

# *Some teachings from Shrī Ātmānanda (Krishna Menon)*

AS REPORTED BY A SĀDHAKA DISCIPLE

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*Note:* This document has been extracted from a discussion on the Advaitin E-group <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/advaitin/messages>> during Nov 2003 to Jan 2004. The discussion was led by Ananda Wood; and the extraction is largely the work of Dennis Waite, who has kindly made a browser version available on his website <<http://www.advaita.org.uk/atmananda1.htm>>.

This new version is intended for distribution as an Acrobat pdf document. It has been modified a little by Ananda, partly to take advantage of the Acrobat format and partly to make some revisions that are meant to make the discussion clearer.

## 1. *Universal and individual*

In the preface to *Atma Darshan* (page 2), Shrī Ātmānanda points out that he takes an approach which brings ‘the universal under the individual’. This is what he called the ‘direct’ approach; and he distinguished it from another approach that he called ‘cosmological’.

- In the ‘cosmological’ approach, an ‘individual person’ or ‘jīva’ is considered as an incomplete part of an encompassing universe. Hence that approach is described as one ‘of bringing the individual under the universal’. It requires an expansion of consideration to a universal functioning – which is ruled by an all-powerful ‘God’ called ‘Īshvara’, or which expresses an all-comprehensive reality called ‘brahman’.

Literally, ‘brahman’ means ‘expanded’ or ‘great’. When what is considered gets expanded, beyond all limitations of our physical and mental seeing, then brahman is realized. Such expansion may be approached through various exercises that have been prescribed, to purify a sādḥaka’s character from ego’s partialities. In particular, there are ethical practices that weaken egocentricism; there are devotional practices that cultivate surrender to a worshipped deity; and there are meditative practices that throw the mind into special samādhi states where usual limitations are dissolved into an intensely comprehensive absorption.

Through such prescribed practices, a sādḥaka may get to be far more impartial, and thus get a far broader and more comprehensive understanding of the world. A teacher may accordingly prepare a sādḥaka, through a greatly broadened understanding of the world, before directing an enquiry that reflects back into non-dual truth. That cosmological path involves a characteristic attitude of faith and obedience, towards the tradition which has prescribed its mind-expanding and character-purifying practices. Accordingly, that path has been given public prominence, in traditional societies which have been organized on the basis of obedient faith.

- In the ‘direct’ approach, a teacher straightaway directs a reflective enquiry, from a disciple’s current view of world and personality. On the disciple’s part, the enquiry depends upon a genuine interest in truth, sufficient to go through with a deeply skeptical and unsettling questioning of habitual beliefs on which the disciple’s sense of self and view of world depends. This calls for an independent attitude – not taking things on trust, but rather asking questions and finding things out for oneself.

For traditional societies, such an independent attitude has been publicly discouraged, for fear of destabilizing the obedient faith that has been needed to maintain their social order. Accordingly, there has been a tendency to keep the direct approach somewhat hidden, away from ordinary public notice. As for example, the skeptical questioning of the Upanishads was kept somewhat hidden until its publication in the last century or two.

In the modern world, we have developed a different kind of society – where education is far more widespread, and independent questioning is encouraged from a much earlier stage of education. So it is only natural that the ‘direct path’ or the ‘vicāra mārga’ should have been made more public, most famously through Raṃaṇa Maharshi.

In Shrī Ātmānanda’s teachings, there is a continuation of this trend towards independent questioning, by the individual sādḥaka. Here, each ‘individual person’ or ‘jīva’ is considered as a misleading appearance that confuses self and personal-

ity. The questioning is turned directly in, reflecting back from physical and mental appendages to an inmost truth of self or 'ātma'.

The questions turn upon their own assumed beliefs, which take for granted mind and body's mediation showing us an outside world. Reflecting back from mind and body's outward mediation, the questioning returns to direct self-knowledge at the inmost centre of experience, from where the enquiry has come.

As the enquiry turns in, all observation and interpretation of the universe is brought back in as well, to an inmost centre that is truly individual. All perceptions, thoughts and feelings must return back there, as they are interpreted and taken into lasting knowledge. Hence this approach is described as one 'of bringing the universal under the individual'.

In short, Shrī Ātmānanda's teachings start out with a direct enquiry into the 'ātman' side of the traditional equation 'ātman = brahman'. The enquiry is epistemological, examining the question of 'What is?' by asking: 'How is it known?' Examining each object from the inmost standpoint of knowing self, the complete reality of world is reduced to non-dual consciousness, where self and reality (ātman and brahman) are found identical.

And the examination is carried out without need of recourse to traditional exercises of bhakti worship or yogic meditation. In fact Shrī Ātmānanda often discouraged such exercises, for many of his disciples, particularly for those whose samskāras were not already involved with them.

Clearly, this approach is not suited to everyone. For many in the modern world, traditional practices of religion and meditation are of much-needed value. In recent times, roughly contemporary with Shrī Ātmānanda, the traditional approach has been taught by great sages like Kānci-svāmi Candrashekharendra-sarasvati and Ānandamayī-mā, for whom Shrī Ātmānanda had great respect.

In fact, Shrī Ātmānanda made it very clear that his teachings were living ones, meant specifically for his particular disciples. He was quite explicitly against the institutionalization of such teachings, saying that the only proper 'institution' of advaita must be the living teacher (if one insists on talking of an 'institution' at all).

So, as I go on to further postings about some prakriyās that Shrī Ātmānanda taught, it should be understood that these are only the reports of a particular follower, whose reporting is inevitably fallible. Some published works by and on Shrī Ātmānanda are indicated below:

1. *Atma Darshan* and *Atma Nirvriti* (each in Malayalam and English versions, the English versions translated by Shrī Ātmānanda himself)
2. *Ātmārāmam* (in Malayalam only)
3. *Atmananda Tattwa Samhita* (tape-recorded talks between Shrī Ātmānanda and some disciples – the talks were mainly in English which has been directly transcribed, and there were also some Malayalam parts which are translated by Shrī Ātmānanda's eldest son, Shrī Adwayānanda)
4. *Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shrī Ātmānanda* (notes taken by a disciple, Nitya Tripta – the notes were encouraged and approved by Shrī Ātmānanda, during his lifetime)

The English versions of *Atma Darshan*, *Atma Nirvriti* and *Atmananda Tattwa Samhita* are available for purchase on the net at:

[http://www.bluedove.com/Advaita\\_Atmananda.htm](http://www.bluedove.com/Advaita_Atmananda.htm)

Items 1 to 3 above are available in Malayalam and English from: Sri Vidya Samiti, Anandawadi, Malakara (near Chengannur), Kerala 689532, India.

For item 4 above, the first edition is now out of print, but an electronic second edition may be downloaded as a pdf file from either of the following sites:

<http://www.advaitin.net/Ananda/>

[http://www.advaita.org.uk/reading/free\\_sages.htm](http://www.advaita.org.uk/reading/free_sages.htm)

*Note:* After the passing of Shri Ātmānanda, his eldest son Shri Adwayānanda became a teacher in his own right, with many disciples who came to learn from him, at his home: Anandawadi, Malakara (near Chengannur), Kerala 689 532, India. The son has passed away recently, much mourned by his followers. His teachings follow his father's approach and are available in published form from Bluedove at:

[http://www.bluedove.com/Advaita\\_Atmananda.htm](http://www.bluedove.com/Advaita_Atmananda.htm).

### **1a. Different paths**

Vicāra or enquiry is essential to the completion of knowledge in any path. When the traditional path is called 'cosmological', this does not imply a lack of vicāra. It simply means that along with vicāra there is also a considerable component of cosmology, which seeks to describe the world and to prescribe suitable actions for improving our personalities and the world around them.

Vicāra must be there in both paths – 'cosmological' and 'direct':

- On the one hand, the 'cosmological' path gets its name from having a cosmological component that is lacking in the direct path.
- On the other hand, the 'direct' path is so called because it looks directly for underlying truth. However bad or good the world is seen to be, however badly or how well it is seen through personality, there is in the direct path no concern to improve that cosmic view. The only concern is to reflect directly back into underlying truth, from the superficial and misleading show of all outward viewing.

The direct path is thus no recent development. It was there from the start, before traditions and civilizations developed. And it has continued through the growth of tradition, along with the personal and environmental improvements that traditions have prescribed. For these improvements are inevitably partial and compromised; so that there are always people who aren't satisfied with such improvement, but just long for plain truth that is not compromised with any falsity.

To find that truth, no cosmological improvement can itself be enough. At some stage, sooner or later, there has to be a jump entirely away from all improvement, into a truth where worse or better don't apply. The only difference between the cosmological and direct paths is when the jump is made. In the direct path, the jump is soon or even now. In the cosmological approach, the jump is put off till later on, in order to give time for improving preparations to be made for it.

There are pros and cons on both sides, so that different paths suit different personalities. An early jump is harder to make, and it means that the sādḥaka's character is still impure; so even having jumped into the truth, she or he keeps falling back unsteadily, overwhelmed by egotistical samskāras. Then work remains, to keep return-

ing back to truth, until the samskāras are eradicated and there is a final establishment in the sahaja state.

A later jump can be easier, with a character so purified that little or no work remains to achieve establishment. But there are pitfalls of preparing personality for a late jump, because a sādḥaka may get enamoured of the relative advances that have been achieved, like a prisoner who falls in love with golden chains and thus remains imprisoned.

So, what's needed is to find the particular path that suits each particular sādḥaka, instead of arguing for any path as best for everyone.

## 2. *The three states – enquiry from everyday experience.*

Shrī Ātmānanda instructed his disciples through a number of different ‘prakriyās’ or ‘methods’ for approaching truth. And, from time to time, he would explain some basic prakriyās in a series of ‘regular talks’, which served as a systematic introduction to his teachings. In 1958, my sister and I attended such a series of talks, at Shrī Ātmānanda’s home in Trivandrum.

We were still children at the time, just before our teens, growing up as westernized Indians in post-colonial Mumbai (then called ‘Bombay’). To us, Shrī Ātmānanda was not westernized but very Indian, quite unlike our westernized school and our avant-garde intellectual parents. And yet, it was our school-teachers and our parents who struck us as old-fashioned and authoritarian. That wasn’t how we thought of Shrī Ātmānanda. We did not have to take what he said on authority, for he came across in a perfectly modern way – as speaking on a level with us, about our everyday experience.

In this everyday experience, he showed a meaning that was simple and straightforward, in contrast to all the complicated stuff that was being loaded onto us by our parents and our school. When we once complained of this load, he very gently made it plain that the load was better taken on than evaded, and that his teaching should not be misused for the purpose of evasion.

Such a straightforward attitude is characteristic of his teaching. Thinking back over Shrī Ātmānanda’s regular talks, that straightforwardness was evident from the first prakriyā explained. This is the prakriyā that examines waking, dream and sleep – as three states which we commonly experience. These states are here examined naturally and simply, as everyday experiences that show a self from which they are known.

- In the *waking state*, the self is identified with a body in an outside world, where the body’s senses are assumed to know outside objects.
- But in the *dream state*, all bodies and all objects seen are imagined in the mind. Dreamt objects are experienced by a dream self – which is not an outside body, but has been imagined in the mind. This shows that the self which knows experience cannot be an outside body, as it is assumed to be in the waking world.

Considering the dream state more carefully, it too depends upon assumed belief. In the experience of a dream, self is identified with a conceiving mind, where thoughts and feelings are assumed to know the dreamt-up things that they conceive.

- Finally, in the *state of deep sleep*, we have an experience where no thoughts and feelings are conceived and nothing that’s perceived appears. In the experience of deep sleep, there is no name or quality or form – neither conceived by mind, nor perceived by any sense.

At first, from this lack of appearances, it seems that deep sleep is a state of blank emptiness, where there is nothing to know anything. No mind or body there appears; and yet it is a state that we somehow enter and experience every day, when waking body falls asleep and dreaming mind has come to rest.

If our experience of deep sleep is thus taken seriously, it raises a profound question. How is deep sleep experienced, when all activities of body and of mind have disappeared? What self could know our experience there, in the complete absence of any perceiving body and any thinking or feeling mind?

The question points to a self which experiences deep sleep, a self that somehow goes on knowing when all changing actions of perception, thought and feeling have disappeared. That self is utterly distinct from mind and body, for it stays knowing when they disappear. Its knowing is no changing act of either mind or body; for it remains when all changing acts have come to rest, in an experience where they are utterly dissolved. So it is changeless in itself – found shining by itself, in depth of sleep.

Since change and time do not apply to it, that self is a changeless and a timeless principle of all experience. In the waking state, it illuminates perceptions and interpretations of an outside world. In dreams, it illuminates the inwardly conceived imaginations of a dreaming mind. In deep sleep, it shines alone, quite unconfused with body or with mind. In all these states, it remains the same. It is always utterly unchanged in its own existence, which illuminates itself.

Through this prakriyā, Shrī Ātmānanda initiated an enquiry from everyday experience that is commonly accessible to everyone. Accordingly, he treated everyday deep sleep as a ‘key to the ultimate’. He said that if a sādḥaka is ready to consider deep sleep seriously, then this alone is enough, without the need for a yogic cultivation of nirvikalpa samādhi.

How far does Shrī Ātmānanda’s position here accord with the traditional Advaita scriptures? This question has already been discussed a week or two ago, but I’ll repeat briefly that it depends on which scriptures are taken up and how they are interpreted. Two scriptures that I’ve studied here are the story of Indra and Virocana in the *Chāndogya Upanishad* (8.7-12) and the analysis of ‘Om’ in the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad*. I personally do not find it difficult to interpret these two scriptures in a way that accords fully with Shrī Ātmānanda. But there are of course other interpretations which place emphasis upon nirvikalpa samādhi, as a fourth state considered in addition to waking, dream and sleep.

I would say that for the purposes of different kinds of sādḥana, it is quite legitimate to interpret the scriptures in such ways that may seem contradictory. Such contradictions must of course appear in the realm of dvaita, where our sādḥanas take place. Advaita is the goal to which the sādḥanas aspire. It’s there that all contradictions are dissolved.

From Nitya Tripta, *Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shrī Ātmānanda*, note 64:

Consciousness never parts with you, in any of the three states. In deep sleep, you are conscious of deep rest or peace. Inference is possible only of those things which have not been experienced. The fact that you had a deep sleep or profound rest is your direct experience, and you only remember it when you come to the waking state. It can never be an inference. Experience alone can be remembered. The fact that you were present throughout the deep sleep can also never be denied.

The only three factors thus found present in deep sleep are Consciousness, peace and yourself. All these are objectless and can never be objectified. In other words they are all subjective. But there can be only one subject; and that is the ‘I’-principle. So none of these three can be the result of inference; since they are all experience itself.

## 2a. Deep sleep and higher reason

A common sense analysis is that deep sleep is a blank in the memory record, between falling asleep and waking up. But such a blank does not provide conclusive evidence of any positive experience by an unchanging self. Sleep can only have a duration in physical time, as indicated for example by the change in a clock or in sunlight.

The memory record is not a physical tape; it is merely a sequence of passed moments. In that remembered sequence, there is a moment of falling asleep and (if the sleep was dreamless) the very next moment is waking up. As described from the physical world, there may be a duration of some hours between falling asleep and waking. When this physical description is added onto the memory record, then it may seem that there were some hours between the two moments of falling asleep and waking up. But if the memory record is considered in its own terms, it says something quite different. It says that these two moments were right next to each other, with no time in between them at all.

So where do we go from this contradiction, between the physical view that time has passed in deep sleep and the mental view that no time has passed at all? We can go two ways.

On the one hand, we can think that yes, there was a period of time which memory has failed to report. But this raises further questions. Can the failure be redressed? Even if we do not remember any physical or mental appearances in that period, was there some experience there that we can understand more deeply? Beneath such appearances, do we have any further experience that is revealed to us, by the sense of refreshing rest and peace and happiness which we seek in deep sleep and which sometimes comes across to us from there?

On the other hand, we can take it that no time at all has passed between adjacent moments, as one has been succeeded by the next. Again this raises questions, even more profound. If there's no time between adjacent moments, what makes them different? How on earth can we distinguish them? Must there not be a timeless gap between them, after one has passed and before the other has appeared? And if this is so between the moment of falling fast asleep and the next moment of waking up, must it not be so between any two adjacent moments?

So doesn't every moment rise from a timeless gap whose experience is the same as deep sleep? And doesn't every moment instantly dissolve back there again? So isn't every moment in immediate contact with a timeless depth of sleep that no moment ever leaves?

That timeless depth is thus present to us all, immediately, throughout all time. Each of us stands in it always, not seeing anything, nor hearing anything, nor thinking anything – just as we recognize ourselves to be in the state of deep sleep, in which there truly is no ignorance. (This is how I would interpret *Atma Nirvriti*, chapter 17.)

Such a position is achieved through a special kind of logic, which Shrī Ātmānanda called 'higher reason' or 'vidyā-vritti'. That is not the outward reasoning of mind, which builds upon assumptions, thus proceeding from one statement to another. Instead, it is an inward reasoning that asks its way down beneath assumptions, thus going on from each question to deeper questions.

That inward logic finds its goal when all assumptions are dissolved and thus no further questions can arise. Advaita cannot be established by the 'lower' logic, the outward reasoning of mind. But of the higher logic or the higher reason, Shrī Ātmānanda said exactly the opposite. He said that it alone is sufficient to realize the truth and to establish advaita. And he insisted that a sādḥaka must hold on to it relentlessly,

not letting go until it dissolves itself in complete establishment. For it is the true logic. It is the truth itself, appearing in the form of logic to take a sādḥaka back into it, when love for truth gets to be genuine.

This is a delicate issue, quite paradoxical to outward intellect. And it depends essentially on the relationship between teacher and disciple. The following is from Nitya Tripta's book (*Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shrī Ātmānanda*, note 1361):

Is 'vicāra' thinking about the Truth? No. It is entirely different. 'Vicāra' is a relentless enquiry into the truth of the Self and the world, utilizing only higher reason and right discrimination. It is not thinking at all. You come to 'know' the meaning and the goal of vicāra only on listening to the words of the Guru. But subsequently, you take to that very same knowing, over and over again. That is no thinking at all. This additional effort is necessary in order to destroy samskāras. When the possessive identification with samskāras no longer occurs, you may be said to have transcended them. You cannot think about anything you do not know. Therefore thinking about the Truth is not possible till you visualize it for the first time. Then you understand that Truth can never be made the object of thought, since it is in a different plane. Thus thinking about the Truth is never possible. The expression only means knowing, over and over again, the Truth already known.

