



## Dreamless Sleep and Soul: a controversy between Vedānta and Buddhism

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**ABSTRACT** *In this paper, perhaps the first of its kind, an attempt is made to elucidate and examine the Vedāntic theory of soul constructed on the basis of the experience of dreamless sleep which, being radically and qualitatively different from waking and dreaming states, is considered by the Vedāntins as a state of temporarily purified individual soul (ātman), a state of pure substantial consciousness. They take the experience of dreamless sleep as a model experience of the soul's final liberation from the body and its internal as well as external faculties. The ultimate liberation, according to the Vedāntins, is a state of total identification of the individual soul with the Universal Soul (Brahman), the summum bonum of every Vedāntin. The paper also includes a critique of the Vedāntic soul theory by the Buddhists who vehemently deny any autonomous and substantial soul whose essence is unchangingly permanent, pure consciousness and self-illuminating knowledge. The soul is instead interpreted by the Buddhists as a product of the functioning of a person's psycho-physical organism and a mere subject of knowing, thinking, desiring, etc. The analysis further shows that the Vedānta, especially the Advaita Vedānta, metaphysics of soul is inadequate in many respects and mainly based on a priori and scriptural arguments and emotive appeals, whereas the Buddhists deny any kind of autonomous and permanent agent of knowing, thinking and desiring by successfully reducing substantial consciousness to mere acts of knowing.*

### The Vedāntic Way of Thinking

The general dominating characteristic of the Upaniṣadic and the subsequent Vedāntic thinking has been to transcend the thinking itself in order to fish out the very substratum (*adhiṣṭhāna*) which is autonomous and provides support not only to thinking, but also to the whole realm of world-appearance. This is not an exercise which is performed within a common man's power and our common spatio-temporal-causal network. This is a matter of spiritual/mystical realisation in which our whole cognitive constitution, including ordinary sense and mental faculties, is kept at bay or suspended, at least temporarily. Although such realisation or experience is said by the Vedānta to be unthinkable, inconceivable and inexpressible in nature, the whole Vedānta literature, along with the ancient and modern Vedāntic thinkers, has ironically made it thinkable, conceivable and expressible. Thus it has sought to devise an empirical and conceptual method to make a case for just the opposite, which is transcendent, inconceivable, etc. The dilemma is that this has to be made possible in the conceptual framework, the only framework (although devised differently) we worldly beings are endowed with for the sake of thinking. The procedure adopted here is to collect evidences or clues from our polluted and illusory empirical and individual

experiences in which matter and consciousness participate, and to make a case for a non-empirical, *a priori* and universal principle which is from the transcendental point of view non-dual (*advaita*), absolute (*nirapekṣa*), self-evident, self-luminous (*svaprakāśa*), supreme knowledge, atemporal, unchangeably eternal (*kuṭasthanitya*), the essence of the idea of unitary soul (*ekātmapratyayasāra*) in which everything worldly loses its existence (*prapañcopaśama*), the quietude (*śānta*), and the gracious (*śiva*), and also from the empirical point of view it is the unseen (*adr̥ṣṭa*), the impracticable (*avyavahārya*), the ungraspable (*agrāhya*), the indefinable (*alakṣaṇa*), the unthinkable (*acintya*), and the inexpressible (*avyapadeśya*). These are the familiar locutions used to emphasise the limits of our knowledge, thinking and language.

All these negative and positive qualifications of the universal principle show that our philosophical inquiry (be it epistemological, metaphysical, ontological, semantic or ethical) in this realm is an impossibility. This is the reason why the whole Upaniṣadic thinking and its further developments, especially Advaita Vedānta, tend to be mystic in which the worldly ways of thinking, talking and acting are silenced and transcended. Philosophically, it is a kind of absolute idealism whose working method is to take an idea, however non-empirical and abstract, and work it out conceptually, rationally, and consistently showing first the possibility and then finally establishing the transcendent reality as an actuality by means of logical and especially scriptural and *a priori* arguments. We can notice that in such enterprises, the concept of 'knowing' as well as the concept of 'existence' change with the change of the nature of reality, its qualitative status, and value when we proceed in our analysis from waking experiences to those of dreaming, and then to sleeping and pure consciousness. For the Advaita Vedāntins, the main criterion of the ultimate reality is that its experience can never be cancelled by any other experience (= *abādha*). It is 'the' autonomous Pure Existence (*sat*), Pure Consciousness (*cit*), Supreme Bliss (*ānanda*); or, to put it differently, it is Ultimate Truth (*satya*), Supreme Knowledge (*jñāna*), and Infinite (*ananta*). Any experience or judgement, if found cancelled or contradictory in the subsequent cognition, is taken by them as presenting false content. For example, when in a waking experience (*jāgrat*) a rope under insufficient light is mistaken for snake and again in the same epistemological situation with sufficient light in the subsequent cognition the experience of snake is cancelled (*bādha*), it is obvious that the previous cognition of snake was invalid, i.e. the snake presented was false. The reason for this false presentation, it is explained, lies in the dependence of our empirical knowledge on the unsupporting external conditions, our faulty cognitive constitution which houses incapable external sense-organs, the false-concept-forming empirical consciousness (= mind), and the intellect which makes error in making cognitive judgements. In this rope-snake case, the first judgement 'This is a snake' is cancelled, as it is found untrue, by the subsequent judgement 'This is a rope'. The cancellation of the first judgement, i.e. establishing the falsity of the appearance of snake, is performed by empirical cognition itself (*dr̥ṣṭatvāt mithyā*) at a subsequent stage. Since the experience of snake is found presenting a false content, it is considered lower or qualitatively inferior in value than the experience of rope in this case. The snake is empirically real, but present elsewhere, not here.

