

# *The Eternal Message of the Gita*

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## 4. The Non-manifested

*At daybreak all that is manifested is born from what is called the non-manifested (avyakta). At nightfall the manifestation merges again into the non-manifested.*

*But, superior to this non-manifested, there exists another Non-manifested, eternal, which does not perish, when all beings perish. (Gita, VIII. 18 & 20.)*

Quite naturally, the 'daybreak' corresponds to the manifested state of waking (*jagrat avasthâ*), and 'nightfall' to the non-manifested state of deep sleep (*sushupti avasthâ*). Normally the non-manifested is considered to be the source, the cause of the manifested which, at a certain time, is again re-absorbed into it. As far as the dream state (*svapna avasthâ*) is concerned, it is part of the manifested (*cf. the Karika of Gaudapada and Shankara's commentary on the Mandukya Upanishad*).

One may find it surprising that, in the *Gita*, no mention is made of the method of *avasthâtraya*—the study of the three

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  - 2 This the 4<sup>th</sup> of a series of independent commentaries by the Swami on various themes of the Gita-teachings published in French from Gretz in their *Bulletin des Activités Culturelles* No.4, December 1955. English translation and edit by André van den Brink and René Tien of Centre Védantique Ramakrichna..

states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep—while other texts, such as the *Uddhava Gita*, emphasize its significance and importance. This objection disappears, however, if one looks upon the states of waking and dreaming as being of the same nature inasmuch as *both* represent the manifested aspect, while deep sleep represents the non-manifested aspect. Similarly we may note that the *Gita* makes no mention of another classic position of Vedanta, according to which it is proper to make a distinction between the ultimate Reality—Brahman, and the apparent reality—Maya (*paramarthika satta* and *vyavaharika satta*). The *Gita*, however, is not a philosophical treatise like the *Viveka-chudamani* or the *Panchadasi*, but is giving an overview of the conflicts, of the contradictions of life, and their solutions. The commentaries, the later developments that were inspired by the living words of Sri Krishna which were full of wisdom, gave birth to various philosophies, but the *Gita* itself does not directly refer to the classical methods of Vedanta, whether it be the study of the three states (*avasthâtraya*) or the proper study of the superimpositions (*adhyaropa-apavada*).

These methods are effective means for attaining the truth, because the human mind indeed feels the need to understand life through a system. The intuition of the Real itself comes, most often, only at the end of a long search carried out according to the particular mental structure of the seeker. The methods of Vedanta, having no other object than to awaken us to the ultimate comprehension, take this mental structure into account.

Before studying the notions of 'manifested' and 'non-manifested' with the help of the method of *avasthâtraya* which is metaphysical and non-causal, we shall first explain more fully the point of view of *adhyaropa-apavada* which is theological and causal, and which looks upon Brahman, the Reality,

as the primal Cause. According to this view our intuition of the Reality is veiled by *samkalpa* and *vikalpa* (volition and imagination) which are the effects of Maya, the apparent reality, and thus Brahman, the ultimate Reality, can only be realized by *transcending* Maya. This theory is illustrated by a classic example: When, in the twilight, we mistake a rope for a snake, the snake is 'superimposed' on the rope. The snake has to disappear so that the rope may appear, for one cannot see the snake and the rope at the same time. In the same way Maya, the apparent reality, is superimposed on Brahman, the ultimate Reality.

The realisation of Brahman through the negation of Maya is a concept common to the two methods quoted above. They differ, however, in the meaning given to the term 'Maya'. To Gaudapada who expounds the method of *avasthâtraya* in the *Mandukya Upanishad*, everything that is perceived is Maya. So, from this point of view, there is *sameness of nature* between the states of waking and dreaming, both being characterized by the perception of objects and thoughts. The theory of superimposition, on the other hand, accords a higher degree of reality to the waking state which it sees as the *cause* of the dream.

Indeed, most of the time we are occupied by the search for the cause, for there is in us a natural need for explanation and satisfaction, which is an emotional reaction of our nature. Only a *dhira buddhi*, a man of superior intelligence, has the courage to discard the prejudices, the erroneous notions which are the result of our emotional reactions. He is no longer bound by an egocentric view of the world, nor by a belief in the absolute reality of the waking state. Such renunciation, however extreme it may seem, nevertheless constitutes the indispensable condition for following the method of *avasthâtraya*.

Nothing would appear to be more shocking to common sense than to find the same value being attributed to the dream and the waking state! And, surely, from the point of view of the waking state, the dream appears as a remembrance, the reality of which is completely subjective. But the search for the truth according to the method of *avasthâtraya* requires one to liberate oneself from the notions of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity'. Since we are dealing here with a *direct* apprehension of the Reality, any intermediary will be repudiated, in particular the intellectual analysis which divides, which classifies, and which establishes this distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective'. It can give but a *partial* view of the truth.