There is knowing in deep sleep, but it is not a knowing of any object that is separate from self. The experience of deep sleep is pure knowing or pure light, unmixed with any object. The objects that appeared in waking and in dreams are thus absorbed by deep sleep into pure light, utterly unmixed with any darkness or obscurity. It's only in the waking and dream states that darkness or obscurity gets mixed up with light, through the seeming presence of objects.

When seen correctly, deep sleep is identical with nirvikalpa samādhi. It is a state of absorption in pure light. This is not of course to deny that the yogic cultivation of samādhi has its benefits, in training concentration, in purifying character and in forcefully turning attention to a state of objectless experience. But, since deep sleep is so commonplace and so easily entered, most people are not interested to consider it seriously.

The whole aim of the three-state prakriyā is to find a standpoint that is independent of each state. Of course the enquiry starts off conducted from the waking state, just as one looks at someone else from one's partial personality. But if the enquiry is genuine, why shouldn't it find a deeper, more impartial ground that is shared with other states? Is it so different from finding common ground with other people, when one is genuinely interested in their points of view?

To find such common and impartial ground, one has to stand back from superficial partialities, thus going down beneath their limiting assumptions. That is what's meant to be achieved, by turning waking mind towards an enquiry of dream and sleep experience. In turning its attention to consider dreams and sleep, the waking mind is turned back down, into its own depth from where it has arisen.

When it considers dreams, it is still mind – which thinks and feels through memory and inference, both of them unreliable. But when the mind goes further down to try considering deep sleep, the only way it can succeed is to get utterly dissolved in consciousness itself, where knowing is identity. There nothing is remembered or inferred;

for knowing is entirely direct, as a complete identity of that which knows with what is known.

So, on the one hand, it is right to admit that one can't see in advance how the analysis or the enquiry is going to succeed. That is quite beyond the superficial waking mind where the enquiry starts off. And, if analysis means 'the objective and rational pursuit of the mind-intellect', then this cannot be adequate.

But, on the other hand, when Shrī Ātmānanda spoke of 'enquiry' or 'reason' or 'logic' or 'analysis', he did not restrict these terms to the mind-intellect. In particular, he said that genuine enquiry must necessarily transcend the mind, through 'higher reason' or 'higher logic' or 'higher analysis'. That higher reason is a questioning discernment which becomes so keen and genuine that the truth itself arises in response to it and takes the sādḥaka back in, beyond all mind and partiality.

In Advaita, all ideas and arguments are useful only to that end. As they proceed, they sharpen reason and discernment, to a point where all causality and all distinctions get dissolved. As reason reaches there, its results can't be foreseen or described, but only pointed to. That's why deep sleep is so significant. It points to dissolution in an utterly impartial and thus independent stand, where no confused distinctions can remain.

According to Advaita, a true advaitin doesn't merely remember something from deep sleep, but actually stands in just that experience which is the essence of deep sleep. The advaitin doesn't merely remember that experience but knows it in identity, as utterly at one with it. And this knowing in identity is most definitely fully present in the waking and all states, whatever may or may not appear.

Hence, the *Bhagavad-gītā* says (somewhat freely translated):

The one whose balance is complete  
stands wide awake in what is dark  
unconscious night, for any being  
seen created in the world.

Created beings are awake  
to what a sage sees as a night  
where true awareness is submerged  
in dreams of blind obscurity.

2.69

In a sense, the only way to non-dual truth is by learning from a living someone who directly knows deep sleep, while speaking in the waking state. That learning cannot be achieved by reading books or by any amount of discussion with people like yours truly. From such reading and discussion, a sādḥaka can only hear of ideas and arguments that living teachers use to take disciples to the truth. To be convinced of the truth to which such arguments are meant to lead, the sādḥaka must be guided by a living teacher who stands established in that truth.

Regarding the 'experience' of deep sleep, the following note by Nitya Tripta may be helpful:

How do you think about or remember a past enjoyment? (*Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shrī Ātmānanda*, note 105)

You can only try to recapitulate, beginning with the time and place, the details of the setting and other attendant circumstances or things, including your own personality there. Thinking over them or perceiving them in the subtle, fol-

lowing the sequence of the incident, you come to the very climax, to the point where you had the previous experience of happiness. At that point your body becomes relaxed, mind refuses to function, you forget the long cherished object you had just acquired, and you forget even yourself. Here you are again thrown into that state of happiness you enjoyed before.

Thus, in remembering a past enjoyment, you are actually enjoying it afresh, once again. But some people stop short at the point where the body begins to relax, and they miss the enjoyment proper.

Similarly, when you begin to think about your experience of happiness in deep sleep, you begin with your bedroom, bed, cushions ... and pressing on to the very end you come to the Peace you enjoyed there. You enjoy the peace of deep sleep; that is to say you find that the peace of deep sleep is the background of the variety in wakefulness, and that it is your real nature.

A philosophical enquiry starts with the mind and its confused assumptions. But what it does is to question the assumptions, in an attempt to clarify their confusions. In effect, as the enquiry proceeds, the mind keeps digging up its seeming ground, from under its own feet. It keeps undermining its previous positions, in search of clarity. Its questions are turned back upon the very assumptions that have given rise to them.

As assumptions are unearthed, and as they are examined and their falsities removed, the enquiry falls deeper back. Its asking thus gets taken down, more deeply back, into foundations that are more directly rooted. From these more direct roots, yet further questions rise and turn back down again, to investigate and clarify what's further underneath.

So long as this reflecting-down enquiry keeps finding that its stand is a construction from diversity, this shows that it is still made up from buried elements that have to be examined further. Its questioning is still caught up in doubtful compromise, and thus it cannot reach a final end. For then one's stand is still built up on different and alien things that are not fully and directly known; and this inevitably brings in ignorance, confusion and uncertainty.

To reach a final end, the mind must find a way to go directly and completely down beneath all mental constructs, to where the mind and all its journeys down are utterly dissolved. So that, at last, no trace of any difference or diversity remains.

How is that possible? Well, in a sense, that happens every night, when we fall into deep sleep. The mind relaxes then – withdrawing back from waking world, through dreams, into a depth of sleep where no diversity appears. The higher reason or vicāra does this in the waking state, by a questioning discernment that progressively refines itself of all ingrained confusions, until it penetrates entirely beneath diversity, where it dissolves spontaneously in what it has been seeking.

In short, though the enquiry starts out in mind, it is not targeted at any object that the mind conceives. Its target is pure subject – the inmost ground from which conceptions are thrown up and where conceptions all return to get dissolved, as they are taken in. By targeting that ground, the enquiry must point beyond its conceptions, to where they get utterly dissolved.

So, from the mind where it starts out, the enquiry and its results must seem quite paradoxical. The paradoxes come from mind that is dissatisfied with its own conceptions. So it looks for a way beyond them, though at the same time it expects to conceive what will be found beyond. In fact, the only way to find out is to go there. It cannot be conceived in advance.

To navigate along the way, language can be very useful, if it is used to point beyond its symbols and descriptions. Its function is to sacrifice itself, to burn up so completely that no trace of smoke or ash remains, so as to interfere with what its meaning shows. It is the ‘higher reason’ that uses language in this way. The function of the higher reason is precisely to burn up all obscuring residues that language leaves behind.

So, where you ask if the higher reason is a function of a ‘higher mind’, the answer is most definitely not. Shrī Ātmānanda was quite explicit about this. In Malayalam (or Sanskrit) the higher reason is ‘vidyā-vritti’, which means the ‘functioning of knowledge’. The higher reason is just that which dissolves the mind in knowledge. It is the functioning of knowledge, expressed in a questioning discernment that takes mind back to knowledge where all thinking is dissolved. There is no ‘higher mind’. The only way that mind can get ‘higher’ is to get utterly dissolved in knowledge.

Let me try to put it more simply. Knowledge is the subject of which both higher reason and mind are instruments. The higher reason functions, through discerning enquiry, to dissolve the mind in pure knowledge, where mind properly belongs. And as the higher reason functions, it makes use of mind reflectively, in order to bring mind back to knowledge. There is no question of the higher reason being an instrument of any mind. It is always the other way about.

I would add that the process of ‘higher reason’ is one hundred percent empirical. Each question is tried out to see what result it leads to. And then, further questions rise empirically. They rise from actual experience of the result, not just from imagining or theorizing in advance what it might be. Thus, the process must go on relentlessly, until the actual experience of a truth where questions do not further rise – where all possibility of questioning is utterly dissolved. All this requires that each questioning attack is turned back upon one’s own mistakes of assumption and belief. Otherwise, the reasoning is merely theoretical.

### *Reasoning and truth*

When an enquiry begins  
to ask for plain, impartial truth,  
the asking is at first from mind.

But, for such asking to succeed,  
the mind that asks must rigorously  
question what it thinks it knows –

discerning what is truly known  
from what misleadingly appears  
through habits of assumed belief.

In search of truth, the asking must  
keep opening what is believed  
to unrelenting scrutiny,

until the living truth itself –  
the very knowledge that is sought –  
takes charge of the enquiry.

That taking charge by living truth,  
of asking mind, is spoken of  
as 'vidyā-vritti' or, in other  
words, as 'higher reasoning'.

Then, in that higher reasoning,  
the knowledge sought becomes expressed  
in living arguments and questioning  
towards a truth beyond the mind –

a truth which makes no compromise  
between mind's thoughts that make-believe  
and what knowing truly finds.

### 3. *'I am consciousness' – reflection back into the 'I'*

The analysis of three states is just a prakriyā. It's just one way of investigating truth. It starts with three ordinary statements: 'I am awake'; 'I dreamed'; 'I slept soundly, where no dreams appeared.' All these statements start with the word 'I'. What is that common 'I', which is implied to know our experiences of waking, dream and sleep? This is an implication that we often make. But what exactly does it mean? What truth is there in it? That's what this prakriyā investigates, as it examines the three states.

For some who are intellectually inclined, there can be a problem with this three-state prakriyā, when it comes to deep sleep. The problem is that deep sleep can seem distant and inaccessible, to the waking mind that examines it. So some would rather investigate the waking state, by asking there reflectively for an underlying truth that our waking perceptions and interpretations each express. That results in a different prakriyā, which proceeds through three levels of knowing.

The three levels are those of body, mind and consciousness. They correspond of course to waking, dream and deep sleep. Instead of reflecting from the waking state through dreams into deep sleep, this second prakriyā reflects from perceiving body through conceiving mind to knowing consciousness.

What is that consciousness, which is expressed in each living act of mind and body? It is the knowing of that self which is present always, throughout experience. That's what self truly is, in each one of us, beneath our different personalities. It is that self which does not part with anyone, not even for a moment. Its knowing is no physical or mental act, which self starts doing at some time and stops doing later on. Consciousness is not a put on act that later can be taken off. Instead, it is the very being of the self, exactly what self always is.

In truth, the self is consciousness, whose very being is to know. It knows itself, shining by its own light. All appearances are known by their reflection of its self-illumination. We know them only when they come into attention, where they are lit by consciousness. But then, how can that consciousness be known?

Consciousness is not an object that is known. Instead, it just that which knows. It is thus known in identity, as one's own self, by realizing one's own true identity with it. That is the only way in which it can be known.

As a matter of ingrained habit, we think of consciousness as an activity of body, sense and mind. Hence what we take for consciousness appears confused with a great complexity of physical and sensual and mental actions.

In every one of us, consciousness is actually experienced in the singular, as one's own self. But when a person looks through mind and body, at a world that seems outside, it there appears that consciousness is different and changing – in different persons, different creatures and their varied faculties. Or, if a person looks through mind alone, into the mental process of conception, it then appears that consciousness is made up from a passing sequence of perceptions, thoughts and feelings.

Thus, in itself, consciousness is quite distinct from the differing and changing appearances that we habitually confuse with it. As it is experienced directly, at the inmost core of each individual's experience, it is pure self – utterly impersonal and impartial, beyond all difference and change. That is the inmost, undeniable experience that we share in common, deep within each one of us. Yet, very strangely, that undeniable experience is ignored and somehow covered up, by the vast majority of people in the world.

It gets ignored because of a confusion that mixes self with body, sense and mind. For this produces a mistaken show of physical and sensual and mental actions, which are deceptively confused with the clear and unaffected light of consciousness. As people identify themselves with different bodies and with changing minds, they mistake themselves as jīvas or persons – who are disparate and uncertain mixtures, made up of knowing self confused with improperly known objects.

Such persons take an ignorantly made-up stand, upon divided and uncertain ground, built artificially from alien things. Accordingly, experiences seem partial and appear divided by our personalities, as people get unhappily conflicted in their seeming selves.

But where confusion ceases, as in deep sleep or in moments of impartial clarity, there personality dissolves and self stands on its own, shining by itself as happiness and peace. Thus, pure happiness and unaffected peace can be seen to shine out in deep sleep, as manifesting aspects of the self's true nature.

Again, it might help to ask briefly how these teachings relate to traditional Advaita scriptures. On occasion, Shrī Ātmānanda said that the vicāra mārga could be characterized by a single aphorism: 'Prajnyānam asmi' or 'I am consciousness.' One such occasion is reported by Nitya Tripta:

The path of the 'I'-thought (*Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shrī Ātmānanda*, note 601)

The ordinary man has the deep samskāra ingrained in him that he is the body and that it is very, very insignificant, compared to the vast universe. Therefore the only possible mistake you are likely to be led into, while taking to the 'I'-thought, is the habitual samskāra of the smallness attached to the 'I'.

This mistake is transcended by the contemplation of the aphorism '*Aham brahmāsmi*.' Brahman is the biggest imaginable conception of the human mind. The conception of bigness no doubt removes the idea of smallness. But the idea of bigness, which is also a limitation, remains over.

Ultimately, this idea of bigness has also to be removed by contemplating another aphorism: '*Prajnyānam asmi*.' ('I am Consciousness.') Consciousness can never be considered to be either big or small. So you are automatically lifted beyond all opposites.

Shrī Ātmānanda is saying here that the mahāvākya 'Aham brahmāsmi' does not quite go all the way to non-duality. It leaves a samskāra of 'bigness', which has to be removed by further contemplation. In a way, the same thing may be seen implied in a classic scheme of four mahāvākyas that follow one after the other. Here is an interpretation of the scheme:

1. '*Tat tvam asi*' or 'You are that.' This represents the guidance of a living teacher, essential to bring mere words and symbols to life, so that a disciple may come to living truth.
2. '*Aham brahmāsmi*' or 'I am complete reality.' This broadens ego's narrowness, in preparation for a non-dual realization that must come about through a knowing in identity.
3. '*Ayam ātmā brahma*' or 'This self is all reality.' Here, the same thing is said as in the previous mahāvākya, but in a way that is impersonal, using the phrase 'this

self' instead of the word 'I'. For the 'I' may still have a sense of the personal in it – even after the broadening of ego's petty considerations.

4. '*Prajnyānam brahma*' or 'Consciousness is all there is.' This finally establishes the true nature of the self, known purely in identity, as consciousness that is identical with everything that's known.

This is of course only one among many interpretations, of one among many schemes of mahāvākyas. It's only meant as an illustration of how the scriptures may be related to the vicāra mārga.

A further illustration may be found in the *Aitareya Upanishad*, chapter 3, which specifically describes the self as 'prajnyānam' or 'consciousness'. It's in this chapter that we find the aphorism: 'Prajnyānam brahma.' Here is a rather free translation:

What is this that we contemplate as 'self'?

Which is the self?

That by which one sees, or that by which one hears,  
or that by which scents are smelled,  
or that by which speech is articulated,  
or that by which taste and tastelessness are told apart?

Or that which is this mind and this heart:  
perception, direction, discernment, consciousness,  
learning, vision, constancy, thought, consideration,  
motive, memory, imagination,  
purpose, life, desire, vitality?

All these are only attributed names of consciousness.

3.1.1-2

This is brahman, comprehending all reality.

This is Indra, chief of gods.

This is the creator, Lord Prajāpati;  
all the gods; and all these five elements  
called 'earth', 'air', 'ether', 'waters', 'lights';

and these seeming complexes of minute things,  
and various seeds of different kinds;

and egg-born creatures and those born of womb,  
and those born of heat and moisture,  
and those born from sprout;

horses, cattle, humans, elephants,  
and whatever living thing, moving and flying;  
and that which stays in place.

All that is seen and led by consciousness,  
and is established in consciousness.

The world is seen and led by consciousness.

Consciousness is the foundation.

*Consciousness is all there is.*

3.1.3

By this self, as consciousness,  
he ascended from this world;

and, attaining all desires  
in that place of light,  
became deathless, that became.

3.1.4

### 3a. Appearances and consciousness

When a person tries to think of consciousness itself, with no content seen in it, that does leave a puzzled 'me'. The puzzlement gives rise to further questions.

First, what are the contents seen in consciousness? Seen through body, the contents are objects, in a world of bodied things. Through the body's senses, the contents are sensations, coming from the world. Through mind, the contents are thoughts and feelings, which the mind conceives.

These physical and sensual and mental contents are seen indirectly, when consciousness looks through faculties of mind and body that are different from itself. But then, what content is perceived directly, as consciousness looks at itself? As consciousness illuminates itself, what does it know immediately, by its self-knowing light? What is its content to itself?

Surely, that immediate content cannot be anything different from itself. That immediate content must be consciousness itself. Interpreted like this, it is quite right to say that there cannot be any consciousness devoid of content. For consciousness is always present to itself. Its immediate content is itself, in all experiences. In the experience of deep sleep, there are no physical or sensual or mental contents. No content is there seen indirectly, through body, sense or mind.

But what about the direct knowing of consciousness, as it illuminates itself? Can consciousness be present to itself, in the absence of body, sense and mind? Habitually, we assume that consciousness is a physical or sensual or mental activity. And then of course it seems that consciousness cannot be independent of body, sense or mind. It seems then that consciousness cannot be present in deep sleep, when body, sense and mind are absent.

You recognize that physical and sensual and mental activities are only appearances, which come and go in consciousness. But when all these appearances that come to light have gone away, what is it that remains? When body, sense and mind and all their perceptions, thoughts and feelings disappear, into just *what* do these appearances dissolve?

Where they dissolve, there are no senses to perceive the presence or the absence of sense-objects. Nor is there any mind to notice or to think or feel the presence or the absence of perceptions, thoughts and feelings. So, if it's said that these appearances of world and mind dissolve into a blank or empty absence, what meaning could that have?