On the same line, we can show that even the rope is not irreducible and ultimately real, but this is shown not by merely cognising it at subsequent stages. For this, we need a different method following which if we unfold the rope, it is reduced to its strands and loses its name and form. In the same process, if continued, the strands can be reduced to threads and threads to further components. Now we can say that these objects—rope, strands and threads—are unreal because they have lost their names, forms, and

identities. This is proved by means of immediate cognition itself. In this manner, the whole range of empirical things can be shown to be unreal. This is a logical-cum-perceptual method. By this process of elimination (*pāriśeṣya-nyāya*), although it will be outside the purview of our cognitive constitution we can conceptually and logically reach that stage of reality where it is utterly unsublatable (*abādha*) in any manner and taken as the underlying principle of the whole empirical multiplicity. This is a purely conceptual, non-empirical, and *a priori* method which is vigorously, fondly, and consistently applied by the Advaitins.

Now we can take dream experience (*svapna*) in which external faculties are inoperative, but the consciousness or self, having been freed from the dependence on these faculties, creates a new world of things, partly by reviving the impressions preserved from the waking experiences and partly by creating its own things and their combinations outside the spatio-temporal-causal network. But these creations disappear and their experience is cancelled on waking. Since the dream objects are proved to be unreal, they enjoy lower status in the hierarchy of reality than their empirical counterparts. But on the other hand, the dreaming self or consciousness enjoys greater freedom as it is free from the bonds of external faculties and thus it is qualitatively higher than the waking self or consciousness.

In the Upaniṣadic and the Advaitic scheme, the next higher stage in the hierarchy is the state of dreamless sleep, or simply sleep (*nidrā, suṣupti*) in which the self sheds off its creative power too and thus is more liberated or freer than it is in the previous two states. In this state, it loses its objectifying power, intentionality, spatio-temporality, and duality. Its creative power is actually withdrawn temporarily from activity to latency (= *bīja*). Its accompanying nature of concealing (*āvaraṇa*), in the absence of projecting power (*vikṣepa*), is in its densest state. As a matter of principle, the Advaitins will not maintain that the self is endowed with concealing and projecting power. It is ignorance (*ajñāna, avidyā*) which has these powers and influences the self in waking, dreaming and sleep states in some or the other way. But what the relation is between the self and the ignorance is a very controversial issue which I need not discuss here. I shall rather discuss the implications the Advaitins derive from their analysis of the three states later.

### Analysis of the *Suṣupti*-related Statements

Here are some of the important Vedāntic statements whose subsequent analysis throws light on the nature of *suṣupti*:

1. The soul is *Brahman*. It has four modes of existence, viz. waking (*jāgrat*), dreaming (*svapna*), deep sleep (*suṣupti*), and the pure consciousness (*turīya*, lit. the fourth).
2. In the waking state, both external and internal sense-organs are operative; in dreaming, only the internal is operative and also creative (= *srjati*). In both, the consciousness is intentional, but the nature of the intended objects are different. In the state of dreamless sleep, the self or the person is without any desire and does not experience dream. This state is unified (*ekībhūta*), i.e. in this state the intentionality of consciousness and duality or plurality of the waking and dreaming states are dissolved. It is in fact a mass of consciousness or knowledge (*prajñānaghana*) and bliss (*ānandamaya*).
3. In the sleep state, the reason for the suspension of conscious activity is all-round ignorance which puts a stop to the vibrations (*manahspandana*) and subject-

object-bifurcating function (= *dvaitajāta*) of consciousness by temporarily covering it. In waking and dreaming states, the vibrations of the empirical consciousness are at play, but since in the sleep state they are temporarily suspended the self loses its differentiating power (*avivekanūpa*). For this reason, it is called a unified mass of consciousness or knowledge (*ekībhūta-prajñānaghana*), just as in the darkness of the night the world of multiplicity becomes a mass of darkness (*ghanībhūta*) because in the absence of light our differentiating cognitions are not possible.

