

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AUM

1. *aum ity etad akṣaram idaṁ sarvaṁ, tasyopavyākhyānam, bhūtam bhavad bhaviṣyad iti sarvaṁ aumkāra eva, yac cānyat trikālātīlam tad apy aumkāra eva.*

1. *Aum*, this syllable is all this. An explanation of that (is the following). All that is the past, the present and the future, all this is only the syllable *aum*. And whatever else there is beyond the threefold time, that too is only the syllable *aum*.

The syllable *aum*, which is the symbol of *Brahman*, stands for the manifested world, the past, the present and the future, as well as the unmanifested Absolute.

2. *sarvaṁ hy etad brahma, ayam ātmā brahma, so'yam ātmā catus-pāt.*

2. All this is, verily, *Brahman*. This self is *Brahman*. This same self has four quarters.

four quarters: which are *viśva*, the waking state, *taijasa*, the dream state, *prājña*, the state of dreamless sleep and *turiya* which is the state of spiritual consciousness. 'The knowledge of the fourth is attained by merging the (previous) three such as *viśva*, etc., in the order of the previous one in the succeeding one.' *trayānām viśvā-dīnām pūrva-pūrva-pravilāpanena turīyasya pratīpattiḥ. Ś.*

3. *jāgarita sthāno bahiḥ-prajñāḥ saptāṅga ekonaviṁśati-mukhaḥ sthūla-bhūg vaiśvānaraḥ prathamah pādah.*

3. The first quarter is *Vaiśvānara*, whose sphere (of activity) is the waking state, who cognises external objects, who has seven limbs and nineteen mouths and who enjoys (experiences) gross (material) objects.

who has seven limbs: refers to the list mentioned in C.U. V. 18. 2. *nineteen mouths* are the five organs of sense (hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell), the five organs of action (speech, handling, locomotion, generation and excretion), the five vital breaths, the mind (*manas*), and the intellect (*buddhi*), the self-sense (*ahaṁ-kāra*) and thought (*citta*).

Vaiśvānara: He is called *Vaiśvānara* because he leads all creatures of the universe in diverse ways to the enjoyment of various objects, or because he comprises all beings. *Ś. viśveṣām narāṇām anekadhā nayanād vaiśvānaraḥ; yad vā viśvaś cāsau naraś ceti viśvānaraḥ; viśvānara eva vaiśvānaraḥ.*

The waking state is the normal condition of the natural man, who without reflection accepts the universe as he finds it. The same

physical universe bound by uniform laws presents itself to all such men.

4. *svapna-sthāno'ntah-prajñah saptaṅga ekonavimsati-mukhaḥ pravivikta-bhuk taijasa dvitīyah pādah.*

4. The second quarter is *taijasa*, whose sphere (of activity) is the dream state, who cognises internal objects, who has seven limbs and nineteen mouths, and who enjoys (experiences) the subtle objects.

The *taijasa* is conscious of the internal, i.e. mental states. While the *viśva*, which is the subject of the waking state, cognises material objects in the waking experience, the *taijasa* experiences mental states dependent on the predispositions left by the waking experiences. In this state the soul fashions its own world in the imagining of the dreams. 'The spirit serves as light for itself.' B.U. IV. 3. 9. Here also the basis of duality operates, the one that knows and the object that is known. Though from the standpoint of the dream, the dream objects are experienced as external, they are said to be subtle because they are different from the objects of the waking state which are external.

The Upaniṣad makes a clear distinction between waking and dream experiences.

5. *yatra supto na kaṁ cana kāmam kāmayaṭe na kaṁ cana svapnam paśyati tal susuptam, susupta-sthāna eka-bhūtaḥ prajñā-na-ghana evānanda-mayo hy ānanda-bhuk ceto-mukhaḥ prajñas trītyah pādah.*

5. Where one, being fast asleep, does not desire any desire whatsoever and does not see any dream whatsoever, that is deep sleep. The third quarter is *prajñā*, whose sphere (of activity) is the state of deep sleep, who has become one, who is verily, a mass of cognition, who is full of bliss and who enjoys (experiences) bliss, whose face is thought.

