

CONSCIOUSNESS PART 2

Higher states of consciousness: Advaita

The example given last week of the 'core consciousness' described by Damasio (which is present while reading a passage from a book) evoked a range of reactions from "that's not at all what we mean by consciousness" to "everything is consciousness", with "it's consciousness expressed at a low level" somewhere in between. As we are looking at the current scientific and philosophical understanding of consciousness, at some point we will have to be careful to define what we mean by consciousness, but first we clearly need to take a look at how consciousness is described in our two teachings.

We might bear in mind Dr Roles' last words on the subject of consciousness, and at the end of our study try to understand what they mean:

There is only one consciousness. The levels are levels of impediment to that consciousness. Everything is that consciousness. That is what we have to feel and know. [82/23]

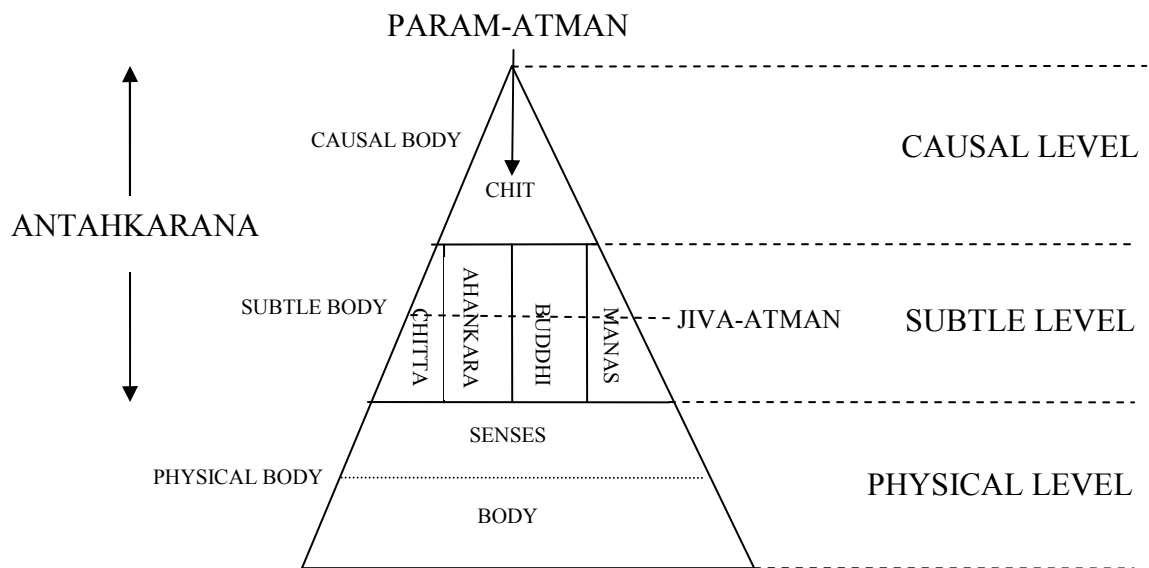
In Advaita it is said that the nature of the *Param-Atman* is *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Being-Life Force-Bliss). These three pervade the *Antahkarana* (soul or mind). As far as consciousness is concerned, it is the Chit or Life Force which is the active element.

HH. Consciousness, *Chit* and *Chitta*. It is important to be clear about *Chit* and *Chitta*, which are quite different. *Chit* is the Chetan power - a property of the Atman - which illuminates everything and makes everything go - without which everything would come to a standstill, despite there being matter and energy. *Chitta* is merely a part of the mind. *Chit* is like the sun, the real source of light, and *Chitta* is only a mirror, which merely reflects it, and from which the body, the mind, change under the influence of sensations arising in our consciousness. This changeability of the *Chitta* is due to its false sense of ownership over or association with the sensations in question. This is the stray state of the *Chitta*.

But pure Consciousness of the Atman, as you say, is altogether different. It never changes. Pure Atman does not feel any "I'ness" with what the physical senses perceive around them. Pure Consciousness of the Atman is also such. Also the Atman and the consciousness of the Atman always go together, being more or less identical. Therefore, it is said to be the embodiment of all enlightenment, truth, power and joy. As such, it is always completely steady, unchanging, flawless and free.