The *suṣupti* state, as we have seen, is called *prajñānaghana*, literally a mass of intuitive or super knowledge which is unlike the consciousness of the waking and the dreaming states in which mind-generated dichotomy of knower and knowable, and the related desire and the resultant suffering dominate life. Śaṅkara's belief or assumption is that the worldly life in which all external and internal faculties are operative is nothing but a life of bondage, ignorance, and suffering, and once their operations are suspended, as in deep sleep, albeit temporarily, the self achieves the state of freedom from suffering. Thus the absence of suffering makes the *suṣupti* a blissful state. This state is considered all at once a mass of supreme knowledge, ignorance, and bliss. But how is it a state of knowledge (*prājñā*) if the self is completely covered with ignorance and the functions of external and internal faculties are suspended? Śaṅkara argues that since in this state the self is the knower of the past and the future, and also of everything else, it is called a state of *prājñā*. Here Śaṅkara uses his presuppositions as his argument. According to this argument, on interpretation, there is consciousness which crosses the limits of present which is epistemologically the only realm for confrontation of the knowable and the knower, and the emergence of resultant knowledge. Śaṅkara's argument places the past and the future, which are by definition 'gone for ever' and 'yet to come' respectively, in the state of present, thus converting them into the present. This creates epistemological and ontological impossibility and conceptual contradictions, for the self achieves the sleep state only by dissolving or suspending the temporality and objectivity of the empirical world, its own intentionality and creativity, and functions of external and internal faculties, thus forgetting the past and suspending its possible future activities. As a matter of fact, for the self, nothing other than itself exists in this state as the Vedāntins including Śaṅkara maintain.

Again, Śaṅkara following Gauḍapāda has called the sleep state a state of knowledge (*prājñā*) which is radically and qualitatively different from the knowledge/awareness/experience of the waking and the dream states caused by means of external and internal faculties respectively. Since this knowledge falls outside the purview of all cognitive faculties and conceptual apparatus, no philosophical inquiry will be possible. Śaṅkara realises this difficulty and therefore, in order to prove his point, takes recourse to the scriptural statements, explanatory presuppositions, *a priori* arguments, and empirical analogies, all of which show his emotive religious drive and escapism from hard but uncomfortable empirical evidences and their neutral analysis.

For Gauḍapāda, there is a gradation of purity and freedom starting from the waking state, which is the least pure and free. In the dream state, the self enjoys greater freedom and purity as the fetters of the external sense-organs are inoperative, although it creates its own world in which the internal faculty is operative. In *suṣupti*, the self is free from the shackles of both sets of organs. For the self, it is a state of self-luminosity, peace, tranquillity, and bliss. This is confirmed by memory when the sleeping person awakes. The *suṣupti* state is considered a temporary prototype of the transcendental

consciousness (*turīya*) as both are unitary and lack the cognition of duality. But the former is said to contain the seeds of the waking and dreaming consciousness to which it is brought back, whereas the latter is unreturnable, i.e. the person is finally liberated even during empirical life. This state is arrived at by following the same process of conceptual elimination (*pāriśeṣya-nyāya*) of the earlier three states. Further, it is said that in sleep state the self and ignorance are in complete union just as a husband and his wife who are in duality before union or intercourse, but during union they forget their separate individuality and are completely absorbed in the state of pleasure.

It is difficult to understand how the self in *susupti* state retains its power of 'seeing' while at the same time being completely covered under the mass of ignorance and also being devoid of external as well as internal faculties. In this state, it is replied, the self loses its differentiating power (*viveka*) as there is no duality, the 'other' for seeing. Even then it is called 'seer', because it sees itself, i.e. it is self-luminous, as the sun shines itself. This explanation is problematic. For any kind of philosophical inquiry, or understanding, or meaningful talk, 'seeing' presupposes a (sense) faculty, an object, and the seer. 'Seeing' is a relative term which is intelligible only when at least these three factors are present.