While the first condition is the waking life of outward-moving consciousness, and the second is the dream life of inward-moving consciousness, the third is the state of deep sleep where the consciousness enjoys peace and has no perception of either external or internal objects. Cp. the Psalmist who says: 'God gives truth to his beloved in sleep' (CXXVII. 2). The transitory character of sleep shows that it is not the ultimate state. The name given to this state is *prajñā*. It is a state of knowledge, though the external and internal states are held in abeyance. It is the conceptual self, while the two previous selves are the imaginative and the perceptual ones. *ekā-bhūtaḥ*: the manifold object series, external and internal, lapses

even 'as at night, owing to the indiscrimination produced by darkness, all percepts become a mass of darkness, as it were, so also in the state of deep sleep, all (objects) of consciousness, verily become a mass (of consciousness).' Ś. In deep sleep no desire, no thought is left, all impressions have become one; only knowledge and bliss remain.

The apparent absence of duality has led to the view that it is the final state of union with *Brahman*. See B.U. IV. 3; C.U. VIII. II.1.

ceto-mukhaḥ: because it is the doorway to the cognition of the two other states of consciousness known as dream and waking.

prajñah: It is called *prajñā* consciousness or knower as it is not aware of any variety as in the two other states.

ānanda-mayah: full of bliss.

ānanda-bhuk: who enjoys bliss. It is not bliss but the enjoyer of bliss. *ānanda-prāyah nānanda eva. Ś.*

In the waking state we are bound by the fetters of sense-perception and desire; in the dream state we have a greater freedom as the self makes a world of its own, out of the materials of the waking world. Though, in the dream state, we take the dream images of delight and oppression as real, we produce them out of ourselves. In dreamless sleep the self is liberated from the empirical world, indeed from the person as a self-contained unit.

6. *eṣa sarveśvaraḥ, eṣa sarvajñah, eṣo'ntāryami, eṣa yoniḥ sarvasya prabhavaḥpyayau hi bhūtanām.*

6. This is the lord of all, this is the knower of all, this is the inner controller; this is the source of all; this is the beginning and the end of beings.

Gauḍapāda says that 'it is the one alone who is known in the three states,' *eka eva tridhā smṛtaḥ*.

Ś urges that 'that which is designated as *prajñā* (when it is viewed as the cause of the world) will be described as *turiya* separately when it is not viewed as the cause, and when it is free from all phenomenal relationship, i.e. in its absolute real aspect.' *taṁ abijāvastham tasyaiva prajñā-śabda-vācyasya turīyatvena dehādi-sambandha-jāgradādi-rahitam pāramārthikim pṛthag vakyati. Ś* on Gauḍapāda's *Kārikā* I. 2.

It is the first time in the history of thought that the distinction between Absolute and God, *Brahman* and *Īśvara*, *turiya* and *prajñā* is elaborated. Cp. with this the Christian view of the Son as 'the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible . . . all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together.' Colossians I. 15. The son is the Demiurge, the heavenly architect, not the God but the

image of the God. For Philo 'the Sun is itself unaffected and undiminished by its radiance, yet all the earth is dependent on it; so God, although in His being He is completely self-contained and self-sufficient, shoots forth a great stream of radiation, immaterial, yet on that account all the more real. This stream is God in extension, God in relation, the Son of God, not God.' *By Light, Light*, p. 243, Goudenough's E.T.

7. *nāntah-prajñam, na bahiḥ prajñam, nobhayatah-prajñam, na prajñāna-ghanam, na prajñam, nāprajñam, adrṣtam, avyavahāryam, agrāhyam, alakṣaṇam, acintyam, avyapadeśyam, ekātma-pratyaya-sāram, prapañcōpaśamam, śāntam, śivam, advaitam, caturtham manyante, sa ātmā; sa vijñeyah.*

7. (*Turiya* is) not that which cognises the internal (objects), not that which cognises the external (objects), not what cognises both of them, not a mass of cognition, not cognitive, not non-cognitive. (It is) unseen, incapable of being spoken of, ungraspable, without any distinctive marks, unthinkable, unnameable, the essence of the knowledge of the one self, that into which the world is resolved, the peaceful, the benign, the non-dual, such, they think, is the fourth quarter. He is the self; He is to be known.