Shankara comments as follows on verse 8.18: 'The non-manifested is the sleep of the Creator. At daybreak, that is to say, when Brahmâ wakes up, it is from this non-manifested that all creatures—animated and non-animated—are born. At nightfall, when Brahmâ goes to sleep, all manifestation dissolves into the non-manifested, *avyakta*.<sup>3</sup> One sees that Shankara is looking at the macro-cosmic aspect of the question that occupies us. But, since this waking and sleeping condition of Brahmâ can only be studied on the authority of the Scriptures, we shall be able to understand the commentary better by looking at the microcosmic aspect, that is to say, the individual aspect where, every day, we have the experience of waking and sleeping. Our sleep then corresponds to the non-manifested and our waking state to the manifes-

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3 From the cosmic point of view Brahmâ, the creator God, is regarded as the Cause of the world, and his sleep is the *mahâpralaya*, the cessation of all temporal processes (*kalpa*). This sleep of God corresponds to *mulavidya*, the universal ignorance, and our own sleep to *tulavidya*, individual ignorance. Of course these theological notions do not stand the criticism effected by the *buddhi*, the higher reason.

ted, and in this manifested we are to include our dreams as well.

Since the activity of our mind is pursued within the domain of causality, we imagine the manifested and the non-manifested to be a *succession* of states. *Avyakta*, the non-manifested, then seems to be the *cause* of *vyakta*, the manifestation, which would thus exist in *avyakta* in its potential state. In verse 8.20 Sri Krishna distinguishes an *other* non-manifested which is imperishable. That which does not perish has never taken birth. Therefore, Shankara says, we are dealing here with the *akshara*, the supreme Brahman (Parabrahman). In his commentary Shankara adds: 'Although different from *avyakta*, one could think of it as being of the same nature as *avyakta*. In order to take away this ambiguity Lord Krishna speaks of "an *other* non-manifested", thereby indicating that its nature is different from that of *avyakta* which is ignorance itself. The *akshara* does not perish, when all beings, from Brahmâ to the most minute, have perished.'

The one object of the *Gita* is to show how to attain to the highest freedom, how to escape suffering and successive rebirths (*samsara*). In verse 8.21, Sri Krishna teaches that the *akshara* is the highest state that one may realize: 'This supreme, imperishable Non-manifested is the final goal. Those who attain It do not come back any more. That is My supreme abode.' Ramana Maharshi spoke of it in these terms: 'The non-manifested also exists in your waking state. Even now you are in the non-manifested. You have to become conscious of it. It is a mistake to think that one enters *sushupti* (deep sleep) and that one leaves it. To be conscious of *sushupti* in the *jagrat* (the waking state), this is what is called "*jagrat-sushupti*" or "*samadhi*".' Ramana Maharshi is speaking here of *sahaja samadhi* which he distinguishes from *kevala samadhi* or *yoga samadhi*.

What discipline, then, is one to follow in order to attain to this supreme Non-manifested? Sri Krishna shows it to us in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter, where He speaks at length about the 'field' (*kshetra*) and the 'Knower of the field' (*kshetrajna*) (cf. Chapter V with the commentary on verse 3.2). The *akshara* is attained when the higher *buddhi* is awakened and the edifice of our mental structure collapses.

As long as this mental structure prevails, all our experiences are interpreted in terms of concepts (time, space and causality) and divided into various categories. Thus we create the notions of waking, dream and deep sleep. But, if we look at our experience of the manifested and the non-manifested in its intrinsic aspect, we find that it concerns a *Totality* (*sarvam*) and not a *totalisation* of different elements. Whereas the non-manifested (*avyakta*) spoken of in verse 8.18, is opposed to the manifested (*vyakta*). The Non-manifested (*akshara*) of verse 8. 20 (the non-manifested of which Ramana Maharshi speaks) is the intuition of the One who is without any opposite, who cannot give any hold to our attempts at fragmentation. When the ego (being the outcome of ignorance) establishes a subject-object rapport within a space-time reality, it finds the indivisible All apparently divided into past, present and future, and into innumerable parts: 'Indivisible, He dwells in all beings as if He were divided. He is what supports all beings; He destroys them and gives birth to them' (*Gita*, XIII. 16). But, in fact, the Reality *cannot* be fragmented, and the different states which we think to be passing through in the course of our lives, are not really distinct from one another. These, the *Mandukya Upanishad* says, do not appear as the four feet of a cow, but as one and the same coin that has been artificially divided into several parts (see Shankara's commentary on the 2<sup>nd</sup> *mantra* of the *Mandukya Upanishad*).

