

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati PRATAH SMARANAM

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The Self merely witnesses the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep

Turīyam is the fourth state. It is the fourth with reference to the three other states that are witnessed: jāgarat or the waking state, svapna or the dream state and suṣupta or the deep sleep state. Yatsvapnajāgarasusuptamavaiti nityam, that which always witnesses the dream, waking, and deep sleep stages. Yat nityam avaiti, it is that which always witnesses.

We go through these three states everyday. Who is it that goes through these experiences? It is the one who experiences the waking, dream, and deep sleep states. Is the one who experiences the waking state the same person who experiences the dream state? In other words, when you dream, do you remember the waking state? You may be a physician or an attorney in the waking state, but you may potentially be an entirely different person in your dream. You may have had a delicious dinner just before going to sleep; yet, you could be hungry in your dream! Thus, the stomach of the waker may be full, but the dreamer may experience hunger. Therefore, is it not that the waker is a totally different person from the dreamer?

The dream appears to be very real during the experience of the dream. While dreaming, nobody says that the dream is a projection of his or her mind. If someone hurts you or praises you, you do experience unhappiness or happiness. Only when you wake up are you wise, not when you are dreaming! Thus, when the dreamer comes, the waker goes away. You do not remember any part of the waker at all in your dream. This is akin to the complete disappearance of the beggar-actor when the actor plays the role of a king. When the same actor performs the roles of a beggar, king, and minister, each of these three roles excludes the other. When the king appears, the beggar is gone; when the minister appears, the king and the beggar are gone, and when the beggar appears, the king and the minister are gone. Similarly, when I go into the deep sleep state, there is neither the dreamer nor the waker. When I wake up there is no dreamer or sleeper either. Now, I know myself as the waker, dreamer, and sleeper.

Turīyam ātmatatvam. While the roles of king, beggar, and minister exclude one another, is there someone who is not excluded or displaced? Is it not the actor? To illustrate with a different example, a bangle is different from an earring or a chain. When I think of the bangle, I don't think of the earring or the chain; when I think of the chain, I don't think of the other two. Thus, each one excludes the other two. All these cannot exclude one thing however: the gold. The bangle can declare it is not the earring or the chain, but it cannot say that it is not gold. The bangle cannot be without gold. That which cannot be excluded in all these mutually exclusive and changing roles or states is the gold. In Vedantic terms, the bangle or earring is superimposed upon the gold. Is the bangle an entity different from the gold? Is it independent of the gold? No; if you remove the gold, nothing remains. Whereas the gold can be without the bangle, the bangle cannot be without the gold. That is why the bangle can be replaced by other names and forms such as an earring or necklace.

Each name and form displaces other names and forms, but its content cannot be displaced. Gold is the content of the bangle, earrings, necklace, etc. It can be called the adhistāna or substratum upon which all the names and forms are superimposed.

The separation of the substratum or satyam from the superimposition or mithyā has to take place in the mind

The substratum cannot be displaced; only the superimposition can be displaced. In Vedantic terms, gold is called satyam and the bangle is mithyā. Mithyā is incidental; it comes and goes. When a bangle is melted down, it can take another form, e.g., an earring, chain or necklace. Names and forms are subject to being displaced or changed; they are limited because they are incidental. Therefore, what is inherent in the ornament? The gold is inherent. For example, a crystal is inherently colorless and transparent, whereas the colors it acquires, red or yellow, are incidental. You should know the difference between the inherent and the incidental. The inherent is called satyam and the incidental is called mithyā. The inherent is called the substratum and the incidental is called the superimposition. Similarly, the actor is the substratum and his roles are but incidental.

We find the combination of satyam and mithyā everywhere and that is the cause of confusion. Satyam never appears by itself; it always puts on the costume of mithyā. Without mithyā, we can't see satyam. For example, gold always comes with a name and form, just as the actor typically appears in a role. That is why viveka is required. When you look at the beggar on the stage, the separation takes place in your mind. The beggar is only a costume. The separation of the substratum from the superimposition has to take place in our minds.