Here we get to a reality which is beyond the distinction of subject and object and yet it is above and not below this distinction. It is super-theism and not atheism or anti-theism. We cannot use here terms like all-knowing, all-powerful. *Brahman* cannot be treated as having objects of knowledge or powers. It is pure being. In many passages, the Upaniṣads make out that *Brahman* is pure being beyond all word and thought. He becomes *Īśvara* or personal God with the quality of *prajñā* or pure wisdom. He is all-knowing, the lord of the principle of *mūla-prakṛti* or the unmanifested, the inner guide of all souls. From him proceeds *Hiranya-garbhā* who, as Demiurge, fashions the world. From the last develops *Virāḍ* or the totality of all existents. The last two are sometimes mixed up.

Gauḍapāda says that this *Brahman* is 'birthless, free from sleep and dream, without name and form, ever effulgent, all thought; no form is necessary for it.'

ajam, anidram, asvapnam, anāmakam, arūpakam

sakṛd vibhātām sarvajñām nopacārah kathām cana. III. 36.

Though objective consciousness is absent in both the *prajñā* and *turiya* consciousness, the seed of it is present in the state of deep sleep while it is absent in the transcendent consciousness. Empirical consciousness is present though in an unmanifested condition in the state of deep sleep while the transcendent state is the non-empirical beyond the three states and free from their interruptions

and alternations. It is present, even when we are immersed in the activities of the waking world or lost in the unconsciousness of sleep. Man's highest good consists in entering into this, the self, making it the centre of one's life, instead of dwelling on the surface.

When deep sleep terminates the self returns to the dream and the waking states. In *turiya* there is a permanent union with *Brahman*. The metaphysical reality is cognised in *turiya*, if such an expression can be used for the transcendent state.

Plotinus portrays a gradual ascent from the world-soul to the spirit (*nous*) and finally from spirit to the One. The goal of spiritual ascent is a mystical ecstatic union with the Absolute. He writes: 'Let us suppose the same rest in the body that surrounds the soul, that its movement is stilled, and that the entire surroundings are also at rest, the earth, the sea, the heaven itself above the other elements.' In words that are echoes of Plotinus, Augustine in his *Confessions* describes the ascent from the changeable apprehensions and objects of sense through the intelligible world of conceptual truth to the Absolute Truth. 'If the tumult of the flesh were hushed, hushed the images of earth, and the waters and air, hushed also the poles of heaven' man turns his spiritual vision godward to receive the light, then he attains the absolute object of mystical union 'the light unchangeable above the mind' with the flash of one trembling glance.

8. *so'yam ātmādhyakṣaram aumkāro'dhimātram pādā mātrā mātrās ca pādā akāra ukāra makāra iti.*

8. This is the self, which is of the nature of the syllable *aum*, in regard to its elements. The quarters are the elements, the elements are the quarters, namely the letter, *a*, the letter *u* and the letter *m*.

This is the self: it is the deepest essence of the soul, the image of Godhead.

The world and the world-soul are both producers and produced. The Supreme God is only the producer; *Brahman* is above the distinction of producer and produced. Cp. Gauḍapāda:

kārya-kāraṇa-baddhau tāv-isyete viśva-taijasau

prājñah kāraṇa-baddhas tu dvau tau turye na sidhyatah.

I. II.

Viśva and *taijasa* are conditioned by cause and effect. But *prajñā* is conditioned by cause alone. These two (cause and effect) do not exist in *turiya*. Primal being unfolds itself as a subject-object relation. The unmeasured and undefined becomes the measured and the defined, a universe of logical discourse. *Prājñā* or wisdom and the element 'm' both indicate that the function of measuring is that of the logical mind. All distinctions are within the Supreme

Brahman. God is the logical being, the defined reality. It is not we that define *Brahman* but *Brahman* defines itself. The supreme logical idea is God who is the true, the good and the beautiful. Defined reality is not divided reality. The real in itself is *Brahman*; the real as logically defined is *Īśvara* who rests in *Brahman* who does not cease to be *Brahman* in becoming *Īśvara*.

9. *jāgarita-sthāno vaiśvānaro'kārah prathamā mātrā pter ādi-mattvād vā'pnoti ha vai sarvān kāmān ādiś ca bhavati ya evam veda.*

9. Vaiśvānara, whose sphere (of activity) is the waking state, is the letter *a*, the first element, either from the root *ap* to obtain or from being the first. He who knows this, obtains, verily, all desires, also, he becomes first.