### Analysis of the Advaita Theses

Now, I analyse the following theses and the supporting justifications advanced by the Advaitins:

1. There is a non-dual, unchangingly eternal, and universal principle which is established on the basis of individual experiences, scriptural testimony, and a *priori* arguments. There are many experiencing individuals but only one absolute principle.
2. Since in the sleep state all faculties are inoperative and the knowables are absent, the self is left with itself and said to know 'nothing' in relation to the empirical and dream objects. Only in this sense can it be said to be covered with ignorance. This sleep-cum-ignorance state, in the epistemological sense, is latently potent as it has the potentiality of making sense-faculties, mind, and intellect functional on its coming back to waking and dream states. Remember that in the dream state the external faculties are still inoperative. The *turīya* state is in a real sense free from this potentiality and thus irreversible and finally free. This is the *summum bonum* of the Advaitins. In this sense the *susupti* state is lower in quality, value, and hierarchy than the *turīya* state. Further, the state of knowing 'nothing' in the *susupti* state is the state of knowing the undifferentiated itself. Therefore, this state is a mass of knowledge (*prajñānaḥana*) which is superior to the knowledge acquired in either waking or dream state.
3. The Advaitins think that the empirical dream states arouse desire for false objects which fail to provide lasting happiness and thus cause frustration, suffering, and bondage. In the sleep state, the self is dissociated from such desires and objects. Consequently, it is free from suffering which is a state of Supreme Bliss (*ānanda*, *saṃprasāda*).
4. It is said that in the sleep state the self is self-luminous (*jyotiṣaḥ puruṣaḥ*, see *Brhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, 4.3.7) which is its essential and true nature. The self-luminosity of the self is present in the waking and dream states also, but because of the web of the objective world created by ignorance through external and

internal faculties, it is not self-conscious or self-evident. The self-luminosity of the self makes its existence identical with supreme knowledge and bliss. It is rather considered or presupposed, in the empirical sense, the very substratum or underlying principle and a necessary condition of all types of waking and dream experiences. It is a being which after withdrawing itself from these experiences, in the process of elimination, is left as non-dual.

5. Śaṅkara establishes the eternal continuity of the pure-consciousness on the basis of memory we have, as for example, on waking after sleep one remembers in the present the state before sleep. The sleep state is therefore a continuity of pure-consciousness, not a break between the two states of before and after the sleep. Not only this, the sleep state is also a state of blissful experience (*ānandabhuktathā prājñāḥ*, see *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā*, 1.3).

The argument of the Advaitin like Śaṅkara in favour of his thesis that 'the sleep state is a state of bliss' is based on one's self-awareness and self-assertion: 'I slept happily and I do not remember anything of that state'. (*sukham aham asvāpsam na kimcid avedīṣam iti*, see *Śaṅkara-bhāṣya* on *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, 4.3.5) on waking from the dreamless sleep. From this the following theses are derived:

1. The sleep state is a continuity of the self, it is not a loss of consciousness.
2. The sleep state is a state of experience, it is not a break of awareness or consciousness.
3. The sleep state is not an ordinary experience, but an experience of Supreme Bliss as there is no desire and suffering in it.
4. The sleep state is a knowledge of 'nothing'.
5. The sleep state is a state of self-luminosity.

Among these theses, only the first one, according to which the consciousness is devoid of intentionality, seems logically possible, though epistemologically and empirically it is impossible to establish. The remaining ones are propounded only on the basis of *a priori* arguments, scriptural statements, and empirical analogies which are all guided by metaphysical and religious presuppositions. Here the jump from empirical to *a priori*, multiplicity to non-duality, non-awareness (in sleep) to self-luminosity, a mere feeling of relaxed physical and mental condition in the present to the bliss state of the past sleep, memory-as-reproduction-of-experience to memory-as-first-order-knowledge-instrument (*pramāṇa*) are all justified in the Advaita philosophy. Sometimes it takes a non-cognitive or emotive belief as a knowledge-claim.

It is worth noting here that in the Upaniṣads the deep sleep, a property of soul, is said to be caused by excessive physical tiredness, a property of body. Just as a bird, after having been tired because of remaining throughout the day in the field, returns to its nest for rest. Here the soul is compared to the bird. This shows that deep sleep is because of the excessive tiredness of the body, not a natural state of the soul. Besides, the Vedāntins, ancient and modern, either do not explain or are unable to explain the loss of consciousness in the state of fatigue (and such loss caused under the influence of anesthesia or alcohol). Moreover, for Advaitins, what is conceivable is inferable, and what is thus inferable is knowable and real. This seems to be the argument advanced by K.C. Bhattacharya when he says:

