

THE PRACTICE



Chapter 9

STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

I. INTRODUCTION

Here, we will try to draw a “map” of the different states of manasic consciousness one has to climb on the way towards *buddhi*. Familiarity with the main features of these states and how to work on each one may help provide a sense of direction and guidance in our spiritual journey. (p. 131)

II. SCALES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Words to Know

scale – is used here with the meaning of “a graduated series or scheme of rank or order”

apperception – self-perception, conscious action ... when attention is fixed on the perception (*The Inner Group Teachings*, pp. 64-65)

Realms – fields or dimensions—Physical, Psychic, Intellectual, Spiritual. (ch. 1, p. 5)

Name Game

5th scale – sense-thought – lower *manas* – self-centeredness – identification – mechanical reaction

6th scale – volition [will] – *manas-antaḥkaraṇa* – self-control – duality – inner struggle

7th scale – awareness – higher *manas* – self-awareness – non-duality – spontaneous action

Questions for Discussion

1. Our sense-thought, and even our perception of things, are strongly conditioned by ... what? (p. 132)
2. This [sixth] scale of consciousness is not necessarily ... what? But rather one of ... what? Then it becomes ... what? (p. 132)
3. From this [seventh scale of consciousness] comes ... what? This is a state of freedom, where ... what? Flow ... how? Because consciousness is not influenced by ... what? (p. 133)
4. Both the fifth and the seventh scales seem to share some characteristics. What are those characteristics? (p. 133)
5. Both of them [the fifth and seventh] show an absence of inner conflict and duality. However, there is a radical difference between the two. In the first case, the will identified with and dominated by ... what? And in the second, the purified personal will is aligned with ... what? (p. 133)
6. What is the common mistake among followers of non-dual philosophies? (p. 133)
7. What is one of the reasons non-duality approaches in the past were frequently kept secret and taught only to those who had gone through the regular practices recommended in their religions. (p. 134)

Points to Ponder

“In some oral instructions to her close students, Blavatsky described a series of seven “scales of consciousness.” The four lower ones are psycho-physiological, belonging to the consciousness of the body and the mechanism to transmit impressions to the mind. The three higher scales relate to our

manasic consciousness working in the higher Psychic and Intellectual realms. Beyond the highest of these scales is *buddhi*.” (p. 131)

“When we are operating in the fifth scale, we are entangled with our sensations, emotions, fears, desires, and memory; responding to the environment in a rather mechanical way. Because of the strong identification with the psyche, there is no action, but only reaction.” (p. 132)

“The sixth scale—that of volitional perception—is one where *manas* is struggling to get disentangled from *kāma*. Here we begin to take control of our responses, and there is a deeper element of freedom of choice. We do not blindly react as in the previous case but are able to “regard or disregard” voluntarily any given idea, emotion, or physical sensation.” (p. 132)

“The seventh scale is one of “apperception.” The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines this term as “introspective self-consciousness” or also as “conscious perception with full awareness.” In this state of conscious self-perception we become aware of our sense of *being*, as well as the different processes that happen in our field of consciousness.” (pp. 132-33)

Exercises to Explore

“The journey through the scales of consciousness can happen naturally for those who guide their efforts keeping the whole picture in mind.”

1. Normally, in the effort to lead a spiritual life, we will begin by going back and forth between the fifth and sixth scales. Through the effort to master personal desires and negative thoughts or emotions, we begin to establish ourselves more frequently in the sixth scale.
2. This gradually produces a certain freedom from the *kāmic* tendencies, which allows the manasic consciousness to begin to touch the seventh scale.
3. Through an effort to live with awareness, the coming back and forth will be mainly between the sixth and seventh scales, although we can still fall back into the fifth occasionally. In due course, we will be able to dwell more frequently in the seventh scale, this state of awareness becoming more and more spontaneous. (p. 134)

III. CLIMBING THE SCALES

Words to Know

sense-thought – the process of thinking when we are engrossed in the external world and react to it mechanically

self-examination – through which we become aware of how our personality tends to react to life

spiritual apperception – self-perception that reaches the higher, self-conscious, *manas*

willpower - control exerted to do something or restrain impulses

Questions for Discussion

1. How do we begin to work our way through the scale of self-control [6th scale]? The first step is ...? And this is important because ...? (p. 135)
2. Why is the purification of emotions and thoughts a necessary foundation for this work? (fn., p. 135)
3. Once we are able to notice undesirable responses as they arise in the field of consciousness, the effort should be directed ... where? The first step is to create ... what? Next, we apply ... what, to deal with responses? And how should it not be applied? ... The best approach available on this scale of consciousness is to ... what? (p. 136)
4. Use the diagram on page 138 and discuss the differences between the scales and their stages. Come up with examples to illustrate each stage. (p. 138)

Points to Ponder

“At the beginning of our efforts we will notice the reactions after they happened. ... With continued attempts in this direction, awareness will come in the midst of the reaction. ... Eventually, reactions will be noticed at their very beginning, and then the door to work on them opens.” (p. 136)

“Applying our willpower ... does not imply repression, but simply self-mastery. Repression is an unconscious mechanism to keep disturbing thoughts and emotions from becoming conscious. It has nothing to do with a deliberate choice of what kind of thoughts and feelings we want to harbor in our consciousness.” (fn., p. 136)