Indeed, whatever the divisions which the number 'one' may be subject to, it will always be enlisted with the numerator, for 'one' cannot be fragmented. (This 'one' who is not admitted into any one series, who is not the 'one' that is normally followed by 2, 3, 4, etc., corresponds to the intuition that we may have of the non-duality [*advaita*] inherent in each experience.) This intuition is a *direct* knowledge *without* any mental processing, infinitely more real than the sensory experience. Sri Ramakrishna, to whom Narendra (the later Swami Vivekananda) put the question: 'Have you seen God?', replied: 'I see God more clearly than I see you.' This God is the *akshara*, the non-manifested of which Ramana Maharshi was said to be conscious of. But here, as one may expect, it concerns an impersonal comprehension that does not admit of a perceiver nor of an object perceived.

Gaudapada and Shankara endeavour to take us to that comprehension by demonstrating that all that which is perceived—the spectacle—is *unreal* (*Mandukya Karika*, II.4). On the other hand, that which is *not* perceived is the Real, the spectator who is eternally present. It may seem paradoxical and even absurd to enunciate such a proposition: 'What is perceived is unreal, and what is not perceived is real.' By 'what is not perceived' one should understand 'That which cannot be *perceived* in any way'. The objection which brings in the classic examples of unreality such as 'the horns of a hare' etc., claiming that this line of reasoning would accord reality to these horns, because one doesn't perceive them, would be void: The very fact of their being conceived is enough to deprive them of all reality, for a concept, too, is an idea that is *perceived*.

The spectator is not a particular entity who would stand aside from the spectacle, for in that case he would immediately become part of the spectacle and cease to be a spec-

tator. Everything which appears in this universe, both in the mental and in the physical world, belongs to the spectacle. As to 'That' which is conscious of the spectacle, no one can apprehend that, no one can describe that: Its very nature is *never to be perceived* and, at the same time, *never to be missing*.

With the spectator and the spectacle it is as with the clay and the multiple objects that may be fashioned out of clay: The clay *in itself* is never perceived. What one is seeing, a jar for example, is but a form of it. Can one say, nevertheless, that the clay is an entity *distinct* from the jar? *There are no two things*: There is not the clay *and* the jar. The clay actually *appears* under this particular form, but there has never been and there will never be anything but clay: *It is the infinite possibility of form*. Therefore, we will never be able to perceive the spectator who is Being itself; we only know its manifestations. At the same time Being can never be absent: Nothing can exist without That, nothing exists *but* That. What, then, is the value of the spectacle from this point of view? There is *only* Being, the spectator, and *the infinite possibility of spectacles*.

In verse 2.16 we find this existential perspective again (*cf* chapter 6.2). In this context Shankara shows how, in each act of perception, a *double* consciousness, a *double* vision occurs: the vision of that which changes (the unreal), and the vision of that which remains (the Real). In fact, in the same act of perception five essential characteristics may be distinguished: *asti* (Existence), *bhati* (Luminosity), *priya* (Love), *nâma* (name), and *rupa* (form). The latter two attributes which correspond to the manifested, particularize the object and, as a result, permit it to be known *as* an object. Our experience of space and time is conditioned by the vision which changes, that of *nama-rupa*. On the other hand, the intuition



of the Real (*asti*, *bhati* and *priya*) is non-dual and transcends the notions of time and space. But the power of Maya is such that man becomes attached to that which perishes. Only the knowledge of the *akshara* can remove this ignorance. The enquiry (*vichara*) which gradually eliminates the emotional reaction and the attachment to the perishable form will make the seeker conscious of the sole reality of Atman, the Self.

'There are two sorts of visions', Shankara writes in his commentary on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (1.4.10), 'the ordinary vision and the real vision. The ordinary vision is a function of the mind, being effected through the organ of sight. It is an *action* and, therefore, it has a beginning and an end. But *Atman* is the witness of this ordinary vision, and its vision is like the heat and the light of fire: Being the very essence of the witness, it has neither beginning nor end. Because it *appears* to be connected with the ordinary vision (which is a product and but a mode of it), the real vision is called "*the Witness*". In fact, it is *itself* that which is being differentiated into witness and vision.'

The vision of Atman is the knowledge of the impersonal, the knowledge of the *akshara*. This is the highest realisation which man may attain to. He who reaches that state will never be deceived any more by the appearances. 'That,' Sri Krishna says, 'is My supreme abode.'



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