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The Four States Of Consciousness

Brahman is the One that defies positive identification and description; the One that can be indicated only by negations and denials; the One that is Eternal and Infinite: Being Awareness Bliss Absolute.

The one all-pervasive *Brahman* permeates the entire universe of animate and inanimate objects. This all-inclusive *Brahman* has assumed the audible form of the primordial word *AUM*. There are four inseparable elements in this Supreme *Parabrahman*. They are *Viswa*, *Taijasa*, *Prajna*, and *Turiya*.

Jagrathavastha, the wakeful state is the state of normal consciousness and is concerned with the gross world of matter. It brings empirical knowledge of the phenomenal world acquired through sensations and perceptions. It has several means of knowing. These

consist of the *karmendriyas* (the five organs of action), the *jnanendriyas* (the five organs of perception), the five *pranas* (vital energies), *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *chitta* (consciousness), and *ahankara* (ego). In the *jagrathavastha* these nineteen aspects of sensational or empirical knowledge are integrated. It is essentially this knowledge which hankers after the pleasures of the material world.

Swapnavastha, the dream state of consciousness has the subconscious faculty of recognising and getting an inkling of the holy experience of divinity and sanctity. It is concerned with the subtler aspects of human knowledge and experience. It carries with it subtler impressions of the experiences of the *jagrathavastha*.

Prajna and *turiyavastha* assume different characteristics. *Prajnavastha* is a transcendental state of consciousness in which the dichotomy between grossness and subtlety disappears in superconsciousness. It is pure *prajna* or consciousness of Divinity. In *prajnavastha*, the differentiating and diversifying faculties of the mind become inoperative. That is why it is said that *prajnana* is *Brahman*. To help man reach this summit of Divinity, Krishna has expounded in the *Bhagavad Gita* the *sadhana* of *dhyana*, the path of meditation. In *prajnavastha*, all mundane desires and dream-wishes are sublimated into the bliss of spiritual experience. The lambent light of *prajnana* shines steadily in this state of higher consciousness.

The *turiyavastha* is the highest state of consciousness in which the essential nature of the *Atma* is experienced. *Santam* (tranquillity), *sivam* (goodness) and *sdwaitham* (nonduality) are experienced by the *sadhaka*. The *turiyavastha* is a pure, tranquil and steady state of superconsciousness in which all discriminating and differentiating *gunas* (attributes) are transcended and dissolved in the eternal and absolute reality of *Brahman*.

Omkar is the fusion of the three primal sounds, *A*, *U*, and *M*. These three letters represent respectively the *jagrata*, the *swapna*, and the *sushupti* states of consciousness. They also symbolise Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshwara. This trinity represents the three personified realities corresponding to the aforementioned three states of consciousness. In a garland of beads, a string passes through them and holds them together. In a similar manner, *Brahman* passes through all *jivas* and makes them interdependent and interrelated.

Sakshatkara is the immediate, intimate, and unitive apprehension of the absolute, supreme, and integral reality of *Brahman*. It is a mystical experience beyond mind, space and time. *Dhyana* is an aid to *sakshatkara*. The eye cannot see itself. Similarly, the *Atma* also cannot see itself. If a doll made of salt is sunk into the sea for finding its depth, the doll gets dissolved in the water and becomes irrecoverable. In a similar manner, the *jivatma* in search of the *Paramatma*

loses its individuality and identity. *Brahman* is an unfathomable ocean. A *jiva* that goes in search of *Brahman* becomes one with *Brahman*. *Atma* and *Paramatma* are ontologically identical and non-dual. They are only aspects of the highest state of consciousness.

In *dhyana*, *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), and the various *indriyas* (senses) are transcended by means of self-control. All dualities, dichotomies, differences, and relativities disappear in the superconscious state of *dhyana*. *Dhyana* is synonymous with the unitive knowledge of the Godhead. It is a *divyadarshana*, a vision of and a path to the Divine. It leads to *Sath-chith-ananda* or the integral reality of Existence-consciousness-bliss. It grants *nityananda*, or everlasting bliss and confers *Atmananda* or the bliss of the *Atma*. It helps man attain *paramananda* or supreme bliss, and *adwaitananda*, or the bliss of non-duality.