How then could we describe any state of experience, like deep sleep, where all appearances of mind and world have disappeared? If we describe it in our usual way, as a merely blank or empty 'absence', we are confused. In this description, we are inherently assuming the presence of some feeling or thinking or perceiving that is taken to experience an absence of *all* feeling and thinking and perceiving.

There is a contradiction here. We are taking it that some mental or sensual activity (of feeling, thought or perception) is present, so as to experience the complete absence of all such activity. Some mental or sensual activity is here assumed to be present during its own absence. This description logically rules itself out. And so it shows us only a confusion of mistaken thought, which we need somehow to remove.

The confusion is that some apparent act (of mind and sense) is here assumed to experience its own dissolution and hence its own absence.

Would it not be clearer to observe that when appearances dissolve, their dissolution must be witnessed by a knowing presence which remains when they are absent? And what else could that presence be but consciousness itself? Could it not be that consciousness whose inmost content stays unchanged, as nothing else but knowing light, so that it stays on shining all alone when all appearances have gone away?

Why shouldn't consciousness itself remain, present to itself, when its passing contents disappear? If consciousness can thus remain, that shows it to be independent of body, sense and mind. Without it, none of them can appear; so each is dependent on it.

Each body, sense or mind depends upon an underlying consciousness that they each one of them express. But it does not depend on them. In other words, they are dependent appearances of its reality. In what they really are, each one of these appearances is utterly identical with consciousness. It is their one reality, which each one shows and which they show together. As they appear and disappear, it seems that they are limited by time and space. Each seems to be present in some limited location and to be absent elsewhere.

But this limitation is unreal. It does not apply to consciousness itself, which is the reality that's shown. For consciousness is the common principle of all experience, present at all times and everywhere, no matter what experience is known, no matter when or where.

So consciousness cannot appear or disappear. Its appearance would require a previous experience where consciousness was absent. Similarly, its disappearance would require a subsequent experience without consciousness. Such an 'experience without consciousness' is a contradiction in terms – a falsity of fiction that has been misleadingly constructed by the mind. So while appearances are perceived by body, sense and mind, their seeming limitations don't apply to consciousness, their one reality.

The limitations are a misperception, seen through the inadequate and partial reporting of body, sense and mind. These unreal limitations make it seem that there are appearances which disappear. But while they seem to come and go, what they are is consciousness itself. It is their unlimited reality, remaining fully present through each one of their appearances and disappearances.

That is a classical Advaita position, which is unequivocally taken by modern interpreters like Ramaṇa Maharshi and Shrī Ātmānanda. From that position, deep sleep is interpreted as an experience where consciousness is shown as its own content. Deep sleep shows consciousness identical with what it contains, with what is known in it. What's there revealed is not contentless consciousness, but consciousness itself.

A further question rises here. If consciousness is independent of our limited bodies, our limited senses and our limited minds, then how can we know it actually, for what it is? In Shrī Ātmānanda's teachings, the question is answered by a simple statement: 'I am consciousness.'

This statement is central to Shrī Ātmānanda's approach. It is the investigating centre of the teaching. When it is said 'I am consciousness', the statement indicates a knowledge in identity. That is how consciousness is known. It's known by self-knowledge, as one's own true identity. It's only there that subject and object are dissolved, including any puzzled or investigating 'me' or any goal to be achieved.

According to Shrī Ātmānanda, the statement 'All is consciousness' does not go far enough. It leaves a taint of expanded mind, intuiting the 'all'. The content of con-

consciousness is still indirectly perceived, as a vast and nebulous object. An expanded intuition is thereby left unexamined, surreptitiously assumed to be doing the perceiving. A final enquiry thus still remains, in order to find consciousness identical with self. Until that identity is reached, duality is not dissolved.

Thus, for Shrī Ātmānanda, intuition is no answer to the limitations of intellect and mind. Intuition is no more than a subtler form of mind. The subtlety can make it even more misleading, when it comes through ego. The only proper answer comes from genuine enquiry, motivated by a love of truth. As the enquiry gets genuine, love brings the truth itself to take charge of the enquiry. Then the enquiry proceeds through ‘vidyā-vritti’ or ‘higher reason’. That is no longer mind expressing ego, but rather truth itself, appearing in the form of penetrating questions and discerning reason.

In Shrī Ātmānanda’s teaching, ‘I am consciousness’ is knowing in identity, which is the only actual experience that anyone ever has, in any state. All else is not actually experienced, but just superimposed by misleading imagination and its false pretence. That knowing in identity is the ‘direct (non-objective) knowledge’ that you speak of. It is fully present in deep sleep, shining by itself.

The perceptions, thoughts and feelings of waking and dream states are not really an obstacle at any time. They don’t show anything but self-illuminating consciousness. All acts of perception, thought and feeling are illuminated by that self-shining light. Each one of them shows that same light.

Consciousness is never actually obscured or covered up, but only seems to be. Any obscurity or covering is quite unreal. It’s a mistaken seeming, seen through a false perspective. The false perspective comes from wrongly imagining that knowing is a physical or sensual or mental activity that’s done by body, sense or mind.

It’s only such activities that come and go – as each appears sometimes revealed, and disappears at other times when it gets covered up by other things. Through all of these activities, the self-illuminating light of consciousness continues knowing perfectly, quite unobscured and unaffected by the presence or the absence of activity.

According to Shrī Ātmānanda, ‘beginningless ignorance’ is a lower level concept. It is meant to explain the world, as in Shrī Shankara’s māyā theory. Advaita proper is not meant for such theoretical explanation, but only for an uncompromising enquiry back into truth, beneath the unrealities of seeming world.

For this enquiry, Shrī Ātmānanda took an extreme advaita position that there really is no ignorance, no real covering of consciousness – neither by waking nor by dream appearances, nor by their absence in deep sleep. Consciousness is not in truth obscured by perceptions, thoughts and feelings, nor by their disappearance. It only seems obscured from the false perspective of physical or mental ego, which falsely identifies the knowing self with body, sense and mind, thus confusing consciousness with physical and sensual and mental activities.

It’s from this false perspective that deep sleep seems dark and blank and empty – when what shines there is uncompromised reality, true knowledge and unflinching happiness.

All that’s needed is to correct the perspective; not to improve, nor to prevent perceptions, thoughts or feelings, nor to avoid what is perceived or thought or felt in the world. In the end, it’s the perspective that needs purifying, not the world.

That clearing of perspective is the special work of the witness prakriyā, which is the next sub-topic for discussion.

#### *4. Witness of thoughts – change and the changeless*

In the statement ‘I am consciousness’, there are two parts. As anyone experiences the world, these two parts get differently expressed. The ‘I’ gets expressed as a changing personality. And ‘consciousness’ becomes expressed in changing perceptions of many different objects. This results in two further prakriyās. One prakriyā examines personal perceptions, reflecting back into their changeless witness. The other prakriyā examines objects, reducing them to consciousness.

The witness prakriyā starts out with a negative. A person’s body, senses and mind are not always present with the self. The outwardly waking body and its senses are not present in the dreams that mind imagines inwardly. And neither outwardly perceiving body nor inwardly conceiving mind is present in deep sleep. So, no one’s self can truly be a body, nor any senses, nor a conceiving mind.

Accordingly, a process of elimination is begun, to distinguish what exactly is true self. One’s own true identity is that from which one can never be apart, which can never move away. Anything that can be distanced must be eliminated from consideration as the truth of one’s own self.

The elimination is progressive. It starts with one’s physical identity, as a body in an outside world. But that outside body disappears from experience, in dreams and deep sleep. Even in the waking state, the body disappears when attention turns to other objects or to thoughts and feelings in the mind.

In fact, the body that perceives a world is present only fitfully, in actual experience. Most of the time, it’s gone away. On some occasions when it appears, it is identified as self – thereby claiming that it continues present all along, even when attention turns elsewhere. But this claim of bodily identity is clearly false, in actual experience. When the mistake is realized, the body is eliminated from one’s sense of self.

As bodily identity proves false, the sense of self falls back into the mind. Then self appears identified as that which thinks a stream of thought experiences, as they succeed each other in the course of time.

At any moment in the stream, only a single thought appears. For in that moment, there is no time to think two thoughts or more. Nor is there time to think of different things, in that single moment. To think of more than just one thing, there must be more thoughts than one, taking place at different times.

So when the mind thinks of itself, it’s there alone, thought momentarily, in a passing moment. Most of the time attention turns to other things, and then the mind has gone away. In its own stream of thought, mind only shows up now and then – as a passing thought of ego, where the mind conceives itself. On the occasions when this fitful ego-thought appears, mind identifies it as a self that knows experience. This passing ego-thought thus claims that it somehow carries on, even when it gets replaced by many other thoughts which keep succeeding it in time.

This thought of ego is self-contradictory, confused and absurdly inflated in its claims. Most people realize there’s something wrong with ego, in the way that it centres what they see and think and feel upon their partial bodies and their shifting minds. But then, what exactly is the problem? And how might it be corrected?

The problem is that when mind thinks, it does not really know. The thoughts of mind are only changing acts, each of which distracts attention from the others. Each drowns out the others with its noisy clamouring. As these thoughts replace each other,

knowing is what carries on. It is a silent witnessing that is completely detached and impartial, not at all involved with any changing action.

The self that knows is thus a silent witness to all thoughts which come and go. As mind and body do their acts, the witness only witnesses. Its witnessing is not a changing act. In its pure and quiet knowing, it does not *do* anything. It does not engage in any act that changes it in any way. It just stays the same, utterly unchanged and unaffected, completely free and independent of what is witnessed.

By the mere presence of that silent witness, what appears gets illuminated and recorded. On that witness, everyone depends, for all memory and communication. To remember or communicate, there has to be a standing back into its quiet knowing presence, which is shared in common by all changing times and different personalities. From there, all things are known, impartially and truly.

Thus, to correct the partialities and the confusions of ego, all that's needed is a change of perspective, achieved by realizing that all knowing stands in the silent witness. That is the only true perspective – standing as the silent knower, quite detached from thinking mind, perceiving senses, doing body, happy or unhappy personality.

In the end the detachment does not come from any physical or mental change, nor from any forced renunciation. It comes just by taking note of where in fact one stands, as that which witnesses all happenings that appear. That witness is by nature unattached: quite unchanged and unaffected by the changing doings of body, sense and mind, in personality and world.

This is clearly a position that is endorsed by traditional Advaita scriptures. In many places, they do so with a different emphasis, upon a cosmic witness of the world. But they also allow for the individual approach – which first reduces the apparent world to a succession of thoughts in the sādḥaka's mind, and then goes on to ask what witnesses those thoughts. In the end, the witness is of course the same, whether cosmic in the world or individual in the microcosmic personality.

Like other prakriyās, the 'witness' approach gives rise to confusions that need to be clarified. One main confusion is explained in a note by Nitya Tripta.

How confusion arises with regard to the witness (*Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shrī Ātmānanda*, note 217)

Suppose you are the witness to a particular thought. A little later, you remember that thought and you say you had that thought some time ago – assuming thereby that you were the thinker when the first thought occurred, though you were then really the witness of that thought.

This unwarranted change in your relationship with a particular thought – from when the thought occurs to when you remember it – is alone responsible for the whole confusion with regard to the witness.

When you seem to remember a past thought, it is really a fresh thought by itself and it has no direct relationship with the old one. Even when you are remembering, you are the witness to that thought of remembrance. So you never change the role of your witnesshood, however much your activities may change.

#### **4a. Consciousness and individuality**

*Question:* A common statement in Advaita is 'Everything is consciousness'. What exactly does this mean and how does it relate to enlightenment?

*Answer:* By this you evidently mean that everything perceived or thought or felt is consciousness – including the perceptions, thoughts and feelings of course. In other words, by thinking about the physical and mental world, you are able to reduce all physical and mental objects to perceptions, thoughts and feelings; and in turn, you are able to reduce all perceptions, thoughts and feelings to something which you call ‘consciousness’.

And yet, you feel that this is not quite enough. You admit that this is just an intellectual understanding, and that something more is needed for what you call ‘enlightenment’. Well, if you see that ‘Everything is consciousness’, then only one question can logically remain. What is consciousness itself?

You conceive of ‘consciousness’ as central to your understanding. But are you clear exactly what is meant by this central concept that you use? From your remaining puzzlement and dissatisfaction, evidently not.

Let me try to make the question more specific. When someone is identified as a personal ego, the self that knows is identified with a limited body and a limited mind. Accordingly, by this personal identity, consciousness is identified with physical and mental activities of perception, thought and feeling. But can it be right to identify consciousness like this? Can consciousness be rightly identified as a physical or a mental activity of any kind? Can consciousness be any kind of activity that any body or any mind may perform, towards a physical or mental object? Can any kind of perceiving or thinking or feeling be equated with consciousness?

In the witness prakriyā, these questions are answered in the negative. The knowing self is carefully distinguished from body and from mind. It is an undistracted and impartial consciousness that witnesses the distracted and partial activities of body, sense and mind. Thus consciousness is carefully distinguished as unchanging and unlimited, quite distinct from perceptions, thoughts and feelings that are each changing and limited.

Here, in the witness prakriyā, consciousness is approached as the silent knowing of detached illumination. It is utterly detached from the noisy perceptions, thoughts and feelings that distract the mind’s attention as they come and go. It is detached from them, though they cannot exist even for a moment when detached from it. Each one of them completely disappears, the very moment that it parts with illuminating consciousness. That’s why they appear and disappear – while consciousness remains, as their one reality.

Even when a perception or a thought or a feeling comes into appearance, it is not different from consciousness. For it has then been taken into consciousness, where all seeming separation is immediately destroyed. Without consciousness, no perception, thought or feeling could appear at all. But the moment a perception or thought or feeling comes to consciousness, it is immediately taken in and is not separate at all.

So it turns out that the separation of the witness is a separation of appearance only. That very separation leads to a non-dual reality of unaffected consciousness, where no separation can remain. It’s only then that consciousness is clearly realized, known exactly as it is, identical with one’s own self.

If the impersonal witness is not separated from the personal ego, there remains a danger in your statement that ‘Everything is consciousness.’ In order to understand the statement truly, each perception, thought and feeling must be seen as nothing else but consciousness. All differing perceptions, thoughts and feelings must be reduced to consciousness. They must all be seen as appearances or expressions, which show or express the underlying reality of consciousness.

The danger is that the statement may be misinterpreted, by doing the reduction in reverse. Then consciousness is falsely limited – by reducing it to something that has been made up, from perception, thought and feeling. In particular, consciousness may be conceived as some mental totalling, by a mind that puts together all the perceptions, thoughts and feelings in its limited imagination. Or, more subtly, consciousness may be conceived as some further perception, thought or feeling of everything, which yet remains to be discovered by the mind.

In either case, a limited conception in the mind is trying to conceive a consciousness that is unlimited. This is clearly a mistake.

Of course, the absence of such thought or feeling would put consciousness beyond the mind's imagination. But could you not step back from mind, to a knowing in identity where consciousness is your own self?

In that knowing, there'd be nothing in between what knows and what is known. And so there could be no mistake. That knowing doesn't have to be remembered from the past, nor imagined as some future goal. It's fully present now; and it is found by merely stepping back from mind and body's seeming acts, into the self that knows them.

The witness prakriyā is specially designed to achieve that stepping back from the confusions of ego. The ego's problem is that it sloppily confuses consciousness with limited appearances of perception, thought and feeling, instead of discerning properly the true identity between them.

According to Advaita, if there were none of this confusion left, you would have attained to enlightenment. If not, the witness prakriyā might help.

There is a quotation which Shrī Ātmānanda made from the poet Alfred Tennyson. It concerns the dissolution of personality into 'the only true life'. And it is relevant to the question we have been discussing, about the dissolution of perceptions, thoughts and feelings into consciousness itself. Here is the passage quoted. (It is from a letter by Tennyson to Mr R.P. Blood, as quoted in the book *Atmananda Tattwa Samhita* which transcribes Shrī Ātmānanda's tape recorded talks.):

... a kind of waking trance, I have frequently had, quite up from my boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me by repeating my own name two or three times to myself, silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being; and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was almost a laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction, but the only true life ...

Here, Tennyson describes a state which was induced by repeating his own name, the name that represents his individuality. This brought about an 'intensity of consciousness of individuality'; and out of that intensity, 'the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being'. This 'boundless being' is of course the 'all', in the aphorism: 'All is consciousness.' Shrī Ātmānanda remarked that this 'boundless being' still has a taint in it, because it still implies a conception of some world of things that are added up into an unlimited 'all'. There is still there a sense of things additional to consciousness – either in a world outside, or brought in from outside.

Where it is truly realized that there is nothing outside consciousness, then there cannot be anything that adds conditioning or quality of any kind to consciousness – neither by sending any influence from without, nor by being brought inside. Without any such addition, there can be no bounds or limits in consciousness; and so there can't be any sense of the 'boundless' or the 'unlimited' or the 'all'. So, according to Shri Ātmānanda, this 'boundless being' is not the end of the road, but a last remaining stage of transition, with a last remaining taint that dissolves itself into the final end.

The end is described when Tennyson goes on to say that this is 'not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was almost a laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction, but the only true life'. For now the sense of a somewhat blurred 'all' has given way to a clarity of consciousness that is completely pure, utterly beyond all dying words and conceptions. And there, beyond all seeming death, its shining purity is fully positive, as 'the only true life'.

When perceptions, thoughts and feelings appear, that pure consciousness is present as their unaffected witness. Each perception, thought or feeling is a passing and a dying appearance. It only shows for a moment, as it gives way to the next such appearance. Thus, as it dies away into disappearance, there follows instantly a timeless moment, before the next appearance has arisen. In that timelessness, consciousness shines by itself, as the living source from which the following appearance comes. That pure shining is the living self, the only true life, from which all seeming things burst forth into appearance.

#### **4b. Memory and recording**

*Question:* I have been wondering about memory. As one looks at the events in one's life, one is aware that 'something' has always been there, the same, aware of the event. What I can't understand is how the event is 'recorded', although it clearly is.

'Illumined', in the present moment, I can understand, but how recorded? Somehow it seems as if the concept of time enters into this, and my understanding is that knowing is not time-bound.

I don't know if my question makes sense....

*Answer:* The question makes sense alright, to me at least. It's a very penetrating question; but correspondingly tough as well. It can be considered at different levels. If you want an attempt at a simple answer that concentrates on the level of knowing, just read the next paragraph, skip the following eleven paragraphs, and then go on to the last three paragraphs of this message. If you want a more detailed intellectual attempt, going more through levels of the mind, you can read the passage in between.