Vaiśvānara is he who has the universe for his body.

10. *svapna-sthānas taijasa ukāro dvitīyā mātrotkarṣāt ubhayadvotkarṣati ha vai jñāna-samītatīm samānaś ca bhavati, nāsyābrahma-vit-kule bhavati ya evam veda.*

10. Taijasa, whose sphere (of activity) is the dream state, is the letter *u*, the second element, from exaltation or intermediateness. He who knows this exalts, verily, the continuity of knowledge and he becomes equal; in his family is born no one who does not know *Brahman*.

11. *susupta-sthānaḥ prājño makāras tṛtīyā mātrā mīler apīter vā minoti ha vā idam sarvam apītiś ca bhavati ya evam veda.*

11. Prājña, whose sphere (of activity) is the state of deep sleep is the letter *m*, the third element, either from the root *mi*, to measure or because of merging. He who knows this measures (knows) all this and merges also (all this in himself).

In deep sleep, all waking and dream experiences disappear. *Īśvara* is the cause of the universe as well as that of its dissolution. As the name *prājña* implies, the condition is one of intellection. In it we have a thinker and a thought. If this difference did not exist, it would be a silent oneness.

This verse affirms what Parmenides, Plato and Hegel assumed that the opposition of being and not-being is the original duality from the ontological standpoint. Being is *a priori* to non-being. The negation presupposes what it negates. Though being is *a priori* to non-being, being itself cannot be conceived without an opposite. Being could never be being without being opposed to not-being. But there is something which is *a priori* to the opposition of being and non-being and that is the unity which transcends both. Thought

cannot grasp and determine this spirit beyond the opposition. There is no concept or substance that could be thought of as being the unity without any opposition whatsoever. We cannot even call it unity for it suggests the opposite category of diversity. But we are in the sphere of oppositions, dualities and yet the positive side of the opposition brings out the content of the spirit. We have to seek the ultimate truth, goodness and beauty in its direction.

Plotinus says, 'Before the two there is the one and the unit must precede the Dyad: coming later than the one, the Dyad has the One as the standard of its differentiation, that without which it could not be the separate differentiated thing it is.' *Enneads* V. 1. 5.

'As long as we have duality, we must go still higher until we reach what transcends the Dyad.' *Ibid.* III. 8. 8.

12. *amātrāś caturtho'vyavahāryaḥ prapañcopaśamah śivo' dvaita evam aumkāra ātmaiva, samviśaty ātmanā'tmānam ya evam veda.*

12. The fourth is that which has no elements, which cannot be spoken of, into which the world is resolved, benign, non-dual. Thus the syllable *aum* is the very self. He who knows it thus enters the self with his self.

In *turiya*, the mind is not simply withdrawn from the objects but becomes one with *Brahman* who is free from fear, who is all-round illumination, according to Gauḍapāda.

līyate hi susupte tan nigrhītam na līyate

idā eva nirbhayam brahma jñānālokaṁ samantataḥ. III. 35.

In both deep sleep and transcendental consciousness there is no consciousness of objects but this objective consciousness is present in an unmanifested 'seed' form in deep sleep while it is completely transcended in the *turiya* consciousness. Gauḍapāda says: The non-cognition of duality is common to both *prājña* and *turiya* but *prājña* is associated with the seed (consciousness) in sleep while this does not exist in *turiya*.

dvaitasyāgrahaṇam tulyam ubhayaḥ prājña-turyayoḥ

bīja-mātrā-yutāḥ prājñāḥ sā ca turye na vidyate.

Ś opens his commentary on the B.G., with the verse that 'Nārāyaṇa is beyond the unmanifested principle and from this unmanifested arises the mundane egg or *Hiranya-garbha*.' *nārāyaṇaḥ paro'vyaktāḥ andam avyakta-sambhavam.* There is first the pure *Brahman* beyond subject and object and then Nārāyaṇa or God confronted by the object but superior to it and then the world-soul.

Lao Tze looks upon the Tao as the ultimate Reality which can be defined only in negative terms as 'colourless,' 'soundless,' 'non-material.' His conception of creation was that out of Tao, the eternal ultimate principle came the one, the great monad or the material cause of the universe. The one produced the two primary essences,

the Yang and the Yin, positive and negative, male and female, light and shade, which gave birth to the three powers of nature, heaven, earth and man, which in their combination produced all creatures.