Krishna said, “*Ahamatma Gudakesa*”. Krishna who is Hrishikesa addressed Arjuna as *Gudakesa*. Hrishikesa is the Lord, the Master of all senses. Arjuna is *Gudakesa*, the one who has acquired sense-control. *Gudakesa* is the disciple of Hrishikesa. The Lord of the senses is the Supreme *Guru* and the one who has acquired control of the senses is His *sishtya*. Krishna is the Supreme *Guru* and Arjuna is His sincere *sishtya*. Arjuna is *Narottama*, the ideal human being; and Krishna

is *Purushottama*, the Supreme *Purusha* or God. Today, there may be good *gurus*, but there are no sincere *sishyas*. This is the influence of *Kali* on human beings. People remember and repeat the name of Krishna, but they do not put His teachings into practice.

Once upon a time there was a noble *guru*. He had a disciple. One afternoon, the *guru* who had gone somewhere, returned home in the hot sun. The disciple was then performing the *guru's* worship. The *guru* had arrived in the blazing heat of the sun. His bare feet were being scorched by the hot earth. He asked the disciple to open the door and let him in. The disciple, who was reciting the *ashtothara* of his *guru* said that he should not be disturbed during the *puja*. He did not open the door until he had finished the *puja*. The poor *guru* had to stand in the hot sun until the disciple had completed his worship. We find many such foolish disciples today. What is the use of worshipping the *guru* but causing him pain? There are many devotees who worship Krishna without caring for His teachings.

Every individual must recognise the truth that there is only one *Parameswara* for all. God may be conceived in many ways. *Brahman* may be either *saguna* or *nirguna*. *Saguna Brahman* is *Brahman* with attributes and *Nirguna Brahman* is *Brahman* without attributes. There is no essential difference between the two, just as there is no substantial difference between a piece of cloth and cotton. *Nirguna Brahman* is like the cotton,

the basic substance, while *Saguna Brahman* is like the fabric, the derivative. *Saguna Brahman* and *Nirguna Brahman* are only two levels of Reality.

A beam of light falling on a prism is refracted. As a result of refraction, we see the different colours of the spectrum. The colours of the spectrum are different, but the light is only one. Similarly there may be various names and forms of the ultimate Reality. *Brahman* is one and its manifestations are many.

A *sadhaka* will have several types of experiences during meditation. When he is absorbed in Divinity he listens to many kinds of sounds. He develops a sort of extrasensory perception. He listens to the sounds of musical instruments like the veena, mirdangam and flute. These sweet strains of music are symbolic of *Sakara Brahman*. They are the first results of *dhyana*. During the preliminary stages of *dhyana*, all sensory organs become hypersensitive. This acute sensitivity enables the *sadhaka* to respond to extraordinary sights and sounds. In course of time, this faculty of hypersensitivity or extrasensory perception develops into the highest faculty of listening to the Voice of Silence itself. There is *sabda* in *nissabda* (the Voice of Silence). It is the primordial sound of *Easwara's Pranava*. The *sadhaka* listens to the repetition and reiteration of the *Primal Voice* of *Aum*. He experiences the ineffable and inexplicable bliss of the *turiya* state of superconsciousness.

During profound meditation, some *sadhakas* feel

that their bodies have become very heavy and cannot move freely. Some others experience a feeling of extreme lightness and levitate upwards. Some *sadhakas* have a sensation of trembling and shivering. The tenacious and steady-minded *sadhaka* will not be unnerved by these supernormal experiences. He will continue his *sadhana* unhampered by his fantastic experiences.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa went through all these stages of *dhyana*, from *sakara* to *nirakara* (from forms to formlessness). During his spiritual evolution, the Divine Mother revealed Herself to him as Kali. But the *Atma* is formless. That is why the *sadhaka* is advised to leave behind all forms and names and strive for the experience of the Formless *Brahman*. The absolute *Brahman* without form and attributes gives the highest spiritual ecstasy. The *sadhaka* is entranced and enraptured by the divine afflatus of *Nirguna Brahman*. He experiences perfect bliss. This superconscious state of meditation transcends all dualities. It is a state of unitive knowledge of the *Brahman*. It is everlasting and transcends all attributes and feelings.

A novice must start with meditation on *Saguna Brahman*. He must observe all restrictions. He should be regular and punctual in his *sadhana*. A young sapling must be protected from animals. A fence must be put around it until it grows into a big tree. The fence becomes unnecessary after it becomes a huge tree.

Similarly, rules and regulations are necessary for beginners in *sadhana*. An advanced *sadhaka* does not depend on external props. He can go into a trance whenever he likes. Meditation becomes spontaneous and habitual.

Dhyana should be distinguished from *dharana*. *Dharana* is mere concentration. The first stage of concentration should be followed up by contemplation and absorption. This absorption leads to meditation. *Dhyana* is not the monopoly of any particular religion. It is a universal and pragmatic programme for gaining the unitive knowledge of the Godhead.