At the level of knowing, as you point out, there is no time. So there can't be any memory or recording. There is no past, nor future, nor any present that's opposed to them. There's only pure illumination, by itself. That's where your question points, but the question and its ideas must dissolve completely on the way, before the timeless knowing that it targets can be reached.

At the level of time-bound ideas, there is the paradox that you describe. A changeless witness quietly illuminates what happens, with its ever present light; but how can it make any record which persists through time? When we think of memory, we usually explain it through some changing action that impresses past events upon an objective record. As, for example, by writing things down upon a piece of paper; or by saving electronic information on a computer disk; or by impressing sensory activity

and its processing electrochemically, into some nervous system in our bodies and their brains.

Actually, if one looks carefully at any objective records, like writing symbols on paper or making coded configurations in an electronic computer or in a more sophisticated brain, such records cannot solve the problem of memory. For the record has to be interpreted by mind – so as to bring a past perception, thought or feeling into some present moment of experience. And for any such interpretation, a continuing witness is implied, shared in common by the past experience and its present recall.

For words on paper or configurations in the brain to recall a memory I had in the past, the same ‘I’ that is here now must also have been there in the past – witnessing what happened then and what is now recalled. There’d be no meaning in the word ‘recall’ if it were not a calling back to the one same witness. Where someone else’s perception, thought or feeling is called into mind, that isn’t direct memory, but a more indirect communication which is more dubious to interpret. If two different witnesses are involved, that is not properly ‘recall’ or ‘calling back’, but rather ‘calling out’ or ‘calling onward’ from one witness to another.

So we are back with the same problem. How can any changing record be made by a witness that is not at all involved in any changing act, but only stays the same? The answer is that the witness does not *make* the record. It only *enables* the record to be made, by its mere presence that continues through experience.

The witness does not know from any shifting standpoint in changing mind, but rather from the changeless background underneath. It’s from there that mind’s and world’s appearances arise. They arise as feelings, thoughts and perceptions – each of which expresses consciousness, through previously conditioned understanding and memory accumulated from the past.

But then, as soon as an appearance is expressed, it gets interpreted and taken in – reflecting back through its perception, thought and feeling into underlying consciousness. Its apparent form and purpose is perceived by sense, its meaning and significance interpreted by thought, its quality and value judged by feeling – as it gets understood and taken back into quiet consciousness, where it is utterly dissolved.

From that same quiet consciousness, further feelings, thoughts, perceptions rise, expressed through a new state of understanding and memory. And this new state incorporates the recent appearance that has been expressed from consciousness and reflected back there again. This cycle of expression and reflection keeps repeating every moment, producing the impression of a mind with continued memory and understanding that enables its perceptions, thoughts and feelings to accumulate a growing knowledge of the world.

But, in fact, the impression is quite false. At every moment, the world is completely recreated from a consciousness in which there truly are no perceptions, thoughts or feelings nor any memory or habituation or conditioning. In that consciousness, there is never any time for any perceptions to form. Nor is there any memory to continue the formation of perceptions into meaningful information.

At each seeming moment, there is an instantaneous creation of the world – whereby one partial object is seen to appear at the limited focus of the mind’s attention, and the rest of the world is imagined to be understood in the background of experience. And at this very moment, as its passing appearance is interpreted and taken in, there immediately results a complete destruction of both seeming object and its containing world.

So there's no real memory, no real continuity, in the noisy flashes of appearance that are seen to keep on rising up from consciousness and falling back again. The only continuity is timeless and changeless, in the quiet background where the witness always knows. That is the only connection between different moments. And it is a connection that completely destroys all differences, so that there's nothing to connect.

In the end, there's only one proper direction for advaita reasoning. It must always be from appearances to truth. It cannot rightly be the other way around. True reason can't derive the compromised appearances of mind and world from truth.

Your question about memory was simply asked and is best simply answered that there is no real memory, but only a misleading appearance of mental recording and recall. Where there is true recording, it is not mental. Instead, it is a taking back of what's perceived into the heart. That's literally what is meant by the word 'record'. 'Re-' means 'back' and '-cord' means 'heart' (related to the English 'core' and to the Latin 'cor' or 'cordis').

So to record truly means to take what is expressed back into the depth of heart, where all expression is dissolved in pure knowing that stays unaffected through all seeming time. That is the true recording of the silent witness.

In the purusha-prakriti distinction, the witness is the actionless consciousness of *purusha*. And the appearances that come and go are the work of *prakriti* or nature.

Though the witness does not act, all actions are inspired by its knowing presence. They rise from it, spontaneously and naturally, expressing it in the appearances of mind and world. That arising of expression shows appearances, which are seen by reflecting the illumination of the witness.

As the illumination is reflected back, each physical and mental appearance is interpreted and taken back into consciousness. That *taking in* is the recording of nature's actions. For every happening or action that appears, its recording takes it all the way back down, into the depth of heart – to consciousness itself, in which all seeming action must dissolve.

#### **4c. Lower and higher reason**

In Shrī Ātmānanda's approach, of 'vicāra' or 'enquiry', he differentiates two aspects of 'reasoning'. The basic use of reason is for questioning, not for description or explanation. Descriptive and explanatory reason is the 'lower reason' – which is merely auxiliary, entirely subservient to the 'higher reason' called 'vicāra' or 'vidyā-vritti'.

In the questioning reason of vicāra, its reasoned questions are themselves the practical experiments. No further practice is prescribed to look for truth. The reasoned questioning is itself the experiment that puts ideas and theory into practice. Reason is here used to turn all questions back upon their own assumptions.

When a question is turned genuinely back, upon a seeker's own confused and contradictory beliefs, the seeker is then thrown into a further state, where a fresh understanding is attained. That is the experiment – to find fresh understanding through the test of enquiry, and to keep on testing further, until there's no confusion left to compromise what's understood.

This process of enquiry proceeds through different levels. The questioning begins at a level where confusing contradictions are found mixed, through assumption and belief, into some picture of the world. By admitting to the contradictions, they are brought into the open and there seen as a mistake. The admission leads to a fresh understanding, which gives rise to a subtler picture at some deeper level.

As further examination shows remaining obscurities and conflicts, their admission leads more subtly down, to deeper levels. The process cannot rightly end so long as any picturing is left – to give the impression of a pictured covering, upon a background underneath. The only end can be the background in itself, where no covering remains of any levels or the slightest picturing. It's only there that obscurities and conflicts end.

In short, the reasoning of enquiry is a process that starts with an admission of conflicting confusion; and it proceeds by repeating the admission through a series of subtler levels – until the conflicts and confusions are completely dissolved, along with all the levels and the questioning.

Each Advaita prakriyā goes through this reflective and dissolving process, including the witness and the consciousness prakriyās that we have been discussing. The witness prakriyā is like 'using a thorn to get rid of a thorn'. The 'witness' concept is like a big thorn, used to remove the little thorn of petty ego. The big thorn must come out as well, to achieve its purpose.

But the same applies to the concept of 'consciousness' and to any other idea. 'Consciousness' is also a big thorn, even bigger than the 'witness'. It is not just the witness concept that must get utterly dissolved, in order to reach truth. So must the idea of consciousness – appearing in any form, signified by any name, intuited through any quality. In truth itself, not the slightest trace of ideation can remain.

Let us look at the consciousness prakriyā, considered at its different levels.

- At the starting level – of body in an outside world – perceptions, thoughts and feelings are physical interactions, between physical objects and a physical body (with its brain and senses and other bodily systems). Perceptions, thoughts and feelings (which we may label as A) are here taken to be nothing more than objective interactions. As such, they are clearly different from subjective consciousness (which we may label as B). Here (to use our labels), A is different from B and B from A.
- At the intermediate level – of conceiving mind – perceptions, thoughts and feelings are mental appearances, which come and go in a passing stream. These mental appearances have two conflicting aspects.

On the one hand, when seen at the surface of the mind, they are changing acts of this mind that conceives them. As such, they are different from the consciousness that carries on beneath them, as it knows all their comings and their goings. In this view of surface mind, our perceptions, thoughts and feelings (A) are not equal to subjective consciousness (B). Thus, A is not equal to B.

On the other hand, when mind is more deeply considered, it is realized that each one of our perceptions, thoughts and feelings is an expression of their underlying consciousness. Each is an appearance of that one same consciousness, which is their sole reality. In this deeper sense, each one of them is nothing else but consciousness. It's what they really are – each individually and all together. Thus, it turns out that  $A = B$ , even though B (consciousness) was previously distinguished as different from A (perceptions, thoughts and feelings).

These conflicting aspects are inherent in the way that the mind thinks of itself – which shows that there is something truly and essentially quite wrong with its self-conception. When that is fully admitted, the mind surrenders all its self-imagined ideation, and it dissolves completely in its underlying consciousness.

- That surrender leads at last to unconflicted truth. It's only there that our perceptions, thoughts and feelings (A) are all truly known as identical with consciousness

(B), which is their one reality. It's only there that  $A = B$  and  $B = A$ , unreservedly. But there, each one of our perceptions, thoughts or feelings is known utterly dissolved. None of them there exists in any way that can be seen or thought or felt at all by mind.

Just what that means can only be found out by going there oneself. It can't be found by looking on from any armchair, but only by a merciless questioning of one's own assumptions – until all trace of compromise is given up, to a complete and utter dissolution in one's own reality.

*Question:* Does the word 'appearance' imply some kind of distinction from consciousness itself? Is there a difference between consciousness and an 'appearance of consciousness'?

*Answer:* Again, the answer depends on the level at which it is answered. At the level of surface mind, I would answer yes, a distinction is implied and there is a difference. And the difference needs to be discerned, to clarify the mind's inherent confusion of consciousness with appearances that this very mind imagines to be different from consciousness.

The mind is self-deceived and thus self-contradicting in its confusions. Only a clear discernment can sort out the mess. By discerning a persisting consciousness, which underlies the passing of appearances, a sādḥaka is able to reflect more deeply back into the depth of mind, right to that consciousness which stays quite unaffected at the final background.

But there, all appearances are taken into consciousness, where all their seeming differences are utterly dissolved. So, at that final background, there remains no implication, no distinction and no difference. But there is no appearance either. Consciousness does not appear or disappear. Nor is there anything in it that may appear or disappear. The word 'appear' does not apply where consciousness is truly found.

The question that was asked is thus shown up to have been misconceived, by words that have been misapplied and thoughts that misconceive themselves. Accordingly, this question gets turned back upon itself, so as to clarify its own foundations. Such questions help a sādḥaka by turning back so thoroughly, with such an unwillingness to compromise, that they at last surrender all their muddled and mistaken asking to a clear and unmistakable truth.

#### **4d. Impersonality**

Shrī Ātmānanda does not use the word 'witness' in the sense of a personally 'individual witness'. There is a problem here with the word 'individual'. In its original and essential sense, this word means 'indivisible' (from the Latin 'individuālis'). Correctly speaking, it refers to the indivisible self called 'ātmā'. But it has come to be used habitually in a degraded sense, to mean 'personal' and hence to indicate a manifestly divisible personality.

So, what's often called an 'individual self' is a personal 'jīva'. It is a seeming 'jīva-ātmā', with a seeming 'jīva-sākshi'. The 'sākshi' or 'witness' here is not completely impersonal. It is still associated with personality in a way that makes it seem different from person to person. The position here is akin to Vishishtādvaita and Sāṃkhya. This is not the witness that is described in strict Advaita, at the highest level of Shrī Shankara's teachings. That witness is completely impersonal, according

to Shrī Ātmānanda. Just as it is the same at all different times in each person's experience, so also it is the same from person to person.

Svāmi Mādhavānanda noted: 'Although the witness is the same as Brahman, yet since it manifests as possessing the limiting adjunct of the mind, it is considered to be different according to different minds.' Here, if you note the words 'it is considered to be different', perhaps you can see that they could be taken to indicate a difference which is not real, but only a seeming attribution 'according to different minds'.

According to Shrī Ātmānanda, the witness is not the discerning intellect (vijnyāna). Instead, the witness is that one same knowing principle which illumines all discernment. It is utterly impersonal, beneath all differences of name and form and quality. Though personalities are discerned to have different names and forms and qualities, no such difference can be discerned in the witness.

There is no way of discerning the witness as different in different personalities. For this very discernment of personal differences implies a witness that stays present through their variation from person to person, just as it stays present from one moment to another. That witness is thus common to all personalities, anytime and everywhere. It is the same universally, as it is individually. It is the common basis of all understanding between different persons, just as it is the common basis of all different memories and anticipations in each person's mind.

That common presence of the witness is illustrated in one of Nitya Tripta's *Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shrī Ātmānanda* (note 679):

...Shakespeare, in his dramas, has created diverse characters of conflicting types, each with a perfection possible to perfection alone. A writer who has an individuality and character of his own can successfully depict only characters of a nature akin to his own. It is only one who stands beyond all characters, or in other words as *witness*, that can be capable of such a wonderful performance as Shakespeare has done. Therefore I say Shakespeare must have been a jīvan-mukta.

And in the same book, it is explained how each one of us stands always there, as just that single witness which is common to us all (note 13):

Every perception, thought or feeling is known by you. You are the knower of the world through the sense organs; of the sense organs through the generic mind; and of the mind – with its activity or passivity – by your self alone.

In all these different activities you stand out as the one knower. Actions, perceptions, thoughts and feelings all come and go. But knowingness does not part with you, even for a moment....

#### 4e. Knowing

*Question:* What do we know when we know? Is the triad 'the knower, knowing and the known' or is it 'knowing, knowing and knowing'? Does it matter whether if everything is ultimately in Consciousness (the Absolute), the individual's consciousness is of an external object or indirectly of that external object via a state of consciousness?

*Answer:* On the status of mind and objects, Shrī Ātmānanda's position is very clear (as summarized in *Atma Darshan*, 3.1). An object is never known directly, but always through mind. Hence, in the triad, 'knower, knowing, known', the mind is always im-

plied in the middle term of the triad. And it makes knowledge of an object indirect, thus distancing the known object from the self that knows.

This distancing of knower and known is dvaita or duality. The way to advaita is to reflect back inwards, to that which truly knows within. The outward-going mind is found to be misleading and inadequate. What it takes for knowledge isn't really knowledge in itself. Instead, it is a confusion of knowledge with ignorance, which produces a compromised and misleading appearance of truth mixed up with falsity. Not satisfied with this outgoing show, of seeming knowledge through the mind, the pure sattva or higher reason turns back toward the self that knows.

By turning back toward the self, the middle term of the triad is cut out. Knowing ceases to be indirect. It ceases to be out through mind. Instead, it stays within, as the non-dual knowing of true self. There, known and knower are identical. By cutting out the middle term, of dualistic mind, the triad becomes a dyad – of knower and known, with nothing in between to distance them. The dyad then collapses of its own accord, into a truth of inmost self where no duality is known.

From the standpoint of that final truth, both outside world and inner mind are unreal. The relative reality of outside world depends on inner mind, through which the world is known. Standing always in the mind, the outside world is shown to be an inner artefact, conceived inside the mind.

But then, having thus no outside, the mind has no inside either. The mind turns out to be unreal and self-contradictory. It takes itself as consciousness going out to world. And that same world is never 'out', as mind imagines it to be. Thus consciousness does not in fact go out, and mind is self-deceived. It is an unreal show, a misleading trick of false appearance that its self-deception makes it seem to be.

This position is the same as Shrī Shankara's, so far as I can see. In the end, the idealist position is shown to be incorrect. Strict advaita is not idealist, but completely realist. But paradoxically, that non-dual realism is attained by a completion of the mind's idealistic dualism. Where the knower is completely separated from the known – so that their confusion is eradicated utterly – there advaita is attained.

Having gone out to seeming world through self-deceiving mind, the only way of getting back to truth is to return through mind, so clarifying mind's mistake that it dissolves into that truth where self is always found at one with all reality.

In relation to the present discussion about the witness and the mind, here are three notes from Shrī Nitya Tripta's *Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shrī Ātmānanda*:

*What is witness knowledge? (note 1027)*

Witness knowledge is pure Consciousness. But mentation knowledge always appears in the form of subject-object relationship. When you stand as witness, you are in your real nature.

Mentation appears in the light of the witness. *The light in the mentation knowledge is itself the witness.* There is no mentation in the witness.

The state of the witness is the same as that of deep sleep and Consciousness pure.

*Is not the witness only one? (note 1067)*

No. It is neither one nor many, but beyond both. When you say that it is only one, you stand in the mental realm as an expanded ego and unconsciously refer to the many.

*What is the significance of the three states? (note 1138)*

1. *The waking state* represents diversity in all its nakedness. ‘Realistic’ (or materialistic) philosophy is based upon the apparent reality of this state.
2. *The dream state* (mental state) shows that it is all the manyness of the one. The idealistic philosophers base their philosophy upon the relatively greater reality of the mind, as compared with sense objects.
3. *The deep sleep state*: Truth alone is absolute non-duality. Vedāntins depend upon the experience of deep sleep to expound ultimate Truth, the real nature of Man.

#### **4f. Deep sleep again**

*Question*: How can we be said to be conscious during deep sleep, when we are not aware of anything?

*Answer*: Consciousness is not defined in opposition to ignorance or unconsciousness; but rather it is found fully present in all states that are seen as conscious or unconscious or as any mixture of the two.

That’s why there is no lack of reality or consciousness in the state of deep sleep, which is seen as ‘empty’ and ‘unconscious’. It’s only seeming objects that are missing in deep sleep. That is the state in which there is no ‘consciousness of objects’. The so-called ‘unconsciousness’ there is not just ‘unconsciousness’, but rather it is an ‘unconsciousness of objects’. That is an objectless consciousness – unmixed with any object which is taken to be different from it.

Accordingly, although we take deep sleep to be an ‘empty’ and ‘unconscious’ state, it is not truly so. Instead, it is that state in which all reality is present by itself – known fully and directly as pure consciousness, whose very being is to know. No mixture or confusion there appears, to complicate the plain identity of that which is and that which knows. That is pure non-duality.

In dream and waking, that simple non-duality appears in a mixed-up sort of way – as a relative existence of limited objects that seem partially known through body, sense and mind. Thus there appear the relative existences of various different objects, and the physical and mental acts of partial knowing that we call ‘consciousness of objects’.

In short, variety is produced by the confusions of appearance, which get superimposed on that which is unmixed and non-dual. In deep sleep, those confusions are removed, showing only the unmixed reality of consciousness that is fully present in what’s taken to be real or unreal, conscious or unconscious.

*Question*: Where does the ‘kāraṇa sharīra’ (‘causal body’) fit into this?