The waker, dreamer, and sleeper are like the roles of beggar, king, and minister. Are they three? Suppose you have to order a cup of tea, would you order a separate cup each for the beggar, king, and minister? Even though they appear to be three entities, there is only one. The actor is called the fourth! However, there are not four people, but only one person. As long as we think that they are independent entities, the teacher points out the actor as the fourth one; the one who is in and through all the three roles. There is only one; the other three are only appearances. Is the fourth one affected by the other three? No. The virtues and vices of the roles do not touch him. The fourth is unaffected by the three roles. While supporting the three, he remains independent of them. Those three cannot exist without him, but he can exist without the three roles. The dependence of the roles upon the actor is mithyā and the independence of the actor from the roles is satyam.

Thus, there is really one, not three. There is someone who acts as a waker by identifying with the gross body; he acts as a dreamer when he identifies with the subtle body, and acts as a sleeper when he identifies with the causal body. Is he free of these three bodies and states? He is independent of them. He supports all of them. He is the substratum of each and is not limited by them at all! He is one who witnesses and illumines all the three states. Why do we call him a witness? A witness is always different from that which is witnessed. The seer is always different from what he sees. A knower is different from what he knows. The Self is the seer, knower, witness, and illuminator of the waker, dreamer, and sleeper. That is, he is different from all of them, independent of all of them, and unaffected by all of them. He is like the actor who goes through different costumes without being affected by them.

Witnessing is not an act and the Self, in simply being, illumines the three states

Nityam avaiti, he always witnesses. To illumine or shine is his nature. Witnessing is not an act. We commonly say the sun shines, illumines the whole world, etc. Illumine is a verb, and a verb always denotes an action. In Sanskrit, it is called a kriya-pada; kriya is action and pada is verb. When I say I am eating the food, it means I am performing the action of eating. Similarly, when we say that the sun illumines the world, it means that the sun performs the act of illuminating the world. But does the sun have to 'do' something to illumine the world? All the sun has to do is shine; illumination takes place. Although we use the word illumination, no action is actually involved. The sun, simply in being the sun, illumines the whole world. Similarly, the Self, in simply being, witnesses or illumines the waking, dream, and deep sleep states. Therefore, avaiti, he witnesses. Even in using the word witness, we are assigning some kind of an action to the Self, some kind of a role. However, he is not a witness. All that is said is that the waking, dream and deep sleep states shine in his light.

I am neither the gross nor the subtle body

Tadbrahma niṣkalamaham. Tadbrahma aham, that limitlessness, I am. brahman means limitless in the sense of bigness, growth. I am that brahman, which is unqualified or limitless. If I am limitless, what am I not? I am nothing else but limitless. What am I not then? Na ca bhūtasāṅghaḥ. Bhūta is elements, sāṅghaḥ is an aggregate. I am not an aggregate of elements, e.g., space, air, fire, water, and earth that make up this body. The gross and subtle states are made up of the five elements. Our subtle body is an aggregate of the subtle components of the five elements, while our gross body is an aggregate of the gross components of the five elements. When it is said here that I am not the aggregate of the five elements, it means that I am neither the gross nor the subtle body. I am not anātmā. I am the one who is the witness or illuminator, the one who imparts this existence. I am that brahman.

Niṣkalam. Kala means part and therefore, niṣkalam is part-less, undivided, or whole. I am not a part of brahman. I am not a part of God. Who am I? I am the whole, undivided aspect of God.

This is what Śrī Śaṅkarācārya asks us to meditate upon at dawn. The first verse, thus, declares that I am sat cit ānanda. I am the sat cit sukham, Existence, Awareness, and Happiness. I am not this not this gross body, the physical body; neither am I the subtle body, the mind. I am the witness, the illuminator of the gross and subtle bodies¹.

¹ Transcribed by Richa Choudhry and edited by Krishnakumar (KK) S. Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.