounded, this explains *why* any ‘Self’ is ultimately a singular unity of both bounded and unbounded dimensions of awareness – affirming both Vedantic notions of Advaita as the unity of the Atman and Para Atman or Brahman, and Shaivist understandings of Advaita as the unity of the jiva with Shiva.

Any field of awareness contained within a surface boundary or perimeter may itself contain within it a multiplicity of surface boundaries or perimeters or selves – like a circle whose inner field contains many smaller circles, but is also itself one circle amongst other circles contained within a yet larger circle. For any surface boundary or perimeter of awareness – any Self – may itself be contained with a field of awareness itself circumscribed by a larger bounding perimeter or Self. If we picture the ‘Self’ then,

as a shaped bounding perimeter of some sort – for example a circle - and ‘Consciousness’ as the fields of awareness both contained by and containing that circle or Self, then we get a clear picture of Awareness as such (Chit) as that ultimately unbounded field of awareness within which emerge *multiple circles within circles* and *selves within selves* (Chetana). Thus there is a type of hierarchy of ever broader and more expansive and inclusive Selves, as well as ever broader and more expansive Consciousnesses – the fields of awareness contained by and containing those Selves. Selves can thus be pictured as ever larger circles embracing ever broader fields of awareness. The larger the field of awareness circumscribed by any Self, the more circles or ‘sub-selves’ it can embrace within that field, along with the elements of consciousness they contain – each of which is less an ‘object’ than a ‘subject’ – being a formed boundary of awareness or sub-self in its own right. Yet since the space or field of awareness either containing or contained within any circle or ‘self’ is essentially one *singular* space or field, one cannot ultimately talk of ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ selves - since it is ultimately the very same *singular* space or field of awareness that both contains and is contained by *all* the circles, selves or surface boundaries of awareness - of whatever dimension or breadth – that form within it.

Parama Shiva, as the ultimate or ‘Supreme Self’ of every individual being or entity (bhava) can be compared to an infinite circle, sphere surface circumference or perimeter of awareness - circumscribing all that is. ‘Anuttara’ on the other hand, defined in the Shaiva tantras as the absolute, ultimate or ‘non-higher’ reality, is that ‘Supreme Consciousness’ whose nature is an awareness unbounded by any bounding ‘circle’ or ‘sphere’ of awareness - and thus also unbounded by any Self - up to and including the Supreme Self that is Parama Shiva. This does not make Anuttara ‘higher’ than Parama Shiva, or the ‘Supreme Consciousness’ higher than a ‘Supreme Self’. For as emphasised, the whole point is to understand that any Self - understood as a bounding surface, sphere or perimeter of awareness, is not *itself* anything bounded. This again is the real and essential reason *why* - as recognised in both Vedanta and Shaiva Advaita – there are ultimately no boundaries of awareness to be ‘overcome’ or ‘transcended’. For to fully identify with and *be* any bounding surface perimeter of awareness, to fully be any ‘Self’ - is already to cease to have boundaries - *except* for those constituted by yet larger

bounding circles or perimeters of awareness, yet larger Selves - up to and including the 'Supreme Self' - Parama Shiva. On the other hand, by identifying with the very *space or field* of awareness contained by or containing *any* circle or perimeter of awareness - any surface boundary or Self at any 'level' - *we at once and automatically* become identical with the 'Supreme Awareness' in its *absolutely unbounded* or 'non-higher' character - as Anuttara.

Any 'body' is defined by a bounding surface or perimeter – whether a cell membrane or our own skin. Yet biology itself acknowledges the skin not simply as an encapsulating boundary but as a breathing membrane uniting us with the air and light around it. That is why, in terms of practices or sadhanas, it is by identifying with our bodily surface - by feeling and being our own 'skin' – that we cease to experience either our Self or Consciousness as something bounded or encapsulated *by* that skin, and instead can feel at one with the infinite space, air and light of awareness surrounding and embracing both our own body and all bodies.

The new and simple picture I offer is that of multiple circles within ever larger circles. The circles as such constitute the Self-nature of awareness and of all things and all beings - not only human 'selves' (jiva) but also beings or entities (bhava) of any sort, including both internal and external 'contents' of consciousness - such as thoughts or seemingly insentient 'things'. For even rocks and mountains 'breathe' – emanating vital pranic units or 'animations' of awareness and absorbing them from the environment around them. The spaces within and around the circles of Selves constitute the singular and Supreme Awareness within which all things and beings emerge. Of course circles and other bounding shapes of awareness can not only contain or be contained within other circles but can also *overlap* with them - like overlapping shapes and colours. This is why Self-identity is nothing *fixed* – for through their defined areas of overlap new selves - new and combined shapes and colourations of awareness - are forever and constantly being created. Yet we can go even further in explicating this new, clear and simplified model of 'Self' and 'Consciousness' in both their bounded and unbounded dimensions. For it remains a fixed prejudice of our ordinary 'physical' perception of space time that the

space around or surrounding a containing surface or perimeter such as a bottle or cell membrane is larger and less bounded than the space it bounds or contains within it. In reality this is not the case - for space not only extends outwardly in an infinite and unbounded way but also inwardly. There is also an unbounded *interiority* to all things and beings. It is this unbounded inner space of awareness that connects them all inwardly, just as the space outside and surrounding them is what embraces and unites them outwardly. And just as there is an ultimate and singular *circumference* of awareness – Parama Shiva – a ‘circumference at infinity’ – so also do all things and beings lead inwards towards an ultimate, infinitely inward *centre* of awareness or ‘centre at infinity’. That singular centre is the dot or bindu of Parama Shakti, the ‘zero-point’ source of all powers of manifestation of awareness, all Shaktis. Circumference and Centre, Parama Shiva and Parama Shakti are united by that singular awareness (Anuttara) which is both outwardly and inwardly unbounded.

This new and clearer picture of the logic and dialectics of Shaiva Advaita is not only clearer and more simple but also more radical in its recognition of both the outwardly and inwardly unbounded nature of awareness, and with it, the unbounded nature of every seemingly bounding shape or form of awareness - such shapes and forms being the Self-nature of all beings and all things – from the very highest Consciousnesses to those belonging to even the most seemingly microscopic or insentient of things. For the space *within* even the tiniest molecule and atom of every body is ultimately as infinite and unbounded as the entirety of cosmic space surrounding it. Indeed ultimately it is this ‘intending’ or ‘intensional’ space of *infinite interiority* that lies behind and in this sense ‘surrounds’ the ultimate outward horizon or circumference of ‘outer’ space. How it does so is represented by the yantra of The New Yoga. For this represents any body as a ‘yoni-lingam’, as an ‘invagination’ (‘yoni’) within cosmic space of an all surrounding ‘intensional’ or ‘non-extensional’ space of awareness – the great black womb of Parama Shakti that is Ma Kali. This invagination of the ‘inner’ into the ‘outer’ also has the nature of a ‘linga’ that penetrates or protrudes like a phallus into ‘outer’ space from that realm of all surrounding inwardness. Hence all things and beings are Shiva-Shakti, having the character of both lingam and yoni - and uniting both unbounded and bounded awareness.