*Answer*: Shrī Ātmānanda would quite agree that ‘sushupta *sthāna*’, or the ‘state of deep sleep’ is in the phenomenal realm of personality. The truth called ‘turīya’ is not a state that comes and goes. But, in the state of deep sleep, that truth is found shining all alone – as just that self which only knows. That is the self whose knowing is its very being, just its own identity. In deep sleep, that self shines all alone, with no appearances to distract attention away from it.

The kāraṇa sharīra is one of those distracting appearances. It is not truly present in deep sleep, but is only superimposed on deep sleep by confused conception in the

waking or dreaming mind. The kāraṇa sharīra is quite simply the ‘unconscious’ depth of mind, at the integrating level of the ānanda-maya koṣha.

The ‘kāraṇa sharīra’ or the ‘causal body’ is that mental function which is needed to put together mind’s essentially fragmented acts of limited and partial conception. We think of this ‘unconscious’ depth, in waking and in dreams, in order to explain how previous states of mind cause later ones in the process of experience, so that our minds seem able to co-ordinate their thoughts and feelings and perceptions.

In short, the kāraṇa sharīra is an explanation in the realm of conceiving mind, and it is thus to be distinguished from ātmā or true self. The kāraṇa sharīra is a mere conception of the mind, appearing only in the waking and dream states. It does not appear in the deep sleep state – where there are no appearances, but only truth or ātmā in itself. In fact, it’s only from that truth that all co-ordination comes.

The ‘unconscious’ kāraṇa sharīra is just an inexplicable explanation, which must dissolve completely in the actual experience of deep sleep. In that experience, there can remain no sense of any changing state. All that remains is unmixed self which shines in its own glory, as it always is – quite unaffected underneath all seeming changes of apparent states. That self is what the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* calls ‘caturtha’ or the ‘fourth’.

When yogi’s speak of ‘turīya’ or the ‘fourth’ as a nirvikalpa-samādhi state that comes and goes, they are not speaking of the same ‘fourth’ as the ‘caturtha’ of the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad*. The *Māṇḍūkya* ‘caturtha’ is the changeless self that utterly dissolves whatever comes to it – including the seeming ‘unconsciousness’ of deep sleep and also the seeming ‘consciousness of objects’ in the waking state. In the *Māṇḍūkya* description, waking, dream and deep sleep are each qualified by the word ‘sthāna’ or ‘state’. But this word is not used when the description goes on to the self. That self is just called ‘caturtha’. It is only called the ‘fourth’: as just that to which the three states finally point, beyond their comings and their goings.

That is (I’d say) just what you call the ‘true Being’. And it is tellingly described in your quote and translation from the concluding stanza of Jnyāneshvar’s *Cāṅgadeva Pāsashī*:

nideparaute nidaijaṇe jāgrti giḷauni jāgaṇe

*That* is the sleep beyond this sleep;  
which swallows up this waking too.

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Here, I would interpret ‘this sleep’ as the seemingly unconscious state which deep sleep appears to be when viewed from the outside. And ‘*That* is the sleep’ would refer to the actual experience in deep sleep, where the outside view has dissolved in that inmost self whose changeless shining is there found unmixed. That same changeless shining stays on ever-present in the dream and waking states, utterly dissolving each appearance that our dreaming minds or our waking senses bring to it.

*Question:* But I do not remember deep sleep – it is a complete unknown.

*Answer:* Why is this a problem? It’s only a problem if one insists on knowing through memory, or in other words through mind. This is a characteristic problem of the idealist position. To insist on staying in the realm of ideas, on standing in the mind, while looking for a truth beyond.

The whole point of considering deep sleep is that it points to an immediate experience that cannot be remembered from the past. That immediate experience is one’s

own identity – just what one truly is, beneath all seeming mind – in the present. It most certainly is ‘unknown’ to mind, and so the mind makes a ‘big’ deal of it, and gives it grand names like ‘everything’ or ‘all’ or ‘brahman’. But that ‘bigness’ too is a mental superimposition that gives a false impression. Hence the corrective of deep sleep, where ‘small’ and ‘big’ and all such varied qualities are utterly dissolved.

## 5. *All objects point to consciousness – ‘Existence has the chair.’*

In the witness prakriyā, a sādḥaka approaches the ‘sat’ or ‘existence’ aspect of the self. Body, sense and mind are seen as changing appearances, illuminated by a changeless witness that stays always present, standing unaffected at the inmost centre of experience. That is the real self, beneath its fitful and changing appearances in personality. Standing back in it, as the witness, all objects seen are taken back into its unmixed consciousness. There, they are utterly dissolved, together with their witnessing, in non-duality.

Instead of this drawing back, there is a further prakriyā which goes forward, into confrontation with apparent objects. This further prakriyā investigates how anyone can know what objects truly are. It proceeds through the ‘cit’ or ‘consciousness’ aspect of self, to determine what is ‘sat’ or ‘existence’ in the world.

First, as in the witness prakriyā, all gross experiences of outside objects are reduced to the more subtle experiences of our conceiving minds. We think of objects in a world that’s outside consciousness, but this is just imagination in our minds. In actual fact, no one ever can experience any object outside consciousness.

In anyone’s experience, consciousness is always there, together with each object that appears. Each object is experienced as a perception or a thought or a feeling, in the presence of consciousness. Each object shows that knowing presence, whatever else may be shown besides.

But then, what else does an object show, as it appears? When an object is perceived, it shows perception. When it is thought about, what it shows is thought. When it is felt, what’s shown is feeling. Our minds imagine that their perceptions, thoughts and feelings somehow go outside of consciousness, to an external world. But this never happens, actually.

No perception, thought or feeling can actually leave consciousness and go outside. When any such appearance goes out of consciousness, the appearance disappears immediately. Each perception, thought and feeling always stays in consciousness until it disappears. It never does show anything outside, as actually experienced.

So what is shown is always consciousness, and only that. Nothing else is ever shown, in anyone’s experience. Consciousness has no outside. Though we imagine that outside things come into it and therefore make it different from what it was before, this is never true, in fact. Consciousness is never influenced or changed, in any way that makes a real difference to it.

When anything appears, it seems that something has been added on to consciousness, so as to make a difference. But again, this difference is false imagination in the mind. In actual fact, the difference is unreal. What appears is nothing else but consciousness; and therefore nothing has, in truth, been added on.

When an appearance disappears, it seems that something has been taken away from consciousness, and this again appears to make a difference. But again, the difference is unreal. Since the appearance did not actually add anything, its disappearance cannot then in truth take anything away.

In short, whatever object may appear, what it shows is only consciousness, as its sole reality. And that reality is always the same, always unchanged – as it is shown by all objects that anyone perceives or thinks about or feels. That consciousness is al-

ways present, throughout experience, as the complete reality of all physical and mental objects that appear in the entire universe.

Our minds and bodies make a changing show, of partial objects that appear perceived or thought about or felt. But, throughout this made-up show of partial things, consciousness knows all existence as itself. In that complete existence, each object is contained.

Shrī Ātmānanda had a special way of pointing out how that existence gets misunderstood. Habitually, we think of existence as something that belongs to objects. For example, having seen a chair and touched it and sat in it, a person may say: ‘This chair exists.’

At first, there seems nothing wrong in such a statement. But it does have a problem. It puts the chair first, and thus it speaks of existence as something that the chair possesses. It says in effect: ‘The chair has existence.’ What then is this existence that belongs to the chair? It is something that appears only in some part of space and time. Elsewhere, outside this particular location, the chair’s existence disappears.

Thus it turns out that the chair’s existence is no more than a partial appearance of some further and truer existence that is more complete. When we think that a chair has existence, we are not speaking with full truth. To speak more truly, it would be more accurate to say: ‘Existence has the chair.’

For existence to be fully true, all objects that appear (physical or mental) must belong to it. They must all be its appearances. That is existence in itself, known truly as identical with consciousness, to which all objects point.

How does this prakriyā relate to traditional approaches? An illustration is given by Shrī Ātmānanda, in one of his tape-recorded talks (the talk called ‘Sahaja’, in the book *Atmananda Tattwa Samhita*). Here, Shrī Ātmānanda recounts an incident that occurred towards the end of his sādhana period, which included a yogic training in some traditional samādhis. In particular, he had come to practice a jnyāna-oriented samādhi – obtained by repetitively thinking, with increased intensity, that he was neither body nor senses nor mind, but only pure consciousness.

One day, while he was thus proceeding towards samādhi, a disturbance came in from a horse-drawn cart, which was going by on the roadside. As the irritating noise came in, it made him think that he should move somewhere else, to get away from the distraction. But then, it suddenly occurred to him that even the irritation was a means, a means of pointing to that same consciousness in which he wished to be established.

As Shrī Ātmānanda goes on to say, once it is realized that every object points to consciousness, then nothing can be a disturbance that distracts from truth. All seeming obstacles are thus converted into aids that help to realize what’s true. Accordingly, this prakriyā leads on to the ‘sahaja’ or the ‘natural’ state, of establishment in truth.

### **5a. The practice of enquiry**

Religious and yogic exercises have long been used as a personal and cosmic preparation, purifying personal motives and expanding cosmic views, in order to prepare for an eventual enquiry into impartial truth. In the end, that enquiry must leave behind all personal development and the entire cosmos that is seen through body and through mind.

Like Ramaṇa Maharshi, Shrī Ātmānanda laid emphasis upon the enquiry itself. In particular, he taught prakriyās that do not need the use of religious worship or of yogic meditation. And he encouraged many of his disciples to focus on these prakri-

yās, to the exclusion of both religious and yogic exercise. He told these disciples that this would be their most direct way to truth. This was not said as a concession to westerners. It was said for everyone, Indians and westerners and others alike, in the changed circumstances of the modern world.

Unfortunately, there is a prevalent misconception that religious worship and meditative exercise are essential, to put the theory of Advaita into practice. And this misconception is not Indian, in particular. It is even more prevalent in the west, as old religious ways and meditations are returning back into fashion, after a long period of repression and neglect.

But as both Ramaṇa Maharshi and Shri Ātmānanda said very clearly, the direct practice of Advaita isn't character development through worship or through meditative exercise. The direct practice is enquiry. What then takes the enquiry from theoretical imagining and postulation into actual practice?

That doesn't happen just by following religious or yogic prescriptions. Instead, the enquiry gets practical when it turns genuinely back – when it is one's own beliefs and assumptions that are genuinely in question. It's only by unseating one's own prejudiced and preconceived beliefs that questioning can come to clearer truth. That unseating puts the theory into practical effect. And it depends on love for truth, to give up cherished falsities on which the ego takes its self-conflicting and deluded stand.

There is nothing new about such genuine enquiry. It always has been there, refreshed with every generation. And it continues there today, refreshed in current circumstance. But it does need to be distinguished from the personal preparations that lead up to it, but which must be left behind. It's only for the special purpose of this distinction that Shri Ātmānanda spoke of religious and yogic practices as 'traditional'. He wasn't saying that tradition and enquiry are fundamentally opposed. Far from it, he regarded enquiry as the essential and indispensable basis of tradition – while religious and yogic practices are dispensable preparations at the changing surface, along with merely theoretical ideas.

In particular, the story he recounted was one of being disturbed while withdrawing into samādhi, and suddenly realizing that the very purpose of the samādhi would be better served by facing the disturbance. He was telling his disciples that yes, he had practised this kind of withdrawal, but he had found it quite unnecessary. Instead of using the statement 'I am pure consciousness' to enforce a withdrawal into a nirvikalpa or mindless state, he had found that he could do better by directly understanding what the statement means. Its meaning is directly shown by every object that appears, including all the objects from which the mind withdraws in samādhi.

By investigating ordinary experience, it is far more practical to see that each object points to consciousness, so that there is no need to withdraw from it. But the practice now is not a formal exercise of getting thrown into a special state. Instead it is a questioning enquiry that faces things for what they are and asks exactly what they show, beneath all seeming make-belief that isn't tested properly.

Ramaṇa Maharshi's last instruction is sometimes said to be: 'Put the Teaching into Practice.' The instruction is quite simple and few would disagree with what it says. But since the very practice is enquiry, it does throw up a practical question: of what exactly 'practice' means. It's rather differently interpreted, not just in theory but very much in practice, by different sādhakas.

*Question:* You say: 'No perception, thought or feeling can actually leave consciousness and go outside. When any such appearance goes out of consciousness, the ap-

pearance disappears immediately.’ Surely all you are doing is saying what the words mean? To ‘perceive’ something means to be conscious of a percept; to ‘think’ something means to be conscious of a thought; to ‘feel’ something means to be conscious of a feeling.

I.e., it is part of the definition of these words that they are associated with consciousness. If a thought ‘goes out of consciousness’ then the appearance does indeed disappear but is this not simply that it is no longer a thought, by definition, if we are not conscious of it? So all that this shows is that (according to dictionary definition) there are no percepts, thoughts or feelings outside of consciousness. And ‘Nothing else is ever shown, in anyone’s experience’ because no one sees anything without being conscious. Back where we started.

*Answer:* The attempt is to say only what the words mean, and to come back to where we started. The drift of the argument is simply this. Though we imagine that a world outside is perceived and thought about and felt, this never actually happens. All perceptions, thoughts and feelings always stay in consciousness, and so they cannot really show anything outside. As you say, from the very meaning of the words we use, it is quite clear that ‘Nothing else [but consciousness] is ever shown...’

So, whatever our minds may imagine, we are always back in consciousness, from where we started imagining. This imagination makes us think that we have gone somewhere else and seen something else, and that we come back and bring things in. But none of this ever happens, actually. We are always back where we started, and even the starting is false imagination. There never is any going anywhere, nor coming back again.

The amazing thing is that this is so obvious, in the meaning of the words, as you point out. The very meaning of the words we use completely contradicts the descriptions that we make of a physical and mental world. And yet, when this is pointed out, the first reaction is to dismiss it, as too obvious and too trivial.

Yes indeed, the contradiction is obvious; and if one does not seriously consider its consequences and the questions that it raises, then it stays trivial. It is then just a curiosity of language, a theoretical anomaly, of no genuine importance. Then of course one needs mystical and religious experiences, to make one take it seriously.

But, according to the Advaita tradition, if this contradiction is properly considered – following its questions through to their final end – then that questioning alone is enough, to find whatever there is to be found, to realize plain truth beyond all compromise. Of course, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

*Question:* I also had some problem with the question of existence. You said: “‘The chair has existence.’” What then is this existence that belongs to the chair? It is something that appears only in some part of space and time. Elsewhere, outside this particular location, the chair’s existence disappears.’ Again, is this not in fact what the word means?

Part of the definition for the verb ‘to exist’ (given by my on-line Oxford English Dictionary) is this: ‘to be found, especially in a particular place or situation’. Also, isn’t ‘existence’ an attribute in its normal usage? I might say that my coffee has blackness but I wouldn’t go on to suggest that blackness belongs to the coffee.

I’m afraid that I did not follow the last parts at all. Why ‘To speak more truly, it would be more accurate to say: “Existence has the chair.”’? What do you mean by talking about ‘existence being fully true’?

Again, I am happy with the conclusion (in theory at least!) – that nothing can be a disturbance because all points to the truth. It's just that I don't quite see how this follows, from what has gone before.

*Answer:* The attempt is only to examine what the word 'exist' means. And neither dictionary definitions nor normal usage are beyond question. The dictionary definition suggests that there are two meanings: one that to exist is to be found in general, and the other that it is to be found in a particular place or situation.

The dictionary favours the particular existence, but an advaita enquiry is not to be settled by some words in a book. It can only be settled by a strictly logical examination of direct experience. And the examination has to be uncompromising in the extreme. To settle the enquiry, no less is needed than a living truth, beyond all our habitual compromise with partial truths that have some killing and confusing element of falsity mixed in.

The word 'existence' most definitely describes something that stands, and stands in its own right. It implies a common and independent reality, seen through different appearances. It's the appearances that come and go, as what exists is seen from changing points of view. What exists remains, independent of how it is seen. When something called 'existence' is found to appear and disappear, then that contradicts the meaning of the word. It means that the word 'existence' is being used for something that doesn't really exist.

Take the so-called 'existence' of a particular chair. Since it appears at some place and time, but disappears at others, it does not in truth exist. We speak of it loosely as existing because it is common to some different views that we see when looking at some part of space and time from different locations. Each view is partial. It shows something about the chair, but not everything. But the chair in turn is a partial view of something bigger which contains it. If we think of the whole house in which the chair is contained, then the chair is a partial appearance that we get of the whole existence of the house. This is a partial appearance that we see by looking restrictedly, at the particular location of the chair.

The same consideration would in turn apply to the house. In the end, the word 'existence' can't be used with full accuracy, unless it applies to 'all there is'. It can only properly apply to a complete existence in which all seeming objects are contained. Only that complete existence can be fully true, without the taint of any compromise with falsity.

When that complete existence is identified as consciousness, then every object points to it. Every object shows the knowing presence of pure consciousness, and it thus helps a sādḥaka to see what's truly there. It's only in the seeming world that one object may distract attention from another. And only then is the distracting object a disturbance that gets in the way of perceiving other things.

But when impartial truth is sought, there can be no real disturbance. Anything that seems to disturb is only announcing its reality, which is pure consciousness. The greater the disturbance seems, the louder it announces that impartial truth. When that is understood, all seeming obstacles are realized as helpful means to find what's true, and to become established there.

It is, admittedly, a funny sort of paradox, seen from the world's confusions.

Shrī Ātmānanda made a delicate distinction between the witness and the real self called 'kūṭastha' or 'ātmā'. The witness is not consciousness itself or ātmā itself. Instead, the witness is a last staging post on the way to realizing self.

The truth of self is found by clarifying ego's confusion, which falsely mixes up the knowing self with known acts of personality. To clear the confusion, the self that knows must be discerned completely from anything that's known as a differentiated object or a changing act. Through a clear and impartial discernment, there must be a full completion of this duality between the knowing subject and its known objects or acts, so that no trace remains of any mixing up between the two.

As the duality becomes complete, the witness stand is reached. Viewed from ego in the world, a last remaining trace of confused duality remains, in the idea of the witness. There still remains a witnessing of changing activities that show up in the mind. And, despite all intellectual arguments to the contrary, the witnessing still looks a little like one of those changing activities, as it illuminates appearances and records what it has lit.

However, when the witness concept has been fully followed through, to where it points, it is no longer an idea, but an actual stand. And then, immediately the stand is actually reached, the idea of the witness gets dissolved, without a trace of duality remaining there. Accordingly, the witness is a completion of duality that straightaway gives itself up, to non-duality.