Lao Tze's follower Chuang-tze regarded T'ien or God as the first great cause.

Plotinus says: 'Standing transcendent above all things that follow It, existing in Itself, not mixing or to be mixed with any emanation from Itself, veritably the one, not merely possessing Oneness as an attribute of Its essence—for that would be a false oneness—a Principle overpassing all reasoning, all knowing—a principle standing over all Essence and Existence . . . only when it is simplex and First, apart from all, can it be perfectly self-sufficing.' *Enneads*, V. 4. 1.

This soundless, partless, supreme Reality is the very self. In the state of deep sleep, it becomes the subject confronting the object which is yet unmanifested. We infer the presence of the object, as its developments take place on getting out of sleep. In the dream state, the object is manifested in the form of mental states; in the waking state, the object is manifested in material states. The subject-object duality is present in different forms in the states of waking, dream and dreamless sleep. It is transcended altogether in the state of *turiya*, while we have a pure consciousness of Self or Absolute.

No object can be set in opposition to the Spirit and so the question of validity or otherwise does not arise. It is self-validating, self-authenticating experience. The question of validity arises when the object appears as alien and impenetrable but in spiritual experience there is no alien object. There is knowledge of identity, by possession, by the absorption of the object at the deepest levels. In the experience of *turiya*, there is neither subject nor object; neither the perception nor the idea of God. It does not reflect or explain any other reality than itself. It is reality, spirit in its inner life. Those who know the truth become the truth. It is not a state in which objects are extrinsically opposed to one another. It is the immersion of the self in reality, its participation in primary being. It is illumined life. It is pure consciousness without any trace of duality; it is unfailing light. *turiyaḥ sarva-ārṅk sadā: Kārikā I. 12.* When the real is known there is no world of duality, *jñāte dvaitam na vidyate. Kārikā I. 18.*

Cp. *Aṣṭāvakra Gītā:*

*jñātā jñānam tathā jñeyam tṛtīyam nāsti vāstavam.
ajñānād bhātī yatredam so'ham asmi nirañjanah.*

When analogically we transfer this idea from the microcosm to the macrocosm, from the individual to the world, since there is a co-relation between intelligibility and being, we have answering to the waking state, *Virāt*, to the dream state, *Hiranya-garbha*, to

the dreamless sleep state, *Īsvara*. All these three are on the plane of duality, *Īsvara* has facing him *mūla-prakṛti*, though in an unmanifested (*avyākṛta*) condition, as the self has the object in an unmanifested condition in the state of dreamless sleep.

Plotinus who adopts a similar view puts the case thus: 'If, then, the Divine thought-forms (The Ideas) are many, there must of necessity be something common to all and something peculiar to each to differentiate them: this particularity or specific difference is the individual shape; but if there is shape there must be something that has taken the shape . . . that is to say there is a foundation, substratum, a matter. Further, if there is an Intellectual kosmos of which our kosmos is an image, and if ours is compound and includes matter, there must be a matter in the Intellectual kosmos as well.' *Enneads II. 4. 4.*

The interaction of the universal subject and object develops the rest of the universe. *Hiranya-garbha* is the *sūtrātman* and plays with ideas, mental states as *taijasa* does in the dream world. In *Rg Veda*, it is said that *Hiranya-garbha* arose in the beginning, the lord of all created beings. X. 121. 1. *hiranya-garbhas sam-avartata agre bhūtasya jātaḥ patir eka āsit.* This whole world is in him in an embryo form. *hiranye brahmānda-rūpe garbha-rūpenāvasthitah prajā-patir hiranya-garbhaḥ.* *Vidyāranya.* When these are projected into space and time, we have *Virāt*. This answers to the waking state, which is *Vaiśvānara's* sphere of activity.

The waking and the dream states answer to the exteriorised existence and interiorised life of the world-spirit. When the world-spirit externalises its attention, we have the manifestation of the cosmos. When it turns its attention inward, the cosmos retreats into latency. When the world-spirit withdraws altogether into undisturbed stillness, the object, though present, becomes a mere abstraction. When even that ceases, *Īsvara* is *Brahman*.