When a man rises from dreamless sleep, he becomes aware that he had a blissful sleep during which he was conscious of nothing. This he knows directly from memory. Now memory is only of a presentation. Therefore the

bliss and the consciousness of nothing must have been *presented* during the sleep. If it be objected that only the *absence* during sleep of disquiet and knowledge is *inferred* from a memory of the state before the sleep and the perception of the state after sleep, it is asked in reply: can we *infer* anything, the like of which was never presented? If reasoning is only a manipulation of rarefied images, the images can have been derived only from percepts. But it may be urged that the negative concept, at any rate, could not have had any percept corresponding to it, and therefore one may justifiably hold the *absence* of knowledge and disquiet during sleep to have been inferred. To this it is replied that absence cannot be inferred, unless it be conceivable. The absence of knowledge cannot be referred to, unless the absence be the object of a direct consciousness of it *during the absence*. Like knowledge, the absence of knowledge cannot be known by external perception or any form of inference founded on it, but by internal perception or self-feeling. No *inference* can ever warrant us in attributing absence of consciousness to any object. If the paradox were allowed, a psychic thing or absence of a psychic thing, if conceived, is actual: its *esse* is its *percipi*—a peculiarity of hypothesis in Psychology which deserves to be noticed. (pp. 18–19)

This makes sense but does not establish and refer to the reality of non-dual, self-luminous, pure-consciousness, and universal nature. Merely talking conceptually in a consistent manner does not prove an ontological reality. The difference between sense and reference can be taken into consideration in this context. Further, an Advaitin like K.C. Bhattacharya can even go to the extent of taking memory as presentational in character, which does not only present the bliss and consciousness of nothing belonging to the past but also a definitely and positively structured content as Truth, Knowledge and Bliss, etc. He admits the role of psychology in the experience of such reality. In that case, one can ask, how is this a kind of experience different from the one under superimposition (*adhyāsa*) in which case the subjective confusion, psychological in nature, is at full play? One fails to understand.

### The Unanswered Questions

Further, there are some questions which the sleep-consciousness theorists like Śaṅkara fail to answer convincingly:

1. If the nature of reality is non-dual, eternal, and unchanging, why do we experience objective plurality in the waking experience and seeming objective plurality in the dream experience?
2. What constitutes these two kinds of plurality?
3. What is the relationship between the non-dual pure-consciousness (*advaita cit*) and its false creations and projections (*srjana*) considered as its vibrations (*span-dana*)?
4. What is the relationship between the pure-consciousness and the nescience (*avidyā*) which has the dual functions of concealing (*āvaraṇa*) and creating/projecting/superimposing (*vikṣepa*) in the waking and dream states while it has only the concealing function (*āvaraṇa*) in the sleep states?
5. What is the justification for taking the absence of objective knowledge, in the sleep state, as the knowledge of 'nothing' as a positive entity?

6. How can one philosophically justify the lack of any awareness, in the sleep state, as the awareness of self-luminosity?
7. How can an intentional consciousness, in the waking and the dream states, become unintentional and self-luminous in the sleep state and again regain its intentionality after waking? Where does this intentionality come from and go to?

### Buddhist Critique of Soul-theory

Buddhism in general is known for its severe opposition to the belief in any substance called soul as the agent of all sorts of cognitive and psychological acts, so much so that in the Vedāntic tradition it is considered the substratum (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of all world appearances. This belief is undermined by the Buddha and the Buddhists by epistemological and hermeneutic analysis. First, they show that such beliefs in a metaphysical entity are the product of cultural, religious and conceptual contexts in which they are present pre-structured and the holy scriptures (*śruti*) are firmly believed to be revelatory of 'ontic' meaning ignoring its purely semantic character. Second, it is also believed that everything said in the holy scriptures is recorded only after the realised souls (*ṛṣi*) have directly experienced the truth. The believers also take them as containing eternally true propositions and eternally valid knowledge by acquaintance which reveals the truly existential reality like soul and *Brahman*. In the Buddhist analysis, such beliefs and the claimed corresponding experiences are shown to be not only purely psychological and speculative, but also dangerous as they cause incurable and endless suffering to humanity and survive on human ignorance about the truth.

The Buddhist approach in this context is phenomenological in a sense that it proceeds with the immediacy of the 'given', passes through the realisation of the self evolution and structuring of consciousness, and ends with the hollowness of the *a priori*. It also discovers that 'rationality' is born out of this and assigns to itself the exclusive right of explaining the 'truth' of one and all. Further, Buddhism propounds the process view of reality and its continuity every moment of which is dependently originated (*pratītyasamutpanna*). It takes consciousness not as the ground of Pure Being and phenomenal appearances, but as an act of being conscious which can never be transcended in order to find a posited ground like soul or *Brahman*. The Buddhists explain the whole phenomena of personality, soul, knowledge-claims, linguistic and conceptual behaviour, and waking, dream and sleep experiences, and the like in terms of the functioning of the psycho-physical organism which is in perpetual flux or process permeated with dispositional tendencies (*saṃskāra*, *vāsanā*).