When fully understood, the 'witness' concept thus dissolves itself, of its own accord, in that non-dual truth of 'self' which is also called by other names like 'consciousness' and 'kūṭastha'.

Literally, 'kūṭastha' means 'standing at the topmost peak' ('kūṭa' meaning 'topmost peak' and 'stha' meaning 'standing'). So I would make the following interpretation of stanzas from the *Bhagavad-gītā*:

Here, in this world, there are two  
principles of life: one changing, while  
the other stays unchanged. All beings  
that have come to be get changed.  
The changeless is called 'kūṭastha' –  
found 'standing at the topmost peak'. 15.16

As I transcend all change and even  
that which does not change,  
I'm often called the 'highest principle',  
both in the Vedas and the world. 15.18

Whoever knows me unconfused,  
just as that highest principle,  
joins into me, entirely,  
with heart and mind completely merged. 15.19

In the first stanza (15.16), the name 'kūṭastha' is associated with the changeless witness, thus indicating that it is the highest standpoint of experience in the world. The next stanza (15.17) suggests an 'I' that is even higher, beyond the world entirely. And the last stanza (15.18) tells of a complete dissolution into that final truth of self, simply by knowing unconfused.

According to Shrī Ātmānanda, that unconfused knowing is attained immediately the witness stand is actually reached. There, dissolution in the real self is immediate and spontaneous, requiring no further thought or effort. In other words, on reaching the topmost height of the witness standpoint, it immediately dissolves its seeming separation as a distinct peak or point, as it merges itself into non-duality.

So yes, there does seem to be a slight difference of terminology between the *Bhagavad-gītā* and advaitins like Shri Ātmānanda, in the use of the term 'kūṭastha'. But the difference is very slight, having to do with the delicate distinction between witness and self. Advaitins like Shri Ātmānanda tend to use 'kūṭastha' as it occurs in the *Ashtavakra Samhitā*:

kūṭastham bodham advaitam ātmānam paribhāvaya .  
ābhāso 'ham bhramam muktva bhavam bāhyam athā 'ntaram ..

Release yourself from the delusion:  
'I am this apparent person  
who has somehow come to be –  
perceived outside or felt within.'

Thus, recognize yourself as that  
true individuality  
which stands above all seeming else  
as unconditioned consciousness,  
unclouded by duality.

1.13

Here 'kūṭastha' is clearly not just the witness, but consciousness itself or non-dual self, which is the one true individuality.

## 6. Happiness and peace – found as the shining of the ‘I’

After the previous prakriyās, which are concerned with the aspects of existence and consciousness, there follows an examination of ‘ānanda’ or ‘happiness’.

This prakriyā begins with the common experience of desiring an object. Why is the object desired? Evidently, the mind that desires feels a want or a lack. The object is desired to fulfil that want.

When a desired object is successfully attained, the mind feels fulfilled, in a state of happiness. But what exactly is that happiness? As it fulfils the wanting mind, from where does it come?

Habitually, as our minds desire objects, we think of happiness as something that is found in them. But of course this isn’t true. An object may or may not bring happiness, depending on the time and the occasion. As Shri Ātmānanda points out (in *Atmananda Tattwa Samhita*, talk 1, ‘Where we stand’), an object that brought happiness in childhood can all too often cease to bring happiness as one grows old. So happiness cannot be really be intrinsic to the objects of our senses and our minds.

But then, if not in objects, where in truth can happiness be found? Can it be in the mind? No, it cannot. For if it were, the mind would always be enjoying it. In that case, we’d never see our minds dissatisfied. We’d never see them wanting any object of desire. And we would never see a passing state of happiness, resulting from some object that has been achieved. We’d never see this state of happiness give way to a further state of wanting – as the mind turns restless again, with desire for some other object.

In a state of happiness, the mind is brought to rest. As a desired object is attained, the mind comes then to be at one with its desired object. Mind and object are no longer seen as two, but are resolved as only one. Each has subsided and dissolved into unmixed consciousness, where there is no duality. There, self is one with what it knows.

In a state of happiness, that oneness shines, showing the true nature of each person’s self. From that self comes happiness. The very being of that self is its non-dual shining, which we call ‘happiness’.

Thus, happiness is not a passing state. It is the changeless shining of true self. In states of dissatisfaction and misery, its non-dual shining seems distracted by the duality of a wanting mind that is at odds with what it finds. In states of happiness, the wanting mind and its duality dissolve, thus showing self for what it always is.

This is a very simple prakriyā, which positively shows the non-duality of self. By seeing that happiness comes always from the real self, as its non-dual shining, this prakriyā can cut right through to the heart of all value and motivation. But in its simplicity, the prakriyā demands a special clarity, for which the previous prakriyās may help prepare.

In looking for indications of this prakriyā in traditional texts, the closest I can think of are two passages from the Upanishads. Free translations of these passages are appended as postscripts. But the indications here are not very close. If anyone can think of other passages that give a closer indication, I’d be grateful.

*Muṇḍaka Upanishad*

Two birds, in close companionship,  
are perched upon a single tree.  
Of these, one eats and tastes the fruit.  
The other does not eat, but just looks on.

On this same tree, a person gets  
depressed and suffers grief: deluded  
by a sense of seeming helplessness,  
and feeling thus quite dispossessed.

But when one sees what's truly loved –  
as that which stands beyond all else,  
as one's own boundlessness, from where  
help comes, where everything belongs –  
there one is freed from misery.

3.1.1-2

*Taittirīya Upanishad*

... It's what *this* is, in a person;  
and what *that* is, in the sun.

It is one.

One who knows thus leaves  
this seeming world behind,  
  
withdraws into this self  
that's made from food,  
  
withdraws into this self  
that's formed of living energy,  
  
withdraws into this self  
that just consists of mind,  
  
withdraws into this self that  
only is discerning consciousness,  
  
and withdraws into this self  
that's nothing else but happiness.

On that, there is also this verse:

*from 2.8 (towards end)*

'It's that from which all words turn back  
together with the mind, unable to attain it.

'It is the happiness  
of complete reality.

'One who knows it  
has no fear of anything ...

'One who is thus a knower  
delivers up these two,  
as the real self ...'

*from 2.9*

## 6a. Consciousness and happiness

*Question:* The happiness referred to, is it happiness, or a state (though we cannot call it a state) where there is neither happiness nor any unhappiness?

*Answer:* In Advaita, the words ‘consciousness’ and ‘happiness’ are used like the word ‘temperature’ in physics. As physicists conceive of heat and cold, all different states of being hot or being cold are varying phenomena that exhibit the same common principle called ‘temperature’. There are many states of temperature – indicated by various degrees on the thermometer, starting from the complete absence of heat at absolute zero to any high degree of temperature. No matter how hot or cold a state may be, the state is something varying and passing. All such states are different appearances of the same principle called ‘temperature’.

Similarly in Advaita, ‘consciousness’ is the common principle of all knowing states, no matter what the apparent degree of knowing. Thus, deep sleep is treated as a state of consciousness to which the degree zero has been given, meaning that there is no activity of knowing there. And various states of conception and perception are given relative degrees of knowing, meaning that their knowing is there incomplete because of some remaining ignorance.

So also in Advaita, ‘happiness’ is the common principle of motivating value in all states of seeking and achievement. Thus, deep sleep is treated as a state of happiness to which the degree zero has been given, meaning that there is no seeking or achievement there. And various states of seeking and achievement are given relative degrees of happiness, meaning that their seeking and achievement is there incomplete because of some remaining dissatisfaction.

So far, this is just terminology. But Advaita goes on to a radical questioning of what knowing really is and what’s really sought to be achieved.

- In the case of knowing, what’s questioned is our habitual assumption that knowing is an activity of perception and conception, carried out by mind and senses. No perceiving or conceiving activities know anything themselves. They only create appearances, which are illuminated by the common principle called ‘consciousness’.

That is the only true knowing, and it has no degrees. Anytime and everywhere, it is one hundred percent present, in all its completeness. That includes deep sleep, where consciousness is found shining by itself, in all its purity.

- In the case of seeking and achievement, what’s in question is another habitual assumption that what we seek are passing states of achieving partial and temporary objectives. No such objectives can themselves bring happiness. What shines in their achievement is an undivided consciousness, where that which knows no longer feels at odds with what is known.

That undivided shining is just consciousness itself. It is the only true happiness, found present in all passing states, motivating all their seeking and achieving. It is the final value that is always sought, the only value that is truly found. In the peace of deep sleep, that happiness is shown uncovered, shining unaffected as it always is – in simple truth, beneath all change of seeming states.

There is another way of seeing this, through the derivation of the English word ‘happiness’. To be happy is to feel at one with ‘hap’, with the happenings that take place in one’s experience. The search for happiness is a search for that oneness, which Ad-

vaita says is the non-dual truth of all experience. It's that for which all acts are done, for which all happenings take place, in everyone's experience and in the entire world.

In the *Taittirīya Upanishad*, 2.7, it is put like this:

... yad vai tat sukṛtaṁ raso vai saḥ, rasaṁ hy ev' āyam labdhv ānandī bhavati,  
ko hy ev' ānyāt kaḥ prāṇyāt, yad eṣa ākāśa ānando na syāt ...

I would interpret this as follows:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| yad vai tat sukṛtaṁ raso vai saḥ,              | It is just this essential savour<br>that is spontaneous and natural.   |
| rasaṁ hy ev' āyam<br>labdhv<br>ānandī bhavati, | It's only when one reaches<br>that essential savour<br>that one comes to happiness.                            |
| ko hy ev' ānyāt<br>kaḥ prāṇyāt,                | For what could be alive at all,<br>and what could move with energy,  |
| yad eṣa ākāśa<br>ānando na syāt                | if there were not this happiness<br>here at the background of all space and time<br>pervading the entire world |

The problem of course is to understand just what this means – to understand that happiness is a changeless background which underlies all our changing feelings, including our most negative and painful feelings of misery and fear and want.

## 6b. Love and devotion

In Shrī Ātmānanda's approach, devotion (bhakti) or love (prema) is of the greatest importance. The higher reason (vidyā-vritti) is only an expression of love for truth. It's only love that can take a sādḥaka from dry ideas to living truth (see note 401 below). As the word 'philosophy' implies (from 'philo-' meaning love and '-sophy' meaning 'true knowledge'), all genuine enquiry is a love affair with truth. And reason – in particular the higher reason – is just a means through which love works, to express itself in the affair.

But, since reason is only a means of expression, it is subject to love and not the other way around. The workings of love are not subject to reason and cannot rightly be directed or described by reason. The only proper use of reason is to question false beliefs, in search of a truth that is loved beyond all else. It's only through such all-consuming love that every last remaining trace of falsity may be surrendered, on the way to truth.

Just how love works, through this surrendering enquiry, is not a subject to which reason properly applies. When a sādḥaka's love for truth is genuine enough, that love for truth manifests itself in the form of a teacher and of sādhanas or investigations which are thereby taught. There is of course a deeply emotional side to this, but it is a side that has to be dealt with in its own right – as a highly delicate matter between teacher and disciple, expressed in a way that is quite specific to their particular conditions and circumstances.

Shrī Ātmānanda himself was a Krishṇa-bhakta, and his teacher asked him to undertake the traditional bhakti sādḥana of Rādhā-hridaya-bhāvana (contemplation on the heart of Rādhā, who took Krishṇa as her lover). Arising directly from this sādḥana, Shrī Ātmānanda composed a poetic work, called *Rādhā-mādhavam*.

The work is composed in very lyrical and passionate Malayalam, as it describes a transcendence of Rādhā's personal desires into a pure love of non-dual self. Long after it was composed, Shrī Ātmānanda was once persuaded to try translating it into English. He sat down to do so, but after a while he gave up, saying that the mood just wouldn't come. An English disciple (John Levy) did make some sort of translation; but it comes across as rather quaint, thus sadly missing out the searing power and spirit of the original. Unlike the reasoned discourse of *Atma Darshan* and *Atma Nirvriti*, which Shrī Ātmānanda did very effectively translate into English, the impassioned bhakti of *Rādhā-mādhavam* was not thus translated by Shrī Ātmānanda himself. Perhaps it was too specific to the particular, traditional environment in which it was composed.

In his reasoned discourses, Shrī Ātmānanda did sometimes speak about devotion and love, but he didn't elaborate here nearly as much as when he spoke of the consciousness or existence aspects of truth. And he emphasized that in the end, the heart or devotional aspect must be left to itself, as beyond the jurisdiction of the head or intellect.

Even so, in Nitya Tripta's *Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shrī Ātmānanda*, there are some brief discussions of devotion and love, usually in relation to knowledge. A few of them are appended below.

*What is the nature of love in its application?* (note 265)

If you love another for his or her gross and external qualities alone, that love is of the lowest type.

But if you love the other knowing that it is the life principle alone in the other that you love, then that love becomes sublime.

And lastly, if you love the other knowing that it is that which transcends the attributes – body, senses and mind – that you love, there the otherness vanishes at once. That love is the most sublime, and is the Absolute itself.

The ordinary man believes the object he desires to be real, and to be the source of the pleasure he enjoys. But the Sage sees objects as mere pointers to the Self.

*Love and how to love?* (note 360)

All worldly love is mere bargaining and has always its opposite attached to it, ready to express itself when the consideration anticipated is in any way obstructed.

But a Vedāntin's love alone knows no bargain, and naturally knows no opposite. It is perfect and unconditional; and always in the form of giving and not taking. Therefore, even to love one's own wife or child in the best manner, one has to become a Vedāntin first. All talk of love in this world is nothing but unadulterated fraud.

So know yourself first. Then alone can you love anybody or anything truly and unreservedly.

*Heart and prema* (note 401)

Heart + I am = I am the heart.

Love is the expression of the Self through the heart, and the heart is always wet. It takes you straight to the Self or Ātmā and drowns you in it. Language is dry and is the expression of the Self through the head or reason. It takes you

only to the brink of  $\bar{A}tm\bar{a}$ ; and leaves you there, till the heart rises up to wet reason and ultimately to drown you in love.

So when you begin to discuss love, it is impossible to proceed with the discussion when the heart wells up. Of the different styles in literature, 'shrīngāra' (based on human love) is the one style found best suited to clothe the highest Truth through the message of love or *prema*. This is why even the Upanishads have invariably utilized this style to express Truth.

*What do you love?* (note 784)

Answer: You can love only the right Absolute, represented by the life principle in others. You can love nothing else.

*What do I love? And why?* (note 875)

Your love is directed only to the real substratum or Self. You happen to love the qualities in one, simply because they belong to the substratum you love. You love, because love is the real nature of the real Self and you cannot help loving even for a moment.

*How to love?* (note 876)

Love is the feeling or sense of oneness with another.

If you correctly understand yourself to be beyond body, senses and mind, your love for another will also be for that self in him. Because there are no two selves, and love is its nature.

If your understanding is incorrect, you love the incorrect self in him; and as a result of that incorrectness, you hate others.

Genuine love absorbs everything into you, and then duality dies. But in conditioned love, or gratitude, duality persists in giving and taking. Even this gratitude, if directed to the Guru, goes deep into you, takes you beyond duality and is transformed into objectless love.

*What differentiates love from knowledge?* (note 889)

Knowing with your whole being is Love itself. In thought (which is knowing with the mind alone) you do not lose yourself. But in love you lose yourself. So love entails the sacrifice of the ego.

*What are the activities of love and knowledge?* (note 901)

Love creates an object for its enjoyment. Immediately, knowledge destroys that object, leaving love objectless. Being objectless, it is one with love Absolute. Love is enriched not by taking but by giving....

*Where is subject-object relationship in love?* (note 917)

When you say you love yourself, you yourself and love stand as one. So also when you love another, you become one with the other. The subject-object relationship vanishes, and the experience is one of identity. In order to '*love thy neighbour as thyself*' you have to stand as  $\bar{A}tm\bar{a}$  itself.

The disappearance of subject-object relationship is a natural corollary of the experience of love. So also of the experience of knowledge. This actually happens in all experiences in the plane of the relative.

Instead of taking note of the sublime Truth, after the event the ego tries to limit, misrepresent and possess it. Whenever any doubt arises, refer to the deep sleep experience. There is no subject-object relationship there.

In the experience of Happiness, the mind dies. There is neither enjoyer nor enjoyed in it. There is only Happiness. It is an egoless state; but this is usurped subsequently by the ego. You are not getting Happiness by loving all, but loving all is itself Happiness. The humanitarian worker emphasizes the 'all' and misses Happiness; the vedāntin emphasizes Happiness, his own nature, and misses or loses the 'all'.

*Devotion* (note 1310)

So also bhakti or devotion is a mental attitude directed to an object, generally an *ishṭa-deva* [a chosen form of God]. This by itself does not give the ultimate result, moksha.

Moksha [liberation] is impersonal. To attain moksha, the goal of bhakti has to be gradually changed to the impersonal, by understanding the nature of God. But the truth about God is that it is the highest concept of the human mind. Therefore, a subjective examination of the mind has to be gone through and its background, the Self, visualized. This can never be done by the mind alone, unaided.

Hence the truth of one's own real nature has to be heard from the lips of a Sage (Guru). By that, one's svarūpa [own true nature] is immediately visualized. It is then that incessant devotion has to be directed to that goal. That is real bhakti, and it enables one to get established in Ātmā. That is mukti (liberation).

*How is misery related to love?* (note 1404)

Answer: Misery is love itself. But how? Let us examine misery. Take any experience of misery. You say the thought of your departed father creates misery. But does it always do so? If your father, when living, was cruel and inimical to you, the thought of his demise would hardly make you miserable. Therefore it is clear that it was not the thought of the father that was the cause of the misery, but it was the thought of your father's love that was the real cause.

But love is attributeless and indivisible. It is wrong even to call it father's love, and it has been proved that the thought of the father was not the cause of misery. Therefore it was love and love alone that was the cause of the misery, if it could ever have had a cause. But you experience only one thing at a time – love or misery – and therefore there can be no causal relationship between the two [as different things].

Hence it is love that expresses itself as misery, and not your father [that causes it, as something different from love]. The father is forgotten in love. To find the source of misery, you must go beyond body and mind. If you emphasize body and mind, you are fixed in the expression of Truth. The substance is beyond.

Misery and happiness are both expressions. Love pure is the background of both. When you cling on to love, objects vanish. But when you cling on to objects, love is not perceived as such.

Where there is no love, there is no misery. So love goes into the make of misery; misery is love itself. It is the illusory concept of time that makes love appear as misery. If you separate love from misery, misery is not.