Chitta when purified and stilled as a reflection of pure Consciousness of the Atman, behaves in such a way that all its behaviours, feelings, thoughts, etc., are at once well settled, organized and deep - so that they are invariably convincing, beautiful and beneficial. The best way to attain this condition is to give up desires and intentions, and to adopt pure and natural ways. [Record 30.05.69]

A very rough diagrammatic view is shown below:



We perceive that in the depth of our being lies the *Param-Atman* (or Real Self). The energy of consciousness is fed from the *Param-Atman* into the deepest part of the soul at the causal level (the causal body). In the ordinary state we have no direct access to this level. Our mind operates at the subtle level (the subtle body), and this is where the *Antahkarana* divides into the four functional elements or roles of *Chitta*, *Buddhi*, *Manas* and *Ahankara*. The ordinary self, the ego (*Jiva-Atman*), can perhaps be understood as a layer of the subtle body which floats between being drawn to the physical body and attending to the *Param-Atman*. The diagram also shows the physical level, composed of the senses and the body. (It should be stressed that this diagram shows things as we see them in our ordinary state)

What we experience as consciousness at the subtle level is immensely variable. The mind can run on a high octane fuel and when it does everything goes quickly and smoothly. But most of the time we seem destined to run on low-grade diesel with its attendant sluggishness, clatter and smoke! In Advaita, this is explained by the ‘fuel’ being composed of a cocktail of the three *Gunas*: *Sattva* (peacefulness), *Rajas* (excitement) or *Tamas* (inertia). We can judge our state of consciousness by the quality of our attention, which the Shankaracharya defined as ‘applied consciousness’ and he had this to say about it:

There is no attention in *Rajas* and *Tamas*. *Rajas* is the state of movement when everything is moving, and *Tamas* is the state of inertia, nothing moves, but nothing exists - rather dead. So Attention can only be with *Sattva*, and Attention can only be helped by *Sattva*. [Record 15.10.62]

There are a number of states of consciousness. There are some abnormal states (fainting, unconsciousness, trance, hallucinations), but leaving these aside, there is according to Advaita the following states: deep sleep, sleep with dreams, waking state, *Samadhi* and *Turiya*. In the

waking state, the ordinary self (*Jiva-Atman*) lives in the subtle body (the part of the *Antahkarana* at the subtle level). In deep sleep the ordinary self goes to rest in the causal body. In sleep with dreams, the self is withdrawn from the external world but is still active internally. In *Samadhi*, the ordinary self enters the causal body and unites with the *Param-Atman* during the waking state (and this is the main purpose of meditation). There is one further state beyond *Samadhi* – enlightenment (*Turiya*). The Shankaracharya again emphasised that consciousness in the different states depends on the *Gunas*:

The states of consciousness experienced in deep sleep, dreams, the day-time state, spiritual awakening, *Samadhi*, etc., are governed by the influx of *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* from people, situations and events. [Record 30.8.70]

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Even within our ever-changing consciousness in the waking state there are glimpses of a higher consciousness. Quite why these happen we do not know. Here is one described by Rupert Brooke:

When you were there, and you, and you,
Happiness crowned the night; I too,
Laughing and looking, one of all,
I watched the quivering lamplight fall
On plate and flowers and pouring tea
And cup and cloth; and they and we
Flung all the dancing moments by
With jest and glitter. Lip and eye
Flashed on the glory, shone and cried,
Improvident, unmemoried;
And fitfully and like a flame
The light of laughter went and came.
Proud in their careless transience moved
The changing faces that I loved.

Till suddenly, and otherwhence,
I looked upon your innocence.
For lifted clear and still and strange
From the dark woven flow of change
Under a vast and starless sky
I saw the immortal moment lie.
One instant I, an instant, knew
As God knows all. And it and you
I, above Time, oh, blind! could see
In witless immortality.
I saw the marble cup; the tea,
Hung on the air, an amber stream;
I saw the fire's unglittering gleam,
The painted flame, the frozen smoke.
No more the flooding lamplight broke

On flying eyes and lips and hair;
But lay, but slept unbroken there,
On stiller flesh, and body breathless,
And lips and laughter stayed and deathless,
And words on which no silence grew.
Light was more alive than you.

For suddenly, and otherwhence,
I looked on your magnificence.
I saw the stillness and the light,
And you, august, immortal, white,
Holy and strange; and every glint
Posture and jest and thought and tint
Freed from the mask of transiency,
Triumphant in eternity,
Immote, immortal.

Dazed at length
Human eyes grew, mortal strength
Wearied; and Time began to creep.
Change closed about me like a sleep.
Light glinted on the eyes I loved.
The cup was filled. The bodies moved.
The drifting petal came to ground.
The laughter chimed its perfect round.
The broken syllable was ended.
And I, so certain and so friended,
How could I cloud, or how distress,
The heaven of your unconsciousness?
Or shake at Time's sufficient spell,
Stammering of lights unutterable?
The eternal holiness of you,
The timeless end, you never knew,
The peace that lay, the light that shone.
You never knew that I had gone
A million miles away, and stayed
A million years. The laughter played
Unbroken round me; and the jest
Flashed on. And we that knew the best
Down wonderful hours grew happier yet.
I sang at heart, and talked, and eat,
And lived from laugh to laugh, I too,
When you were there, and you, and you.

Dining-room tea by Rupert Brooke