“If there is a reaction that is frequent in our lives, at some point we will need to pay attention to it, watch its operation, question it, and try to understand why we react in this way. It would also be helpful to apply the technique of self-examination that we have explored earlier. By these means we can work to eventually transcend the reaction.” (p. 137)

“It is the state of awareness itself, and not any action on our part, that will bring order to consciousness. This stage can be regarded as self-centered in the sense that the whole of one’s attention is absorbed in the process of watching the psychological activity.” (p. 139)

Exercises to Explore

To pass on to the next [sixth] scale of volitional perception we have to start becoming aware of our inner world. ... let us suppose something happens that produces a response ... to avoid being taken over by it and reacting mechanically ... we have first to notice this response ... without a certain degree of awareness there is no possibility of choice between accepting and disregarding the response. (p. 134)

A useful practice in this endeavor is that of self-examination ... although this exercise takes place at a specific moment in our day, the knowledge acquired will open the door to an awareness of the inner psychological movement while going through our daily activities. ... as we aspire to follow the ideal of right action, we will find ourselves living more and more in the sixth scale. (pp. 134-35)

The effort to control our personality, although still rooted in duality, produces some important effects upon us:

- i) it brings some order to the psyche by weakening the action of self-contradictory desires
- ii) it develops inner strength (willpower)
- iii) it brings some realization that we are beyond these thoughts, emotions, and sensations we are striving to master

These three conditions are the foundations on which we can later build a “dwelling place” in the seventh scale of spiritual apperception. (p. 135)

IV. FOUR STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Words to Know

jāgrat – the normal waking state; when consciousness is expressing itself through the body and its senses

svapna – dreaming; based on what takes place on the physical plane—we see the body asleep and dreaming; while consciousness is on a higher plane where it has its own activity

susupti – the deep sleeping state; sleep without dreaming; consciousness has retreated to the spiritual planes while the body is left behind in deep sleep

turīya – beyond the dreamless state, the one above all, a state of high spiritual consciousness

fractal – geometric figure where each part reflects the whole

Points to Ponder

“Due to the “fractal” nature of the cosmos ... these four states of consciousness are contained as sub-states within each other, in the same way we explored the “scales of consciousness.”

jāgrat – awareness of external objects and actions (everything around us, including our body)

svapna – awareness of internal objects (emotions, thoughts, images, memories and ideas)

susupti – awareness with no objects (awareness in silence and darkness)

turīya – a state beyond the three, which integrates and transcends them (p. 142)

Exercises to Explore

Working on the lines above in Points to Ponder, we can draw a “map” to guide us on our path in raising our consciousness towards the spiritual states, while still aware on the physical plane:

- 1.1 – *Jāgrat of jāgrat*: This is the state where one is awake and conscious of external objects, ... without being constantly distracted and conditioned by all kinds of sensations, thought, memories.

The first stage in our spiritual practice is to be truly awake in our daily life, that is, to be mindful of whatever we are doing on the physical plane, instead of reacting mechanically to life or being lost in daydreaming.

- 1.2 – *Svapna of jāgrat*: This state is one of self-observation, ... paying attention to the workings of ... “internal objects” such as thoughts, emotions, desires, memories, and so on.

Just as in the previous state, the practice involves being mindful, but now of the process of thinking and feeling that directs our actions.

- 1.3 – *Susupti of jāgrat*: Here, there are no objects separate from the observer. ... during our waking consciousness this means to be able to remain aware in a state of silence.

Here, there is just awareness of being aware.

- 1.4 – *Turīya of jāgrat*: The fourth state is the foundation and source of the other three. It is essentially beyond description. ... It may be related to Blavatsky’s concept of “conscious non-consciousness” ... a conscious sense of non-being. (pp. 142-44)

Questions to Discuss (pp. 144-45)

1. At this point in evolution, where is our seat of consciousness?
2. This awareness includes the fields of and below the lower mind, which is ... what?
3. For those not interested in leading a spiritual life the process of thinking is for the most part concerned with seeking gratification on these levels. This is the _____ scale, that of a _____ perception.
4. By paying attention to the sense-thought our consciousness begins to do what?
5. Eventually, as we grow in this direction we come to a point where there is in us an _____ opposing the _____ thought and nourishing those that are good. This is the _____ scale, that of _____ perception.
6. Next, we discover that there is the possibility of a further step—the development of _____, that is, the _____ scale of _____.
7. We begin to be mindful of our actions (called what?) and aware of psychological activity (called what?). This causes our consciousness to rise to a level of non-dual awareness (called what?).
8. Here, there is only a silent and impersonal I-ness or sense of being that is beyond ... what?

9. Awareness of this pure _____ opens the door to a more permanent state that is “behind” all _____ and _____ movement. This could be described as one of _____ non-_____ (called what?) When we stabilize ourselves in this state, we are ready to go beyond ... what?

Further Reading

Occultism in Southern India - article by T. Subba Row (*Esoteric Writings*, T. Subba Row, Chapter IX, p. 106-114) http://www.katinkahesselink.net/sr_india.htm