*What is bhakti?* (note 1410)

Answer: You cannot have bhakti for something non-existent, nor can you have it towards anything you do not know. Every object of bhakti has two aspects:

1. The impermanent or non-existent form, and
2. The permanent or the real consciousness.

Bhakti should be directed to the latter aspect, and the former can be blissfully ignored when it has fulfilled its legitimate purpose. The purpose of the ‘form’ is only to arrest your attention and to enable you to direct it to Consciousness, which is its background. The Consciousness can never be objectified. That is always the ultimate subject (vishayin). It is in the devotee himself and indivisible.

Therefore, a real devotee can only and need only direct his attention to the Consciousness in him. This is real bhakti; and it immediately yields Peace or Ānanda, which is Consciousness itself. This is vastu-tantra, the outcome of Truth. Shrī Shankara defines real bhakti of the highest order as follows (in *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇī*, 31):

mokṣa-sādhana-sāmagryām bhaktir eva garīyasī  
sva-svarūpā-’nusandhānam bhaktir ity abhidhīyate

[Among all ways of seeking to be free,  
it’s love that is the best, one must agree.  
To question one’s own truth, to ask what’s there,  
that is the love of those who ask with care.]

‘Incessantly clinging onto one’s own real nature is verily termed bhakti.’

Bhakti for anything other than this is really unworthy of the name. It may, at the most, be called a fascination as unreal as the object itself.

*Question:* Do you mean by ‘reason’ the mind that needs to be appeased by practice to let Brahman shine?

*Answer:* No, ‘the mind that needs to be appeased’ is what Shrī Ātmānanda called ‘lower reason’. He defined such mind or lower reason as ‘consciousness going out towards objects’. And he gave the name ‘higher reason’ or ‘vidyā-vritti’ to what Rāmaṇa Maharshi called ‘self-enquiry’ or ‘ātma-vicāra’.

That higher reason is consciousness reflecting back into the self from which mind arises (and seems to go out). That alone is true reason. And it is not mind at all. Instead, it is consciousness itself or love itself, expressed in the form of investigating questions, so as to take a sādḥaka back to her or his own truth.

*Question:* What do you mean by speaking of questions that can ‘take a sādḥaka back to her or his own truth’? In particular, does this imply that there are different truths, to be found by different sādḥakas?

*Answer:* It looks that way, because different sādḥakas see themselves differently – as different personalities, with different bodies and minds. But, in the end, it’s only when we talk of personality that ‘hers’ and ‘his’ seem different. When any sādḥaka comes finally to truth of self, ‘hers’ and ‘his’ are found to be the same, in reality.

All difference there is shown to be appearance only, always showing one same self. That's what love points to, as a sādḥaka gives up what seems to be 'my' for what is truly 'I'.

*Question:* When one talks about truth, is this not the turīya and turīyātīta states? According to Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi the final truth is the Self, which is realized in the states mentioned above.

*Answer:* Again, there is a problem of terminology, with different words producing seeming differences that have to be transcended on the way to truth. But the problem here is a bit technical, I'm afraid. In Sanskrit, the word 'turīya' simply means the 'fourth'. In the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad*, the truth is called 'catuṣ-pat' or 'fallen out in four'. The four are:

1. 'jāgarita-sthāna' or the 'waking state'
2. 'svapna-sthāna' or the 'dream state'
3. 'sushupta-sthāna' or the 'deep sleep state'
4. 'caturtha' or the 'fourth'.

In this fourfold division, the word 'sthāna' or 'state' is applied only to the first three divisions, which are the states of waking, dream and sleep. The last division is where all divisions are dissolved. It is merely called the 'fourth', and the word 'sthāna' or 'state' is significantly omitted. Here is the concluding stanza of the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad*:

amātraś caturtho 'vyavahāryaḥ prapañc'-opaśamaḥ śivo 'dvaita  
evam om-kāra ātm' aiva saṁviśaty ātman' ātmānam ya evam veda

I would translate this (somewhat freely) as follows:

The fourth is not an element;  
nor has it elements. It cannot  
be transacted or made up.  
In it, the whole created world  
of made-up things is brought to rest.  
  
It is the unconditioned  
happiness of non-duality.  
  
'Om' is thus self alone.  
One who knows that  
joins back, through self,  
into the truth of self.

In this interpretation, the 'fourth' is not a state that comes and goes. Instead, it is a non-dual reality beyond all change and movement. It is the changeless reality described by the mantra 'om'. It is the 'fourth' merely in the sense that it is beyond the three states of waking, dream and sleep. These three are states that come and go. The 'fourth' is the reality that's found beyond these changing states. It's that which stays the same, while they come and go. Each one of them shows it alone and nothing else.

However, there is also another interpretation, in which the 'fourth' refers to a state of nirvikalpa samādhi, which is forcefully entered through the waking state. Such a samādhi state does come and go, but it is taken as a special gateway from the waking state to changeless truth. Then the word 'turīya' (which is just another Sanskrit word

for 'fourth') is used to describe a changing state. And the changeless truth is described as 'turīyātīta' or 'beyond turīya'.

Sometimes, even 'turīyātīta' is spoken of as a higher state, beyond 'turīya'. And then, the changeless truth has to be conceived as 'turīyātītātīta' or 'beyond turīyātīta'. So the conceiving of higher and higher states can go on indefinitely, so long as a sād-haka keeps thinking in terms of changing states.

To avoid this endless elaboration of terminology, Shrī Ātmānanda recommended a simple questioning of the experience of deep sleep, in its own terms. And he said that this questioning could well be carried out in the waking state, by reflecting into the objectless depth of waking consciousness. For it is that same objectless depth which stays present in all dreams and in deep sleep as well.

As the experience of deep sleep is considered, the consideration can take a sād-haka reflecting down – beneath all waking assumptions – into a knowing relaxation that dissolves all pettiness of ego into unconditioned truth. But that knowing relaxation needs the help of truth itself, which arises in the form of a 'kāraṇa guru'. a 'kāraṇa guru' is a teacher (guru) who is at one with 'kāraṇa' – the inmost source within each sād-haka.

According to Shrī Ātmānanda, love for such a teacher is the highest devotion. And it is utterly beyond all reasoned questioning, through which the teaching is conveyed.

## *7. The background – where all experiences arise, abide and subside*

After the sat, cit and ānanda aspects have been examined, the next prakriyā investigates the changeless background of all change and difference.

As the world appears, to anyone, it is shown in seeming pictures – physical, sensual and mental. These are pictures that have been created by changing acts of perception and conception, through our bodies and our minds. As our minds and bodies differ, so too their acts of picturing get to be different as well. The differences produce a great variety of pictures – at different times and places, and in different cultures and personalities.

But in the end, each picture must arise from the same complete reality of physical and mental world – which includes all times and places, together with all cultures and all personalities. Whatever picture may appear – of anything or to anyone – that complete reality is always implied, in the background of the picturing.

Each apparent picture is portrayed at the foreground of experience, by some act of picturing. This very act must express the reality from which it has arisen. That expressed reality is quietly implied. It stands utterly unpictured in the background, while changing pictures are portrayed on the seeming surface of the mind's attention.

Accordingly, reality can be approached as a background screen, on which all pictures of the world are drawn. The screen is in itself unpictured – remaining everywhere the same, never varying at all. In this sense, of standing changeless underneath, that background is called 'sat' or 'existence'.

But that background is no object in the world. Each object is a pictured element, appearing on the background screen. And each such element is lit by consciousness. The knowing light of consciousness is present through all pieces of the picturing. Throughout all varied pieces of the pictured show, that light stays present with the screen.

The pictured pieces change and vary; but their background and their knowing light stay present always, throughout all the changes and the differences. There is no way of distinguishing between that background reality and the knowing light of consciousness. The two cannot be told apart. They are in fact identical. The background screen is light itself, illuminating all its pictures from behind.

The pictures are all made of light. As they show, they shine by that light, which illuminates itself. In this sense, as self-illuminating light, the reality is called 'cit' or 'consciousness'.

As the pictures come and go, they all arise expressing consciousness, from which they come. That expression is their life, which animates their changing movement. From it comes all their sense of purpose and meaning and value.

In the end, all pictured acts are done for the sake of consciousness, which they express. As it knows itself, in identity, it shines non-dually – identical with the reality of each picture that it lights. By that non-dual shining, all actions in our pictures are inspired to take place, spontaneously and naturally, of their own accord.

For that non-dual shining is the happiness that is uncovered when desire is fulfilled. The wanting mind is dual, feeling need for something else. When what's wanted is obtained, the self that knows is felt to be at one with what has come about. The wanting mind's duality has there been brought to rest, dissolved into a non-

duality that is its real motivation. In this sense, as that which is ultimately valued, the reality is called ‘ānanda’ or ‘happiness’.

The background is thus ‘sat-cit-ānanda’. As ‘sat’, it is the background of all objects and objective acts. As ‘cit’, it is the background of all thoughts and ideas. As ‘ānanda’, it is the background of all feelings and all values. But then, how can it be investigated, beneath the pictures that appear to cover it?

As Shrī Ātmānanda explained, it can be found by looking carefully at the gaps in our picturing of the apparent world. There, in the gaps, when they are properly examined, the background may be found uncovered, shining by itself.

In deep sleep, the gap is obvious, because it corresponds to a gap in physical time, seen from the waking state. But there is also a less obvious gap – which need not take any physical time, and which usually passes quite unnoticed. This is the gap that keeps taking place in the mind, whenever a perception, thought or feeling comes to end.

At this point of time – just after each mentation disappears and just before the next appears – there is a timeless gap, in which the mind has returned to dissolution in its shining background. In that gap, as in deep sleep, the ego is dissolved and the real self is found ‘shining in its own glory’.

Taking note of that gap shows the background positively, as that true and positive reality of each object and each action that appears. What makes this prakriyā so positive is that the gap can be seen to keep occurring all the time. It occurs before and after every moment – as each present moment rises from the dissolution of what went before, and as this moment in its turn dissolves into a timeless shining out of which the next succeeding moment is then born.

Whatever may appear is thus shown to rise immediately from the shining background, which provides both knowing light and continuing support. And with the same immediacy, what rises into show is then returned to that same background, which stays present quite unchanged.

Through this reflection back, all perceptions, thoughts and feelings keep on pointing to a positive reality, which underlies their fitful appearances in changing mind. They point back by their natural and spontaneous returning to dissolve in that reality – where they keep expiring, at every moment that we know.

How and where is this prakriyā described in traditional and ancient texts? I must confess to not having much of an answer. Perhaps some group members could help out. I can only give a few preliminary indications, which are appended below.

#### *The concept of the ‘background’ in traditional Advaita – some indications*

First, when speaking of the ‘background’ in his native Malayalam, Shrī Ātmānanda used the word ‘poruḷ’ (with a retroflex ‘ḷ’ – the word comes from Tamil). My dictionaries translate the word as ‘meaning, truth, wealth, essence, sum-and-substance’.

Second, Ramaṇa Maharshi often speaks of the background as a screen. For example, in ‘Forty Verses on Reality’, he says (in stanza 1, translated from his Malayalam version *Sad-darshanam*):

Names and forms are pictures.  
The one who sees, the light  
and the screen: all these  
are one reality, and that alone.

Similarly, at an earlier time, Shrī Jnyāneshvar says in *Cāngadeva Pāsashī* (composed in old Marathi prākṛit):

A non-existent picture shows,  
but what exists is only wall.  
So too, what shines is consciousness,  
here in the form of changing world.

13

Third, going back to ancient times, the concept of ‘ākāsha’ is often used to indicate or to imply a continuing or changeless background. In particular, as the fifth element, ākāsha is the background continuity pervading all of space and time. And this word ‘ākāsha’ has also a deeper meaning, shown by its derivation. It comes from the root ‘kāsh’, which means to ‘shine’. To this root, the prefix ‘ā-’ is added, indicating ‘nearness’ or ‘immediacy’. So, more deeply seen, the word ‘ākāsha’ indicates an immediate shining, found in the background of our space-time pictures.

In that deeper meaning, the element ‘ākāsha’ shows a changeless reality that is identical with knowing self. That meaning is brought out in the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad*, chapter 3, through a persistent questioning of Yājnyavalkya by Gārgī.

Initially, she goes through the five elements, asking what each one is made of. When she gets to ask about ākāsha, he answers cosmologically, through various mythical and religious conceptions that lead up to the limitless expanse of ‘brahman’. And he refuses to answer beyond that – telling Gārgī that her head will fall off, if she asks too many questions.

But, some time later on, she comes back with a more intelligent way of asking about the underlying nature of ākāsha. She asks a leading question that brings out the pervading continuity of ākāsha, throughout all space and time. And then she goes on to ask what it is that supports the continuity.

Only then does Yājnyavalkya give a full and direct answer, telling her that ākāsha shows an unchanging reality (akshara) which is directly found as knowing self. As he puts it:

This, Gārgī, is that same changeless principle  
... which is not known, but is the knower.  
... Other than this, there is no knower.  
Gārgī, it is in this very changeless principle  
that ākāsha is woven, warp and woof.

3.8.11

## 8. *Merging into non-duality – ‘Sleep in consciousness.’*

In his ‘regular talks’, Shrī Ātmānanda gave an ordered introduction to some main prakriyās – from the three states to the changeless background. The prakriyās show different aspects of the same truth, to which they each reflect. Each prakriyā relates back there, to that truth where each must point and get dissolved.

It’s only thus, by merging back, that different prakriyās relate. The order that relates them is a subtle one, which cannot be constructed as a formal system. It can only be unfolded naturally, by a repeated merging back into that single truth from which all prakriyās arise.

In fact, as shown by the background prakriyā, we merge back into truth at every moment of our various lives. But, through blind habit of conditioned ego, we don’t see just where it is that we are merged, continually. What an advaita teacher does is to take a sādḥaka to truth, through a higher reasoning that makes it plainly and completely clear just what truth is in itself, as the sādḥaka is merged back there.

When a sādḥaka thus merges back with complete and utter clarity, Shrī Ātmānanda describes the experience as a ‘visualization’ of truth. And here, it must be understood that the word ‘visualize’ is being used in a special way. It does not refer to any partial seeing, of any physical or mental perception. Whenever truth is rightly visualized, the visualizing is an utterly impartial seeing, with no last remaining trace of partial mind and body still confusingly mixed up with it. At the time when it occurs, that visualizing is complete and clear, with no smallest trace of any partiality or misunderstanding.

But, as the sādḥaka’s mind and body are thus left behind, to visualize the truth, this mind and body may yet still retain impurities of possessive ego, which have not yet been eradicated from the sādḥaka’s character. If so, the lingering impurities will later reassert themselves, so that the visualization gets obscured. Then, more work of sādḥana is needed.

Using the teacher’s prakriyās, or any other prakriyās that may be discovered or invented, the sādḥaka must keep returning back – from ego’s straying, to the truth that has been shown. By thus refreshing the visualization, over and over again, the truth keeps being emphasized, at the expense of mistaken ego.

As lingering impurities of ego get removed, the visualization gets to be steadier and less easily obscured. Eventually, the ego gets completely eradicated and the visualization stays completely steady and uninterrupted. That unbroken seeing of the truth is called the ‘sahaja’ or ‘natural’ state. The truth is then spontaneously understood, without the need of any clarifying effort, no matter what may happen or appear. In such a sahaja or natural state, the confused sense of a ‘sādḥaka’ or a ‘seeker’ is no more. This confusion has then gone – by seeing it as a facade of partial personality, whose changing tricks of made-up show have made no real difference. In place of this personal confusion, the ‘jnyāni’ or the ‘sage’ has irrevocably taken charge, upon a changeless stand that is utterly impartial and spontaneous.

To describe the steadying of visualization into irrevocable spontaneity, Shrī Ātmānanda spoke of ‘establishment’ in truth. And towards that establishment, he encouraged his disciples to discover or invent new prakriyās for themselves.

By way of an example, he spoke of an idealist prakriyā, which investigates the role of memory, in our experience of the world. This prakriyā points out that all such experience depends upon past memories that come into the present through our minds. So, at any point of time, what’s actually present of the world can be seen as an idea,

made up from current memory in mind. There's nothing here additional to present consciousness.

The outside world is thus reduced to inner mind. And then what's left is only mind, with no outside things and no outside influence. In that pure mind, there's nothing found to make it in the least bit different from the present consciousness that knows it. Accordingly, the mind is in its turn identical with the present reality of consciousness. And that is no seeming triviality of physical or mental ego. Instead, it is the non-dual truth of knowing self and everything that's known, including the entire world.

And finally, as a summation of Advaita reasoning, Shri Ātmānanda said that it reduced all of the world and all of its perceptions, thoughts and feelings to pure consciousness, which can only be realized as one's own self.

But, from this summing up, a question may arise. Why is it centred upon 'cit' or 'consciousness'? What about the other two aspects, of 'sat' or 'existence' and 'ānanda' or 'happiness'?

An answer comes from the nature of the prakriyās. They proceed through reason – starting with the assumptions and constructions of lower reason and then going on to the reflective questioning of higher reason. Such reasoned prakriyās are centrally concerned with knowing, where consciousness comes first. To examine existence and happiness, it must be asked how they are known. They are thus examined by reflecting back to consciousness, and observing them from there.

This is not much of a problem for existence, because it is natural to verify existence by observing it. But where happiness is concerned, the same does not apply. For it is more natural to 'feel' happiness, rather than observing it. And such feeling implies a motivating depth of knowledge, which we call 'love'.

Accordingly, the aspect of happiness implies a further and deeper approach, which concerns the motivating heart of reason and enquiry. This deeper approach is of course the devotional love of bhakti. For Shri Ātmānanda, advaita bhakti is a very delicate matter, between teacher and disciple. He insisted that it is not subject to any mind-initiated reasoning. Thus, he treated it as a deeply emotional issue, which must be left to itself, beyond the reach of thinking intellect.

All that he would say is that a teacher stands for truth itself, at the centre of a disciple's heart. Once truth has been shown by an advaita teacher, all further sādhana proceeds from there and comes back there. Without that living guidance from within, no sādhana is rightly meaningful.

For sādhana towards establishment in truth, his general advice to disciples was in two parts. First, to face squarely whatever may come up to confront the disciple in the world. And second, having faced each occurrence squarely, to reflect upon it spiritually, thus returning to the truth that stays always unaffected by what happens in both world and personality.