The soul-theorists, on the other hand, cite the facts of personal continuity, memory, recognition, unity of cognitions and thought, self-consciousness, desire, and the experience of pleasure and pain, etc. which, they argue, can be explained only when a sustained subject like soul is maintained. The Śaṅkarites, the Cartesian 'Cogito', and the Kantian 'transcendental unity of apperception' have in modern time further strengthened the belief in this substantial soul. The Buddhists reduce this posited soul and its above properties to 'I-ing' (*ahaṃkāra*) and 'mine-ing' (*mamakāra*), causally conditioned (*pratītyasamutpanna*) but separate acts of consciousness flowing in quick succession (*saṃtāna*), and certain constituent factors classified differently as five aggregates (*skandha*), 12 spheres (*āyatana*), and 18 elements (*dhātu*), without assuming any permanent ground or eternal and conscious threading principle.

In the Buddhist literature, we do not find any discussion of the dreamless sleep (*susupti*) as a state of soul. Buddhism does discuss the dream experiences which are



caused by certain disturbances in the functioning of the psychophysical organism, but denies the reality of soul. On this basis we can formulate the Buddhist arguments against dreamless sleep as a model experience of the transcendental, eternal, and universal reality like *Brahman*. But when the soul itself is denied, the question of its various states including *śuṣṭi* does not arise.

Buddhism maintains the distinction, so far as the semantic meaning is concerned, between consciousness as pure ground of psychological acts and consciousness as mere act of knowing. Whereas the former is an imaginative and false construction (*abhūtaparikalpa*), the latter is an experienced fact. Even clubbing of these acts of knowing does not ontologically produce or reveal the One, Eternal, Universal Consciousness as Pure Being and the Ground of all psychological acts and world-appearances. According to Buddhism, this belief in a soul is purely psychological in nature as opposed to the so-called cognitive belief which is also not ultimately substantial, objective, and mind-neutral; it is rather disposition-loaded and a false security-giving device. The Buddha maintains that such beliefs feed on the blind faith (*saddhā*), the so-called revelatory scriptures (*anusava*), choice (*ruṇi*) containing dispositional elements, and the discursive and reflective thoughts on form (*ākāraparivattakka*), and 'the acceptance of solidified views (*diṭṭhinijjhānakkhanti*)'. (see Kalupahana, p. 6). He says:

... even if I know something on the basis of the profoundest reflection on form, that may be empty, hollow and false, while what I do not know on the basis of the profoundest reflection on form may be factual, true and not otherwise. It is not proper for an intelligent person, safeguarding the truth, to come categorically to the conclusion in this matter that this alone is true and whatever else is false. (*Majjhimanikāya* 2.170, quoted & tr. in Kalupahana, p. 7)

In Buddhism, especially in early Buddhism, Mādhyamika and Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda, the metaphysical status of personality (*pudgala*) and metaphysical ground of empirical phenomena (*dharma*) are reduced to the sensuous experiences and their derivatives. The Vedāntic pure consciousness is explained away and instead consciousness is explained in terms of six kinds of consciousnesses (*vijñāna*) which are mere acts of knowing arising from certain factors interacting with each other and which undergo conceptual evolution (*vijñānapariṇāma*). The feeling of the continuity is nothing but the flux of thus-arisen consciousnesses unable to be grasped separately. Thus, visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental consciousnesses arise from the contacts of eye and material form, ear and sound, nose and smell, tongue and taste, body and tangible, and mind and concepts respectively. With the introduction of self-consciousness in this process, a sense of ego (*ahaṃkāra*, as the subject of knowing, etc.) and mine (*mamakāra*, as the possessor or ground of knowing, etc.) arise. At this level, so many other factors like an obsessive faith in a metaphysical substratum, and a dispositional choice of basic elements for system-construction, and discursive thinking creep in. The whole human personality, according to Buddhism, is nothing more than the effectively functional psycho-physical organism. The whole endeavour of the Buddha and Buddhism is to make one realise one's own personality and existence in terms of these unenduring and dependently arisen factors which are various functions, but when taken together they constitute human personality without any real abiding agent or principle. A passage from the *Madhupinḍikā-sutta* reads:

Depending upon the visual sense and the visible object, O brethren, arises

visual consciousness; coming together of these three is contact; depending upon contact arises feeling. What one feels one perceives; what one perceives, one reasons about. What one reasons about, one is obsessed with. Due to such obsession, a person is assailed by obsessed perceptions and concepts in regard to visible objects cognizable by the visual organ, belonging to the past, the future and the present. (*Majjhimanikāya*, 1.111–112 quoted & tr. in Kalupahana, p. 32.)