Aum thus represents both the unmanifested Absolute and the personal *Īsvara*. *Gauḍapāda* writes: 'The sacred syllable *aum* is verily the lower *Brahman* and it is also said to be the higher *Brahman*. *Aum* is without beginning, unique, without anything external to it, unrelated to any effect and imperishable.'

*pranavo hy aparam brahma, pranavaś ca paraḥ smṛtaḥ
apurvo'nantaro bāhyo nāparaḥ pranavo'vyayah. (26).*

If we worship *Aum* as *īśvara*, we pass beyond grief: 'Know *Aum* to be *Īsvara*, ever present in the hearts of all. The wise man, realising *aum* as all-pervading, does not grieve.'

*pranavam hiśvaram vidyāt sarvasya hr̥di samsthitam
sarva-vyāpinam aumkāram matvā dhīro na śocati. (28).*

While *Īsvara*, the personal God, is the lord of the world of manifestation, of becoming, the Supreme *Brahman* is beyond all becoming in pure being. 'One who has known *Aum* which is (at the same time)

devoid of elements and of infinite elements, in which all duality is resolved, the benign, he is the (real) sage and none other.'

*amātro'nanta-mātrāś ca dvaitasyopasaṃmah śivah
aumkāro vidīto yena sa munir netaro janah.* (29).

In this Upaniṣad we find the fundamental approach to the attainment of reality by the road of introversion and ascent from the sensible and changing, through the mind which dreams, through the soul which thinks, to the divine within but above the soul. The truth of our intellectual knowledge presupposes a light, the Light of the Real above logical truth, the Light which is not itself but that by which it has been created and by whose illumination it shines.

In the Apocryphal *Wisdom of Solomon*, the immanent reason is described thus:

'For she is a breath of the power of God,

And a clear effluence of the glory of the Almighty.' VII. 25.

Wisdom becomes a personality (XVIII. 14-16) akin to the word in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel. Though Wisdom is a potency *outside* God it is yet wholly *in* God. Philo makes a sharp distinction between God in Himself and God revealed, between God who is pure being, unknowable, outside the material universe and God who is immanent in man and the universe, who is all-penetrating, all-filling. The gap between the Infinite God and the finite man was bridged in the Old Testament by God's angels who were regarded as emanations of the divine, offshoots of deity, parts of his very being. Philo held that the universe was filled with divine potencies. While in one sense these are attributes and self-revelations of God, in another sense they are personal beings, incorporeal souls who mediate between God and men, who 'report the injunctions of the father to his children and the necessities of the children to the father.' *De Somniis* I. 22. The unity of all these potencies is constituted by the Logos. Heaven and earth subsisted in the Logos before their material creation. The potencies which are the creators of matter emanate from the Logos. God who is the ultimate creator never works directly but through the Logos who again works through the potencies called logoi. *Prājña*, wisdom, Logos, Intellectual Principle, have a family likeness.

Plotinus has the transcendent triad of the Absolute One, the Intellectual Principle or God and the World-soul. 'The one is not a Being but the source of Being which is its first offspring. The One is perfect, that is, it has nothing, seeks nothing, needs nothing, but, as we may say, it overflows and this overflowing is creative; the engendered entity looks towards the One and becomes the Intellectual Principle; resting within itself, this offspring of the One is Being.' *Enneads* V. 2. 1. This Intellectual Principle *Nous* is the image of the One. It is engendered because the One in its self-quest has vision. This seeing is *Nous*. The third is the soul, the author of

all living things. It made the sun the moon the stars and the whole visible world. It is the offspring of the Divine intellect. It is, in Plotinus, of a twofold nature. There is an inner soul intent on *Nous* and another which faces outward. The latter is associated with a downward movement in which the soul generates its image which is nature and the world of sense. For Plotinus it is the lowest sphere, something emanating from the soul when it forgets to look upward towards the *Nous*. We have the One, *Nous*, Soul and the world answering to the fourfold nature of reality in the *Māṇḍūkya U*. The last two, the world-soul and the world are the subtle and the gross conditions of the same being. *virāṭ trailokya-śarīrah brahmā samaṣṭi-vyaṣṭi-rūpaḥ saṃsāra-maṇḍala-vyāpī.* Ś on T.U. II. 8.