But there is also a particular sādhana which he described by two short injunctions: 'Sleep knowingly' and 'Sleep in consciousness.' To give an idea of this sādhana, a series of quotations are given below, from Shri Nitya Tripta's *Notes on Spiritual Discourses of Shri Ātmānanda*. These quotations may also help to relate this sādhana to some practices and conceptions of traditional meditation.

*From note 1*

... we get to our real nature by relaxing our mind from all forms of activity, and at the same time not losing sight of the happiness and peace experienced in deep sleep.

This positive aspect saves us from the probable shroud of negation and slumber. We should not allow the mind to be active and at the same time we should see that it does not become inactive. In other words: ‘*Sleep knowingly.*’

Thus, deep sleep can be utilized directly for establishing oneself in the real centre.

*Note 39*

The poet Tennyson says [in the poem ‘Ulysses’]: Pursue ‘knowledge, like a sinking star, beyond the utmost bound of human thought’. It will take you a long way if you think deeply about what Tennyson meant by this statement.

‘Sinking star’ may mean this. Sinking implies relaxation. You have only to retreat and retreat into the ‘I’-principle, and rest there. Allow yourself therefore to be led on. Sink, sink, sink... Sink from the body, sink from the senses, and sink from the mind...

Ashṭavakra says, in a similar context (*Ashṭavakra-samhitā*, 1.4):

yadi dehaṁ pṛthak-kṛtya citi viśrāmya tiṣṭhasi .  
adhunai ’va sukhī śānto bandha-mukto bhaviṣyasi ..

This means: ‘Separating body from you, if you take rest in Consciousness, you stand liberated here and now.’

*From note 112*

‘... Sleep away the whole world, clinging on to Consciousness,’ said the Sage [Ashṭavakra].

The use of the word ‘sleep’ in the transitive form, though peculiar, is specially meaningful. It means give up name and form, and rest in the background.

*From note 597*

yadi dehaṁ pṛthak-kṛtya citi viśrāmya tiṣṭhasi .  
adhunai ’va sukhī śānto bandha-mukto bhaviṣyasi ..

*Ashṭavakra-samhitā*, 1.4

This means: ‘Sleep in Consciousness.’ This is the royal road to the natural state.

*Note 599*

How to sleep knowingly?

Know that you are going to sleep. Let that thought be as vague as possible. Then empty your mind of all intruding thoughts, taking care not to strain the mind in the least. Having understood from the Guru that your real nature alone shines in its own glory in deep sleep, if you relax into deep sleep as already suggested, the deep sleep shall no longer be a state, but your real nature, even beyond ‘nirvikalpa samādhi’.

[This note is linked to the following statement – from the appendix, ‘Some Spiritual Statements ...’:]

*Sleep involuntarily* and you will be taken to the ignorant man’s deep sleep. *Sleep voluntarily* and you will be taken to nirvikalpa samādhi. *Sleep knowingly* and you will be taken right to your real nature (your natural state) beyond all samādhi.

*From note 669*

In relaxation one should have something to hold on to. If you hold on to the 'I' and relax the senses and mind, you get to real sleep.

Let the mind be asleep to the whole world, and wakeful to the 'I'.

*From note 806*

See that either end of your sleep is saturated with the thought of your real nature, your native home.

*Note 1241*

Experience is of two kinds: vastu-tantra [governed by reality] and kartri-tantra [governed by a doer].

1. *Vastu-tantra* is begotten of Ātmā.
2. *Kartri-tantra* is begotten of doership.

All experiences of duality, including even the yogin's nirvikalpa samādhi, are kartri-tantra. The experience which takes me straight to my real nature, of Peace and Consciousness, is alone vastu-tantra....

Vastu-tantra, being ātmic, is beyond feeling. Kartri-tantra, being mental, is capable of being felt, but is fleeting. Mental satisfaction can be derived both from Truth as well as from untruth. Vastu-tantra is not the result of any activity or inactivity. But kartri-tantra is always the result of activity, which takes the form of desire and effort for its fulfilment.

When the disciple – who is a waking subject – is told by the Guru that even his phenomenal satisfaction is not derived from objects, but that it is his own real nature shining in its own glory, his doership (which is the centre of kartri-tantra) crumbles for ever. Desires torment him no more, and satisfaction is transformed into permanent Peace.

When this sublime Peace, vastu-tantra, is sought to be brought down to respond to kartri-tantra, guided by varying tastes and tendencies, a host of new concepts in the form of religions, heavens, objects of pleasure and so on begin to appear. Therefore, give up your tastes, tendencies and desires – not violently, but by knowing, and by knowing more and more deeply, that all satisfaction is the expression of your own real nature of Peace – and you shall be for ever free.

The state of Peace in deep sleep is the most familiar experience of vastu-tantra in daily life. The annihilation of all kartri-tantra is the ultimate goal of Vedānta. This establishes vastu-tantra without any positive effort whatever. Look at deep sleep. You have only to give up your attachment to body, senses and mind, in the waking and dream states. Immediately, Peace – vastu-tantra – dawns, permanent and self-luminous.

Deep sleep comes involuntarily, and without the help of discrimination. Therefore it disappears, after a while. Establish the same state voluntarily and with discrimination. When once you visualize it this way, it will never disappear.

## 8a. Visualization and establishment

*Question:* May I take what you said [about establishment in truth] as the sthita-prajnyatvam of the *Bhagavad-gītā* that results when the seeker virtually *becomes* the prajnyāna of ‘Aham brahmāsmi’?

*Answer:* Yes, I would say that the ‘sthita-prajnya’ described in the *Bhagavad-gītā* 2.54-57 could be interpreted as one who is ‘established in truth’, in Shrī Ātmānanda’s use of this phrase. But, for that, the stanzas would need to be interpreted from a jnyāna approach. Here is how I would go about it:

*Arjuna asked:*

What may be said of one who is  
established in true knowledge and  
stands there absorbed? How does that person  
speak, sit down and move about? 2.54

*Krishṇa replied:*

When all desires, going deep  
into the mind, have finally  
been given up, a person comes  
to lasting peace and happiness  
in self alone, all by itself.

When someone gets to live there quite  
spontaneously, remaining always  
undisturbed, no matter what  
takes place; that someone is then said to be  
‘established in true knowledge’. 2.55

Such a one, of steady  
understanding, stays unshaken  
inwardly: no longer driven by  
possessive want, nor by desire,  
fear and rage, through all the  
miseries and joys that mind gets into.

Such a one, who stands upon  
unchanging ground, is called a sage. 2.56

Whatever happens, good or bad,  
someone whose knowledge is established  
stays impartial everywhere:  
quite unaffected by complacency  
when things go well, or by  
frustration at receiving ill. 2.57

You may well ask what might be so special about a jnyāna interpretation, to make it different from more usual interpretations. Well, I would say that the usual interpretation is the one you imply in your question, when you speak of realization as resulting ‘when the seeker virtually *becomes* the prajnyāna of “Aham brahmāsmi”’.

The word ‘*becomes*’ here indicates a transformation of personality, which implies a yogic approach of mind expansion and character improvement through meditative

exercise. And, quite rightly, you qualify the ‘becomes’ with the adverb ‘virtually’, in order to indicate a shift towards an advaitic jnyāna approach.

In such a jnyāna approach, it is acknowledged that the seeker already is the truth which is sought, so that there is no need to attempt any ‘becoming’ through yogic meditation. The only need is for the sādḥaka to realize that she or he was never bound, and to keep returning to that realization until it becomes steady and spontaneous.

As Shrī Ātmānanda put it, even after a disciple has been taken fully to the truth, she or he may lapse into a remaining phase of identification, as one who still thinks that she or he has realized. A mistaken identification thus persists for a while. But the mistake of ego has been cut at its very root, so that the mistake does not go on being replenished as before. Instead, it is irrevocably on the way to working itself out.

The working out is then best assisted by returning back to realization, over and over again, through a direct enquiry whose sole target of concern is only truth and nothing else. All character improvement is thus left behind, to function as a mere side effect, in the seeming paradoxes and confusions of partial personality and world.

*Question:* With regard to memories of the past, does Shrī Ātmānanda acknowledge the traditional vāsanas and samskāras of past lives? This is asked because I find myself confronting an outside world of situations that are not warranted by the memories of this life alone.

*Answer:* Yes, Shrī Ātmānanda did sometimes use ideas of transmigration and he did have insights into the past life samskāras of particular persons. But he did not generally require or even encourage his disciples to get involved with this conception of past lives. In fact, he specifically told his disciples that they would be better off seeing this conception as a metaphor for the more immediate death and rebirth that each person keeps experiencing in the present – as each thought dies into pure consciousness, from which alone all thoughts continue to be born.

*Question:* There is a visualization of my body with only the sense of tactility supporting it.... The object slowly vanishes, taken in by the light that lights it up. Then, there remains only the light.... I am pure light. No thoughts that worry about its physical properties of size and magnitude of brilliance. Only light. Let us call it the light of awareness....

Then, something unfortunate happens. The oblivion of sleep greedily gulps the light down, making the whole scenario a blankness about which I can be aware only when I awake. That is no different from an ignorant man’s sleep! How then to sink down and down a la Tennyson? Any personal tips that you have would be really helpful to all of us.... is there a need to *sleep knowingly* whatever that implies?

*Answer:* I use the word ‘visualization’ in a way that is quite different from your description above. What you seem to be describing is a process of meditation which progresses from bodily tactility to clear light and pure awareness, before getting engulfed in the blankness of sleep.

For me, the word ‘visualization’ refers to a timeless understanding that is reached at the background of experience, where all sense of time and process has completely disappeared. That timeless understanding is not built up through any meditative process. Rather, it’s more like a sudden throwback into timelessness, which somehow follows doubting reason or some other stimulus to inner reflection.

And this ‘throwback’ happens in a quirky and paradoxical way that undermines any talk of its location or duration in time. It must after all be a paradox to talk of when or for how long one has been thrown out of time. Or, indeed, to talk of what one is in that timelessness – where no change occurs so as to make comparison possible.

The throwback is indeed into utter dissolution of appearances, and in that sense it is into an oblivion of the world. But it is not into a blank and meaningless nothingness. Instead, it is into peace and light, which somehow means just that for which all things are done. And it means that without saying it, or thinking it, or feeling it.

But, of course, it is completely absurd and utterly inadequate to describe such a visualization in this way. The whole thing happens in a flash, so that it’s over as soon as it started. And there can be no memory of it afterwards in mind. So it always must get lost and quite misrepresented, whenever it is drawn out into some long-winded description in words, or when some big thing is made of it in grand ideas or sentimental feelings.

Such a visualization does its work best when it is done quietly, by relaxing into it. That is the aim of trying to ‘sleep knowingly’. This sādhanā is intended to promote an increasingly relaxed visualization of the truth. When the visualization gets to be completely relaxed, the visualization occurs with utter spontaneity, of its own accord. Then it is permanent, with no effort required to induce it. The sādhanā has then dissolved, established in the truth.

## Glossary

- advaita*: non-duality, in particular the non-duality of knowing subject and known object
- advaitin*: a non-dualist
- ākāsha*: ‘ether’, the pervading continuity of space and time, fifth of the traditional five elements
- ānanda*: happiness, that aspect of truth which is approached through value and feeling, as the underlying motivation of all thoughts and actions (see also glossary entry ‘sat-cit-ānanda’)
- ānanda-maya kosha*: the covering of happiness, the inmost of five coverings (koshas) of personality
- ātmā*: true self, the inmost knowing subject found unmixed with any object other than itself
- ātma-vicāra*: self-enquiry (see also glossary entry ‘vicāra’)
- ātmic*: concerned with the true self called ‘ātmā’
- bhakta*: a devotee
- bhakti*: devotion
- brahman*: literally the ‘expanded’, and hence a term used to convey an expanded concept of reality that includes everything in the entire universe (see page 2)
- caturtha*: literally the ‘fourth’, and hence a term used in the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* to denote an unchanging reality beyond the three changing states of waking, dream and deep sleep (see pages 50-51 and also the glossary entry ‘turīya’)
- cit*: consciousness, that aspect of truth which is approached through discerning thought and reflective reason, as the knowing illumination of all perceived and thought and felt appearances (see also glossary entry ‘sat-cit-ānanda’)
- dvaita*: duality
- hridaya*: heart
- Īshvara*: God, as the ultimate and final Lord
- jīva*: a living personality, resulting from false identification of true self with body, sense or mind
- jīvan-mukta*: one who has attained to ‘moksha’ or ‘freedom’, while seeming to live in a limited personality
- jnyāna*: knowledge
- jnyāni*: literally a ‘knower’, and hence a sage who is established in non-dual truth
- kāraṇa*: cause
- kāraṇa guru*: a spiritual teacher who shows that final truth which is the cause of all appearances
- kāraṇa sharīra*: the ‘causal body’, made up from hidden seeds of potency which have been sown by previous actions and which will get manifested later on (see the glossary entry ‘samskāra’)
- kartri-tantra*: see page 58
- kūṭastha*: see pages 39-41
- mahāvākya*: literally ‘great statement’, and hence a term used to denote a major aphorism from the Upanishads
- mārga*: path, way
- māyā*: illusory appearance
- moksha*: liberation, in particular that liberation which is attained by realizing truth
- mukti*: freedom (very similar in meaning to ‘moksha’, as in the glossary entry above)
- nirvikalpa*: unmixed with conception in the mind
- nirvikalpa samādhi*: a state of absorption where all conception is found absent
- ‘Om’: chanted syllable, uniting the sound elements ‘a’, ‘u’ and ‘mmm...’ and thus representing the background reality that carries on through the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep (see the glossary entries ‘caturtha’ and ‘turīya’)
- prajnyāna*: consciousness, as that principle of knowing which is common to all experience
- prākṛit*: vernacular language
- prakṛiti*: nature, as the underlying principle that manifests itself in all activity (kriti)
- prakriyā*: literally a ‘procedure’, and hence a term used in Advaita philosophy to denote a way of enquiry that proceeds to-

- wards truth – there being many such ways, each with its own special method and usage of terms
- prema*: love
- purusha*: the knowing principle of consciousness, from which all nature’s activities are illuminated, in every personality and thus in everyone’s experience of the physical and mental universe
- sādhaka*: one who is engaged in sādhanā or spiritual work (see the glossary entry ‘sādhanā’ below)
- sādhanā*: spiritual work towards realization of uncompromised truth
- sage*: one whose personality is firmly and irrevocably established in non-dual truth
- sahaja*: literally ‘with birth’, and hence ‘natural’ in the sense of spontaneously inherent in one’s own true nature
- sahaja state*: the ‘natural state’, the state of a sage who is established in truth and whose actions thus express that truth, with a complete and utter spontaneity
- sākshi*: a witness, who knows quietly and impartially, quite uninvolved with the noisy distractions and partialities of perception, thought and feeling in our bodies and our minds
- samādhi*: literally ‘absorption’, a term used to denote a state of mental absorption that is achieved through meditative practice
- Sāmkhya*: literally ‘reckoning’, and hence a term used for a school of thought that provides an analytic account of how the manifested universe evolves, from a division of two basic principles called ‘purusha’ or ‘illuminating consciousness’ and ‘prakṛiti’ or ‘self-manifesting nature’ (see the glossary entries ‘purusha’ and ‘prakṛiti’)
- samskāra*: literally ‘with action’, and hence a term used for a tendency of character that an action leaves behind, as a seed of latent potency that gets manifested in what happens later on (see also the glossary entries ‘kāraṇa sharīra’ and ‘vāsana’)
- sat*: existence, that aspect of truth which is approached through ongoing life and effective action, as the unchanged reality shown by all changing happenings in world and personality (see also the glossary entry ‘sat-cit-ānanda’ below)
- sat-cit-ānanda*: truth seen approached as ‘existence-consciousness-happiness’, these being three aspects corresponding to the yoga mārga or the way of union, the jnyāna mārga or the way of knowledge and the bhakti mārga or the way of devotion (see also the glossary entries ‘sat’, ‘cit’ and ‘ānanda’)
- sattva*: the essential quality (-tva) of true existence (sat) which shines by itself, as its own source of knowing light, from where its life is expressed and its appearances are lit
- sharīra*: body
- sthāna*: state
- sthita-prajnya*: literally ‘standing in knowledge’, and hence a term used to describe a sage who is established in truth (see page 59 and also the glossary entries ‘sage’ and ‘sahaja state’)
- Svāmi*: honorific title for a ‘sannyāsi’ or a ‘renouncer’
- svarūpa*: literally ‘own form’, and hence used philosophically as a term for the true nature of a reality that is known beneath all outward forms, by realizing what it is in itself (i.e. as a ‘thing in itself’)
- turīya*: literally the ‘fourth’, and hence a term used to denote nirvikalpa samādhi, as a fourth state beyond the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep (see pages 50-51 and also the glossary entries ‘nirvikalpa samādhi’ and ‘caturtha’)
- turīyātīta*: beyond (-atīta) the turīya state (see glossary entry ‘turīya’ above)
- Upanishads*: philosophical texts at the end of the Vedas
- vāsana*: similar in meaning to what is described in the glossary entry for ‘samskāra’, but indicating a more deeply residual aptitude that’s left behind in the conditioning of character by action and happening (see also the glossary entry ‘kāraṇa sharīra’)
- vastu-tantra*: see page 58
- Vedānta*: philosophy of the Upanishads, conceived as a culmination (-anta) of the Vedas (see glossary entry ‘Upanishads’)

*vedāntin*: a Vedānta philosopher (see glossary entry ‘Vedānta’)

*vicāra*: literally ‘reflective thought or questioning’, and hence a term for the reflective enquiry that Shri Ātmānanda called ‘higher logic’ or ‘higher reasoning’

*vicāra mārḡa*: what Shri Ātmānanda called the ‘direct path’, the way (mārḡa) of ‘vicāra’ or ‘reflective enquiry’

*vidyā-vritti*: literally the ‘functioning (vritti) of knowledge (vidyā)’, and hence a term for the higher reason of reflective enquiry – conceived as an expression of underlying knowledge which arises from below, so as to reflect the investigation back into an impartial truth beneath all partiality of body, sense and mind

*vijnyāna*: discerning (vi-) knowledge (jnyāna)

*vishayin*: the subject, as opposed to a ‘vishaya’ or an ‘object’

*Vishishtādvaita*: Qualified (vishishṭa-) non-dualism (advaita)

*yoga*: literally ‘union’ or ‘harnessing’, and hence a term describing an approach of meditative practice that harnesses all bodily and mental faculties – back into an originating unity where knowing and being are identical, beneath all differing and changing acts of world and personality

*yogi* or *yogin*: a yogic practitioner

*yogic*: related to yoga