The Buddhist in his epistemological analysis of empirical experiences exposes the psychological factors involved in any knowledge-claim, the human tendency to transcend what is given in the sensuous experiences, and the belief that non-sensuous intuitive experience is the only truly authentic mode of knowing and revelatory of transcendent reality. Their analysis shows that our empirical experience starts with immediate sensuous experience which is subsequently joined by self-awareness, memory involving linguistic and cultural learning, and dispositional and reflective tendencies which all together give birth to the whole range of ontologically neutral conceptualisation. This is nothing but an abstract and endless evolution of consciousness (*vi-jñānapariṇāma*) which is set into motion after one becomes conscious of a concept formed at the end of the process of sensuous experience. In such a situation, any belief or postulation of a substantive soul is a mere imagination (*abhūtaparikalpa*).

Further, in the case of a sensuous experience, seeing (*darśana*), for instance, is a mere cognitive act (*kriyā*) dependently arising from the contact of visual sense and visible form as we conventionally think. Then, this act is directed toward the self as its substratum and possessor. A blind, lazy, and insecure mind thinks in this manner of speaking, which if extended can assign substance-status to what is in one context a mere property. In the present context, the act of seeing is a property of soul, but this act in the form of property can be converted into substance if one changes the manner of speaking. That will be the manner in which a substantial entity is talked about. Thus, one can say that this act is short or long in duration, vague or clear, intelligible or unintelligible, etc. These are the predicates of the 'act' under consideration. In this manner, the property-act becomes substance-act which is an ontologically neutral product of our conceptual and discursive thinking. This is made clear from the Buddhist analysis of our perceptual and conceptual processes.

It is an important fact to note that our understanding of any experience, concept or linguistic term is never understood in isolation of other experiences, concepts, and linguistic terms. Now any act as property is intelligible only in relation to that which is non-act, such as an enduring and possessor substance. Similarly, in brief, seeing-act is understood only in relation to eye, the material form, and the seeing agent, although we can further conceptually elaborate them *ad infinitum*. In Buddhism, all this is explained as the result of the metaphysically and ontologically barren conceptualisation. In the *Mādhyamika*, the mutual dependence or dependently arising character of a being (*bhāva*) is taken as possessing no self-same nature (*svabhāva*). This refutes the claim of any self-same substantial reality beyond knowing acts.

From the preceding analysis it follows that seeing-agent is born only when seeing-act, seeing-faculty eye and seeable-object are born in the stream of evolutionary consciousness. We presume a seer soul only as a matter of conventional and logical necessity. Epistemologically, we can never transcend a cognitive act, and the conventional and logical necessity cannot establish the ontological status of soul. There are some philosophers who take such necessity as an important philosophical factor in

philosophising this kind of metaphysical reality. But the Buddhists do not subscribe to this way of philosophising because of its inherent impotency and purely speculative nature. Nāgārjuna says:

Act of seeing [as a matter of fact] does not see itself [i.e. its own structure as it would be contradictory for the act of seeing to see itself]. [Thus], how can that which does not see itself sees other things? (*Mādhyamakakārikā*, III.2; hereafter MK)

It is clear from this *Kārikā* and the one following it alongwith Candrakīrti's commentary in the *Prasannapadā* that the Mādhyamikas try to show that the very talk of a substantial agent of seeing apart from the act of seeing is non-sensical. Applying his characteristic method of dialectic, Nāgārjuna argues that in order to establish the independent status of an agent (*kāraṅka*) like soul, its self-same existence without any context of the act of seeing, doing, etc. must be proved and understood first. But on analysis we find that such a thesis is logically self-contradictory, cognitively vacuous and transcendently impossible to reach. It is even unintelligible and non-sensical. The argument against a substantial agent of seeing, doing, etc. proceeds as follows:

First, the name agent (*kāraṅka*) is derived only when someone, who is said to exist self-same, is conjoined with an act (*kriyā*). Now for conceptual clarity, it is necessary that the concept 'agent' is understood as either identical with the act itself or wholly different from it. In the former alternative, it is reduced to activity and in the second, it is shown unrelated to the activity losing its very name and identity as 'agent'; or, if it is said to exist prior to act, then the very arising of the concept of 'agent' becomes impossible. The soul-theorists, like common man's unanalytical thinking, mix up these opposed alternatives in order to form a unified concept of a substantial, appropriating, conscious, knowing, doing, and desiring agent.

Now let us take a psychological state like desire (*rāga*) which is said to have its substratum in the one who desires (*rakta*). The Mādhyamika (MK, VI.1) argues: 'If the one who desires exists prior to his act of desiring, divorced from and devoid of desiring, then in that case the desire would depend on the one who is already divorced from desire'. This will lead to a separate existence of the act of desiring and the one who desires. In this case, this independent desiring agent when involved in the act of desiring will acquire a new name 'the desiring desiring-agent'—a sheer non-sense and also leading to *infinite regress*. The whole confusion arises when the desiring agent is assigned a separate and self-same ontological/metaphysical status different from the acts of desiring.

The Mādhyamika is not a sceptic denying the conventionally accepted external world, rather he is a realist in this sphere; but he does deny the substantial self-same nature of this world and the Vedāntic notion of a metaphysical cogito or a unifying principle of our cognitive and psychological acts in the form of soul. He maintains that concept-generated beings arise in dependence of other such beings and so they are devoid of self-same existence (cf. *Prasannapadā* on MK, p. 79.13–14: *vayaṃ tu pratītyotpannatvāt sarvabhāvānāṃ svabhāvam eva nopalabhāmahe*). A world of such things is the product of our perceptual and conceptual processes. About such speculated things and their existence or non-existence, left to himself, he would prefer silence (MK, IX.12). Moreover, it is not possible to find a suitable, sensible, and justified way

of speaking of a determinate person who exists prior to the acts of seeing, hearing, etc. (cf. MK, IX.3).

According to Vasubandhu, the feeling of self is generated by the defiled mind (cf. *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya*, p. 14: *ātmapratibhāsaṃ klišṭaṃ manam*) which is permeated with and guided by self-view, self-love, self-esteem, and self-confusion (cf. Ibid.: *ātmamohādīsaṃprayogāt*; also see *Triṃśikā, kārikā* 6). Both the Mādhyamika and Vasubandhu maintain that it is the appropriating activity of mind which is responsible for generating the concept of self. For mind's activity, it is not necessary that the external world is presented to it. It functions even on self-generated objects which are nothing but concepts and their network. Mind, in Vasubandhu, is a stage in the evolution of consciousness which is the cause of the birth of object-consciousness and its further development. In deep sleep state, the empirical consciousness and its evolution are absent; therefore, in this case, any kind of objectifying and determining agent like mind is also absent, although the unbroken stream of dispositional tendencies are still in existence but not manifested. These tendencies are very obvious in waking and dream states. The issue of memory, after deep sleep is over, can be explained in the above way. The whole endeavour of the Buddha, Nāgārjuna, Maitreya, and the later Vasubandhu is to show the non-substantiality of the external as well as the internal world. Their purpose is to enlighten others about the impermanence and dependent arising of all types of existence including human existence. This realisation, they believe, helps transform one's personality for global ethical behaviour.

### Concluding Remarks

Now I conclude. The Upaniṣadic and the Advaita epistemology and rationality, and for that matter their whole thinking, are guided by their metaphysical and religious presuppositions, the clues for which they find in empirical illusory experiences and their cancellation in some way or the other. Their analysis is all at once epistemological, logical, metaphysical, and religious. For them, the waking and the dream experiences fall under the purview of empirical/epistemological/phenomenological analysis, whereas the sleep state, which lies beyond such analysis, is analysed on scriptural, religious and *a priori* grounds. They jump from the former to the latter by declaring the former as mere appearance and thus false. They derive ultimate truth from what is ultimately untruth. They deny ultimate ontological status to what is given in the objectively empirical experience and confer the ultimate true ontological status to what is thus not given. They proceed from knowledge-disclaim of the empirical world to the ultimately true knowledge-claim of the non-duality. They show discontinuity of the empirical world and arrive at the unchangeably eternal continuity of the non-empirical. They create two realms of reality, knowledge and value by creating a radically qualitative difference between them. That is why they have different tools and rationality to deal with them. As a matter of fact, their whole journey is conceptual, religious and emotive. They talk of transcending the sense–mind–intellect–body–space–time–cause–karmic system while remaining in it, just as a fish which, while remaining and swimming in deep water, would talk of its experience of climbing Everest. All this is made possible because of their particular ontological commitment and ignorance of the distinction between a theory of sense and a theory of reference. This problem is found throughout all Indian philosophy barring Buddhism. J.N. Mohanty (1992, p. 13) has raised this issue along with the issue of a theory of constitution and discussed them in the context of Indian philosophy. Some attempts have been made by the Buddhist, Śaiva system,

Rāmānuja, Bhartṛhari, Aurobindo and others to rectify the mistakes and the difficulties arising from the Upaniṣadic and Advaita thinking, but this is outside the purview of this paper for discussion.

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